

Year at a Glance	
Nov 9-Dec 14	Early Church Age
Jan 4-Feb 8	Post Nicene Age
Feb 15-Mar 22	Medieval Age
Mar 29-May 10	Reformation Age
May 17-May 31	Great Awakening to Today

Medieval Age	
February 8 - March 22	
Date	Topic & Reading
Feb 15	"Gregory the Great" (chapter 17) "Charlemagne and Christendom" (chapter 18)
Feb 22	"The Papacy and the Crusader" (chapter 19)
Mar 1	MISSIONS SUNDAY
Mar 8	"Scholasticism" (chapter 20) "The Monastic Ideal" (chapter 21)
Mar 15	"The Decline of the Papacy" (chapter 22)
Mar 22	"Wyclif and Hus" (chapter 23)

This past Sunday we covered a wide sweep of church history under the theme *Eastern Orthodoxy and Mission to the Barbarians*. In the first half of the class, we traced the development of Eastern Orthodoxy as **"the Church of the Seven Councils,"** emphasizing how theology, culture, language, and authority shaped the growing divide between East and West. We looked at the primacy dispute, the filioque controversy, and the iconoclastic crisis, noting how differences in Trinitarian theology, views of tradition, and approaches to mystery eventually culminated in the **Great Schism of 1054**. Events such as the Photian Schism and the sack of Constantinople in 1204 showed how deeply these divisions hardened over time.

In the second half, we followed the gospel's movement beyond the Roman world to the so-called **barbarians of northern Europe and beyond**. We saw how missionaries like Patrick, Boniface, and Augustine of Canterbury brought Christ to pagan cultures shaped by fear, power, and warfare, and how entire peoples were converted through a mixture of preaching, power encounters, political authority, and God's providence. We also considered the remarkable, and often overlooked, missionary expansion eastward through Persia along the Silk Road, including the rise and eventual disappearance of the **Nestorian church in China**.

We concluded by stepping back to view three great **ages of Christian history**: Jewish Christianity centered in Jerusalem, Christianity established in the Greco Roman world, and Christianity moving beyond Rome to new peoples and cultures. The enduring lesson was that the church's survival and growth have never depended on a single empire or culture, but on the sovereign purposes of God, who continues to gather His people through both faithfulness and frailty.

## REVIEW OF INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

### I. What are Church History and Historical Theology?

- a. *Church History*: The hand of God in the events of fallen men as He providentially works through the Christian Church to bring glory to Himself (Stitzinger).
- b. *Historical Theology*: The study of the progress of doctrine in the history of the church. Major figures from Church history are considered in order to put the various theological issues into their proper historical context.

### II. What is the Church?

“The true universal Christian church consists of all who have been saved during the present church Age and who have been joined by the Holy Spirit’s baptism to the Lord Jesus and to one another in Him to form a mystical body, of which He is the Head and the Life, and to be His espoused bride” (Barackman, p. 413)

### III. Why Study Church History/Historical Theology?

- a. When Christ said, “I will build my church,” He wasn’t referring merely to the American evangelical church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but to a Body that has been alive in some form since the time of Pentecost. Church History helps us see our faith in the context of the church universal.
- b. There is nothing new under the sun. The storms we face today have been weathered before. A knowledge of Church History reminds us how God has guided the Church in the past.
- c. Church History is encouraging and humbling.
- d. There are consequences for historical amnesia (Shelley, p. xv).
  - i. The church is more vulnerable to false teaching.
  - ii. The church is more vulnerable to spiritual pride.
  - iii. The church is more inclined toward “disconnected” ministry without the advantage of a broader context for their labor.

## GREGORY THE GREAT (540-604)

*Mark 10:42-45* <sup>42</sup> But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. <sup>43</sup> But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: <sup>44</sup> And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

### I. Gregory the Man

- A. Born 540 to an old, wealthy senatorial family of Rome.
- B. Grew up during a time of chaos (Visigoths; Lombards; plague)
- C. Educated for government service. Appointed Prefect of Rome in 573.

### II. Gregory the Monk

- A. **Preferred the ascetic life of a monk** (it was largely the rigors of this kind of life that led to his health problems).
- B. Founded seven monasteries.

