

Gifts of Finest Wheat
Year 2, Session 2: Church History
Week 3: Significant Events in Church History Through 553 - 975 AD

I. Continuing Doctrinal Controversy

Second Council of Constantinople, 553 AD

- Difficulties persisted after Chalcedon
 - Some denied that Jesus had a human will
 - Some acknowledged the existence of this will, but denied that it was in any way active¹
- In response the council stated this:

We likewise proclaim in (Christ), according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, two natural volitions or wills and two natural actions, without division, without change, without separation, without confusion. The two natural wills are not – by any means – opposed to each other, as the impious heretics assert; but His human will is compliant, it does not resist or oppose but rather submits to His divine and almighty will. For, as the wise Athanasius says, it was necessary that the will of the flesh move itself, but also that it should be submissive to the divine will; because, just as His flesh is said to be and is the flesh of God the Word, so too the natural will of his flesh is said to be and is God the Word’s very own, as He Himself declares: “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of the Him who sent me” (John 6:38). He calls the will of His flesh His own will, because the flesh also has become His own.²

II. Later Missionaries and Church Expansion

A. St. Augustine of Canterbury, Roman Englishman, death in 604 AD

- Chosen by Gregory the Great to carry out missionary work in England
 - Arrived there in 597
- Work well received by people and rulers
 - Larger numbers of conversions and baptisms

B. St. Boniface, English German, death in 754 AD

- English Benedictine monk
- Carried out missionary work first in what is now the Netherlands, later – and more prominently – in what is now Germany
- Martyred in 754, near Dutch town of Dokkum

¹ Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (Staten Island, NY: 2002), 248-249.

² *Ibid*, 249.

III. Dude! Where's Half of my Church?: The Rise of Islam

A. *Islamic Claims*

- Muhammed (570-632) is God's prophet
- Recipient of greatest form of God's revelation, writings of Koran
- Jews and Christians had corrupted the scriptures that had been entrusted to them
- Abraham, Jesus, other biblical figures important in Islam as well
Must note it is these individuals as portrayed in Koran, not as we know them from the scriptures

B. *Problems with these claims*

- When were most reliable accounts of Abraham, Moses, David, etc. written – centuries before Christ or in 7th century AD?
- Who wrote most reliable accounts of life of Jesus – those who knew him during his ministry/learned from those who did, or guy sitting in a cave in the 600s?

C. *Islamic Expansion*

The initial territorial expansion of Islam was breathtaking

This occurred largely at the expense of the Christian Byzantine Empire
At expense of Empire in the east
Less of an issue for Pope and other western leaders

- 632, Muhammad dies
- 635, Damascus falls
- 638, Antioch and Jerusalem conquered
- 651, Egypt has been conquered, remnants of Persian empire have been destroyed, Islamic empire stretches to the Atlantic Ocean³
- 711-713, Southern Spain falls⁴

Amazingly this initial Islamic expansion could have been much more extensive

669-718, Muslim forces make multiple attempts to conquer the Byzantine capital of Constantinople
Crushing losses to starvation, in battle, and at sea finally prove too much for the besiegers

³ Meyendorff, John, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450-680 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 356-357.

⁴ Tyerman, Christopher, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 52.

D. *The Battle of Tours/Poitiers*

732, a Muslim force is decisively defeated 150 miles south of Paris⁵

Christian forces commanded by Frankish leader Charles Martel

Had title “mayor of the palace”

Merovingian kings, Frankish line of kings that Clovis was a part of, no longer de facto rulers of their own kingdom at this point

“Mayors” exercised real power⁶

Descendents of Charles Martel would change this political structure

E. *Reflections on the Significance of These Events*

The impact of these events on the Christian Church was tremendous

We’re used to thinking of North Africa, Turkey, and the Middle East as Islamic nations

We fail to realize how important these regions were in the early Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Augustine, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Ignatius of Antioch all came from lands that fell to the initial Muslim assaults.

Holy Land also taken

Modern Turkey

Portions remained free of Islamic rule until 1453

Site of the first seven Ecumenical Councils

Home to St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory Nazianzus.

E. *Continuing Conflict With Islam*

Several centuries of internal wars within Christendom and the Islamic world

Christians fighting Christians

Fate of Pope Hadrian’s family

Muslims fighting Muslims

Skirmishing of varying intensity along the frontiers of these two worlds

Will talk about this more in future classes

- 830, Muslim forces conquer Sicily
- 846, Muslim forces sack Rome, including St. Peter’s and St. Paul’s basilicas⁷
- 963-975, Byzantines retake Cyprus, military campaigns reach as far as Iraq and northern Palestine⁸

⁵ Crowley, Roger, *1453: The Holy War for Constantinople and The Clash of Islam and The West*. (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 11-15.

⁶ Meyendorff, 326.

⁷ Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes* (San Francisco, HarperCollins: 1997), 136.