### III. Gregory the Pope

- A. Made a **deacon** in the **Roman** church in 579.
- B. Became **abbot** of St. Andrews (in Rome) in 585. This was his labor of preference.
- C. In 590 Pope Pelagius II died of the plague. The papacy was vacant for six months.
- D. When elected as the new pope, Gregory fled Rome. He was found and dragged back to be consecrated.
- E. He viewed his election as Pope as a **punishment** from God. Nevertheless, he threw himself completely into the work.
- F. Gregory strongly opposed **John IV of Constantinople** (John the Faster) for adopting the title “**universal bishop**,” seeing it as an expression of sinful pride that undermined the shared authority of all bishops. Gregory argued that **no single bishop could rightly claim universal jurisdiction over Christ’s church** and warned that such a title diminished the office of other pastors and belonged to Christ alone. Ironically, though bishop of Rome, Gregory rejected hierarchical supremacy and instead embraced the title *servant of the servants of God*, making this controversy a key moment showing that early church leadership emphasized humility and collegial authority rather than centralized ecclesiastical power.
- G. It is amazing how much work he did when we consider that he had **terrible health** and was often confined to his bed.

“For a long time I have been unable to rise from my bed. I am tormented by the pains of gout; a kind of fire seems to pervade my whole body: to live is pain; and I look forward to death as the only remedy” (601 letter; cited in Shelley, p. 166). “I am daily dying, but never die” (other letter; *ibid.*)

- H. Gregory was the **first great medieval pope** and although he was not that original in his thinking, his views had a great impact on the theology of **the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages**.

#### IV. Gregory the Negotiator/Administrator

- A. In AD 410 the Visigoths (Germanic peoples from the west), sacked the city of Rome and in AD 476 the last Roman emperor in the west (Romulus Augustulus) was deposed and a series of Germanic kingdoms replaced the Roman empire in the west.
- B. A significant event in the formation of the Papacy came soon after the installation of Gregory I to the office of the archbishop of Rome (593 AD).
  - a. Lombards (Germanic tribe) had invaded Italy and were threatening to once again sack the city of Rome.
  - b. After appealing with no avail for help to Constantinople, Gregory **took money from the church treasury and paid the Lombard soldiers** their overdue wages in exchange for their agreement not to sack the city.
  - c. This event coupled with his skill as an organizer and administrator caused his popularity with the people to rise to the point that later generations called him “Gregory the Great.”
  - d. From this point forward, the papacy grew and consolidated its hold on the consciences of Europe.

#### V. Gregory the Missionary

- A. Angles
  1. One day Gregory saw blond, blue-eyed war captives in the Rome slave market. He was told they were **Angles**, and he famously replied, “*Not Angles, but angels*” (*Non Angli, sed angeli*).
  2. He desired to go as a missionary to the Angles and initially received permission, but unrest in Rome caused him to be recalled.
- B. 596 — Gregory (as pope) sent 40 Italian monks led by Augustine
  1. The monks initially became frightened by reports of the Angles’ violence and paganism and attempted to turn back.
  2. In **597**, they landed in **Kent**.

3. King **Æthelberht of Kent** had a Christian Frankish wife, **Bertha of Kent**, who already had a Frankish bishop; the king cautiously allowed Augustine to preach, wary of possible spiritual or supernatural influence.
4. The missionaries settled in **Canterbury** and founded the monastery of **St. Peter and Paul** (later known as **St. Augustine's Abbey**).
5. Augustine became the **first Bishop of Canterbury**.
6. King Æthelberht was baptized.
7. This marked the first large-scale pagan conversions resulting from missionaries sent **directly from Rome**. The monks reported 10,000 conversions among the **Angles**.
8. The English church developed a strong connection to Rome and loyalty to the papacy.

#### VI. Gregory the Compassionate

- A. Was well-known for his concern for the poor and needy.
- B. Gave away all he owned for the establishment of monasteries and for the poor.
- C. As Pope, oversaw an effective **church-based welfare system** that resulted in increased power of the church.

#### VII. Gregory the Musician

- A. Transformed church music (Gregorian chant)
- B. Wrote many hymns

#### VIII. Gregory the Theologian

- A. Gregory greatly respected Augustine's views but appears to have interpreted Augustine's theology through **John Cassian's synergistic theology**. In doing so, Gregory promoted a synergistic approach to salvation that was not in line with what Augustine believed. Gregory's views would remain the norm until the time of Martin Luther (Dr. Michael Vlach).
  - a. Catholic scholars consider Gregory as Semi-Augustinian.
  - b. Protestant scholars consider Gregory as Semi-Pelagian.
  - c. Note: Pelagianism was formally condemned at the **Council of Carthage** in **A.D. 418**. This was then **confirmed ecumenically** at the **Council of Ephesus** in **A.D. 431**.

- B. *Papacy* - Gregory established the concept that the Pope was the Vicar (representative) of Christ.
- C. *Doctrine of Man* - Gregory believed that God's electing grace could be activated by human effort (thus he was Pelagian).
- D. *Baptism* - Through baptism God grants forgiving grace freely without merit.
- E. *Penance* - Penance **must be offered for sins committed after baptism**. Penance is a form of punishment inflicted upon oneself in order to atone for post-baptismal sins. It involves repentance, confession and meritorious works (Shelley, p. 169).

"According to Gregory, being crucified with Christ means extreme repentance, including penitential acts of self-sacrifice, a general rational self-denial of bodily pleasures that hinder spirituality, active participation in the sacramental life of the church, and works of love, such as giving to the poor" (Olson, 288).

Thus, terms that summarize Gregory's soteriology include synergism, legalism, and asceticism.

- F. *Meritorious works* - Deeds which involve sacrifice or suffering, such as almsgiving, ascetic practices, and prayers at all hours (Shelley, p. 170).
- G. *Prayer to the saints* - While this belief predates Gregory, he is credited with making it central to medieval Christian piety.

"Behold the severe judge Jesus is about to come; the terror of that mighty council of angels and archangels is at hand. In that assembly our case will be tried and yet we are not seeking patrons who will then come to our defense [, as we should be]. Our holy martyrs are ready to be your advocates; they desire to be asked, indeed if I may say so, they entreat that they may be entreated. Seek them as helpers of your prayer; turn to them that they may protect you in your guilt" (cited in Shelley, p. 170).

- H. *Holy relics* - Gregory encouraged the collection and veneration of holy remains of the saints and martyrs, believing they possessed great powers, including that of self-defense (ibid.).
- I. *Purgatory* - Those of intermediate character must spend time in purgatory as penance.

Gregory recounts the story of a monk named Justus who died after secretly hoarding money. Following a vision that placed Justus in a purifying fire, Gregory ordered thirty consecutive Masses to be offered for him. At the conclusion of the thirty days, another vision declared Justus released from suffering—an early and influential narrative foundation for the doctrine of purgatory and Masses for the dead (Shelley, p. 171).

This episode shows:

- Theology being derived from **visions and experience**, not Scripture
- A shift from **Christ's finished work** to **ecclesiastical mediation**
- The sacramental system beginning to function as a **postmortem remedy**

It's a perfect example of how **pastoral concern + monastic discipline + Roman sacramentalism** gradually produced medieval doctrine.

J. *Holy Eucharist* - a communion with Christ whose body and blood are really present in the bread and wine. Its power lies in its sacrificial character. It is offered by priests for the sins of the participants or for stated individuals in purgatory (see Shelley's quote in p. 171).

K. Evaluation

1. **Pastoral compassion can unintentionally reshape church authority.**  
Gregory's care for the poor and his civil leadership during crisis were necessary and compassionate, yet they accelerated the church's rise as a political and administrative power.
2. **Humility in language does not prevent expansion of institutional power.**  
Though Gregory rejected titles like "universal bishop" and embraced servanthood, the papacy nonetheless grew in moral authority and influence under his leadership.
3. **When experience and fear drive theology, assurance of salvation erodes.**  
Gregory's emphasis on judgment, penance, purgatory, and sacramental remedies reflects sincere concern for souls, but it weakened confidence in Christ's finished work.
  - a. Gregory's approach to salvation destroyed any sense of security for Medieval Christians.
  - b. It was Gregory's version of Augustinian theology that Martin Luther would encounter when he joined an Augustinian monastery. Through extreme asceticism and effort, the early Luther tried to earn favor with God. This attempt led only to his frustration. It was against Gregory's form of Augustinianism that he would rebel when Luther discovered that the righteous must live by faith.



## “CHARLEMAGNE AND CHRISTENDOM”

Luke 22 - 36 And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. . . . 49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

What ought to be the relationship between the church and the state?