IV. Two Leaders Who Changed Europe

A. Pepin III

Son of Charles Martel

751 deposed last Merovingian king
Anointed king by St. Boniface⁹

753 AD Pope Stephen II traveled to Ponthion to meet with Pepin

- Rome was threatened by Lombards who were still a menacing presence in Northern Italy
- Asked Byzantine Emperor for help and was rebuffed
- Appeal to Pepin for aid is successful
 - Pepin 1st attempts negotiations with Lombards
 - These fail
 - Defeats them in 754
 - Lombards threaten Rome again when Lombards cross Alps
 - More severe defeat at Pepin's hands in 756
- Pepin does not return land to Byzantines
 - Places it in hands of Pope
 - Creation of the Papal States¹⁰

Political power of Papacy, like conversion of Constantine, was mixed blessing

- Probably better than the alternatives at the time
 - Constantine's actions meant end of persecution
 - Political/military strength of Papacy held off those who sought to destroy church
- However; prestige, comfort, wealth, security of church were at times going to enable corruption and spiritual indifference

C. Charlemagne, 742-814

Son of Pepin III

Crowned as Holy Roman Emperor, Christmas Day 800
Holy Roman Empire didn't finally come to an end until 1806¹¹

Last pagan tribes conquered by his Frankish forces in late 8th and early 9th centuries¹²

⁸ Tyerman, Christopher, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), *God's War*, 53.

⁹ Meyendorff, 326.

¹⁰ McBrien, 121-122.

¹¹ Tyerman, 5.

Rise of rival political power in the west did not please Byzantines¹³

Increasing problem of westerners not knowing Greek

Easterners not knowing Latin

Both groups looking down on the other group's scholars, literature, and artists¹⁴

Creation of more powerful political force in west led to concerns of subjecting of church to whims of rulers¹⁵

Historic Eastern problem was now a greater concern in the west

Separation of Church and State

- Not really the order of the day at this time in history
- Later advocates of this had two main motivations
 - Avoid domination of church by state
Seen in rulers doing what they wished with church
 - Avoid domination of state by church
Seen in those times that Popes (and at later some Protestant authorities) abused their power
- Charlemagne's rise paved way for some of future difficulties seen in this area

V. The Emperors Say to Stop Being a Heretic: The Iconoclast Controversy

Iconoclasts rejected veneration of images

Claimed that use images of Christ and saints was idolatry

In first centuries of church the use of images was controversial

Some devout Christians rejected their use, some accepted them

Gradually this division ended as the use of images became more universally accepted¹⁶

Seen not as worshipping of objects but as way to give honor to those portrayed in those images

Some Eastern emperors supported this movement

Can seem like relatively minor issue to us

Hard for us to believe that iconoclasts had such hatred for use of images

Some saw use of images as idolatry

Those who held to legitimacy of portraying Christ's and saints, and of decorating churches with these images, faced violent persecution

¹² Ibid, 36-37.

¹³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985), 53.

¹⁴ Ibid, 53-54.

¹⁵ McBrien, 130-131.

¹⁶ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1993), 282-284.

Iconoclasts showed continuing problem of some people not accepting Christ's humanity¹⁷
Incarnation, God becoming man, seen as opening door for images portraying holy figures

Possibility of Islamic influence¹⁸

Caving into Islamic pressure

Possible attempt at appeasement

Making Christianity less offensive to Muslims

Resolved through political power being used for good

Empress Irene

Ended persecution in 780 when she came to power

In 787 she called Second Council of Nicaea

Officially affirmed legitimacy of using images/icons as way of honoring figures portrayed

Empress Theodora

In 843 brought to end renewed persecution led by iconoclast emperors who reigned after Irene¹⁹

VI. You're excommunicated! No YOU'RE excommunicated!: Photius and East/West Schism

858, Photius (810 or 820 – 893) becomes Patriarch of Constantinople, 2nd most influential and important position in Christian world

Previous Patriarch, Ignatius had been exiled by empire and resigned under pressure²⁰

Pope Nicholas I, 820-867, Pope 858-867

- Sends delegates to Constantinople to investigate this case
- They agreed with local authorities who said Photius should be recognized as legitimate patriarch
- Nicholas refuses to recognize this²¹
- 863 excommunicates Photius²²

In response in 867 synod called by Photius in Constantinople excommunicates Nicholas

Nicholas was already dead by time news reached Rome

Still serious break between east and west²³

¹⁷ Ware, 38.

¹⁸ Ibid, 38-39.

¹⁹ Ibid, 39.

²⁰ Ibid, 61.

²¹ Ibid.

²² McBrien, 139

²³ Ibid, 420.

- Tensions between east and west also made worse by sending of western missionaries to Bulgaria
This had previously been recognized as territory under control of Patriarch of Constantinople²⁴

Pope Hadrian (Adrian II), 792-867, Pope 867-872

- Sent representatives to 4th Council of Constantinople, 869-870
- Council upheld Rome's condemnation of Photius
- Listed patriarchs in order of prestige
Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem
Last three cities under Islamic political control but still Christians and churches present there
Previously Rome had given Alexandria precedence over Constantinople
Hadrian accepted Council's decision in this matter
- Council restored union between Rome and Constantinople
- Married priest, at this point mix of married and celibate clergy (although married clergy very rare in western church)
Led to tragic events
Show difficulties faced by Popes at time
Daughter raped and murder, wife killed when Duke of Spoleto (ruler of much Italian land not controlled by Papal states) sacked Rome²⁵

Pope John VIII, Pope 872-882

- First, but not last, Pope to be assassinated
Reasons for death unknown
Beaten to death in the streets of Rome
Good old days not always so good
- Personally led Papal forces against Islamic armies of the Saracens
- Council held in Constantinople in 879
John accepted Photius as reinstated Patriarch of Constantinople

Impact of these events

- East and west ultimately reconciled
- Even controversial Photius had good standing restored in Rome's eyes
- But tensions leading to eventual East/West split were worsened

²⁴ Ibid, 139-140.

²⁵ Ibid, 140-141.