### I. Precursors to a revived “Christendom”

- A. Frankish leader **Charles Martel (“the hammer”)** (688-741 AD) beats back the Muslims at **Tours** (732).
- B. Pepin (Charles’ son) forces the Lombards to surrender territory, later donated to the Pope and became what was known as the Papal States (“**Donation of Pepin**”).
- C. So when Leo III encountered trouble there was an established history of cooperation between the Franks and the Pope.
  - Charles Martel → **Pepin the Short** (son)
  - Pepin the Short → **Charlemagne** (son)

### II. Leo III and Charlemagne scratch each other’s back

- A. Leo was personally attacked on St. Mark’s Day (April 25, 799) by opponents who supported Adrian’s nephew Paschal for the papacy. **His attackers attempted to gouge out his eyes and cut out his tongue,<sup>1</sup>** and afterward accused him of adultery and perjury in an effort to depose him.
- B. Charles presided over a hearing December 23, 800 where Leo took an oath denying the charges made against him.
- C. Two days later, on Christmas Day, Leo crowned Charles the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

### III. Charlemagne’s Christian Kingdom

- A. Military/religious conquest
  1. Charles resolved to drown his enemies in blood or water. As a result, many were “converted” to Christianity.
  2. He appointed bishops just as he named generals, though always seeking worthy men.

<sup>1</sup> Mutilation (especially tongue and eyes) was a standard Byzantine method for disqualifying rulers and clergy.



3. He ordered **preaching in the language of the people**, that Sunday be observed as a day of worship and rest, that tithes be collected as taxes. Enacted severe laws against all pagan practices.
4. Selected **Benedict of Aniane** to lead widespread monastic reform by standardizing monasteries under the Rule of St. Benedict (Gonzalez, p. 268).

B. Charles did much to promote education.

1. Though Charlemagne learned to read Latin reasonably well, he struggled to learn writing. After inviting the learned English monk **Alcuin of York** to his court in 781 to teach him and to reform education throughout his realm, **Charles made serious efforts later in life to master writing, practicing on wax tablets, sometimes even keeping them under his pillow. He never gained fluency beyond signing his name.** Nevertheless, he valued learning deeply and learned quickly in other areas.
2. He ordered that every monastery open a school which would service both the wealthy and the poor. *Charlemagne's requirement that every monastery maintain a school—open to rich and poor—undercuts the myth of a uniformly uneducated 'Dark Ages' and marks what historians call the Carolingian Renaissance.*
3. Though Charlemagne proved to be very intelligent, he did not escape medieval practices like the *trial by ordeal*—the practice of testing suspects by torture supposing that no harm would come to the innocent.

When Germanic peoples converted, they **kept their legal customs** even as they adopted Christian belief. The ordeal was often **re-theologized**, not invented by the Church:

- Pagan “gods” were replaced with **appeals to God**
- Clergy sometimes blessed the instruments
- The ordeal was framed as *God's judgment*

But this was **accommodation**, not biblical justice.

C. Theological activity

1. “The revival of learning that Charlemagne had sought bore fruit throughout the ninth century. Wherever there was a strong ruler and a measure of peace, schools flourished, manuscripts were copied, and there was a measure of theological activity” (Gonzalez, p. 269).
2. *John Scotus Erigena* – Native of Ireland who was the one great systematic thinker during the dynasty of Charlemagne.

- a. Translated the false “Dionysius the Areopagite” (supposed neoplatonist disciple of Paul).
  - b. Most of his writings were too abstract for anyone to understand them.
3. *Gottschalk of Orbais* (c. 808–869), a Carolingian monk who, after study of **Augustine**, determined that the church had departed from his teachings particularly the doctrine of **predestination**. He was condemned for teaching double predestination at the Councils of Mainz (848) [publicly flogged] and Quierzy (849), spending the remainder of his life imprisoned.
4. *Pachasisus Radbertus* – Declared that when the bread and wine are consecrated they are **transformed into the body and blood of the Lord**. *Ratramnus of Corie* answered that the Eucharistic body of Christ is not the same as the historical body of Jesus, which is sitting at the right hand of God (Augustine’s spiritual presence view). This controversy demonstrates that the doctrine of transubstantiation (settled at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215), was not an established doctrine in the Carolingian period of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

#### IV. Charlemagne’s kingdom declines after his death

- A. *Louis “the Pious”* – Son of Charlemagne whose weak leadership was exploited by the end of his reign.
- B. As Arab expansion in the 7th–8th centuries came to dominate the eastern and southern Mediterranean, Western Europe was largely **cut off from long-distance trade with the Orient**, leading to a sharp decline in commerce, coinage, and urban life. With little trade and limited access to wealth beyond local resources, political and economic power became **land-based rather than money-based**. Out of this setting emerged **feudalism**, a decentralized system in which kings granted land (fiefs) to nobles and warriors in exchange for loyalty and military service, and those nobles in turn became lords over lesser vassals. Feudalism thus functioned as both a **political and economic system**, organized around personal relationships of obligation (lord and vassal) rather than centralized government, providing order and protection in a fragmented, insecure world.

#### V. Theories of Church/State Relations

- A. *Church/State Coequality* – Pope rules men’s souls; emperor rules men’s bodies
- B. *State superiority* – Emperor is superior to the pope in secular affairs
- C. *Church superiority* – Subordination of temporal authority to spiritual authority
  1. Emperor’s authority is temporal
  2. Pope’s authority is spiritual
  3. As the moon is inferior to the sun . . .

## VI. Hildebrand and Henry IV

- A. Hildebrand becomes pope (Gregory VII) in **1073**
- B. Continues the reformation of the church by . . .
  1. Promoting cleric **celibacy**
  2. Opposing **Simony** – the buying and selling of church offices for money
  3. Opposing lay **investiture** – any person holding office in the church committed sin if he received that office from a man not ordained to church office.
- C. In France and Germany half of the land and wealth was held by bishops and abbots.
  1. In the feudal system land meant tax base and military support.
  2. So whoever had the power to elect new bishops and abbots had control of those lands, and thus their tax and military base.
  3. Investiture Question: Were bishops and abbots servants of the Church or the state?
- D. In response to riots in Milan provoked by extremists who sought to enforce clerical celibacy, Henry deposed the bishop and installed another in his place (Gonzalez, p. 286).

The riots in Milan were connected to the **Pataria movement**, a radical reform group that supported the papal push for clerical celibacy and opposition to simony, in a city where married clergy had long been tolerated. Rather than relying on orderly church discipline, **extremists sought to enforce celibacy through public agitation and mob pressure, denouncing married priests as immoral, urging laypeople to boycott their Masses as illegitimate, and intimidating or assaulting clergy, sometimes driving them from their churches.** Bishops who tolerated such priests were accused of corruption and incompetence, making their position untenable. Gregory VII expelled several church officers installed by Henry IV, king of Germany.
- E. Gregory then summonsed Henry to Rome by a certain time, threatening that if he refused, he would be deposed and condemned to hell.
- F. Henry called his own council a few days before Gregory's deadline. There he deposed Gregory on grounds of tyranny, adultery, and practice of magic. The notification sent to Gregory read **"to Hildebrand, not a pope, but a false monk"** (ibid, p. 287).
- G. Gregory then excommunicated Henry and declared him deposed:

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, by the power and authority of Saint Peter, and for the defense and honor of the church, I place king Henry . . . under **interdict**, forbidding him to rule in any of the kingdoms of Germany or Italy. I also **free**

**from their oaths** any who have sworn or would swear loyalty to him. And I **forbid that he be obeyed as king**" (ibid, p. 287).

- H. The interdict affected Henry's entire kingdom. All services of the church ceased (communion, baptism, marriage, burial, etc.).
- I. Henry's enemies now had the sanctioning of the pope to disobey him.
- J. Superstitions spread especially after one of Henry's staunchest supports died unexpectedly (Gonzalez, p. 287).
- K. Henry finally decided he needed to submit to Gregory in order to preserve his own rule.
  - 1. He crossed the Alps in midwinter with his wife and child in hopes to seek a semi-private meeting with Gregory.
  - 2. Gregory, not knowing if Henry was coming in peace or with an army, had secured himself in the fortified city of Canossa.
  - 3. While Henry wanted a private interview, Gregory insisted on public repentance. Henry had to beg admission for three days before finally being admitted into Gregory's presence.
  - 4. Gregory granted pardon and withdrew his sentence.
- L. Henry returned quickly back to Germany to restore order where his enemies had rebelled.
- M. Gregory took no stance against the rebels and Germany was soon in civil war.
- N. When Henry came out on top Gregory excommunicated him again and foretold Henry's death.
- O. In spring of 1081 Henry attacked Rome, drove Gregory into exile, and installed Clement III as pope. Gregory died in exile in 1085. His dying words: "I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile."**
- P. Henry was later attacked by his own son (Henry V), who had been turned against his father by another pope. Henry IV died in 1106.

**What can we learn from this portion of history?**

**Homework:** Read "Charlemagne and Christendom" (chapter 18) & "The Papacy and the Crusader" (chapter 19)