

# CHURCH HISTORY

## 7. DECLINE OF ROME, RISE OF THE POPES

### 1. WHO IS THE POPE?

- “Pope” is derived from Latin papa, meaning “father”.
- It was used in reference to all Bishops (overseers, shepherds) early on; in the 9th century that the term begins to be exclusively used for the bishop of Rome and it's only in the 11th century that Pope Gregory VII decrees that the term may only be used for the bishop of Rome.
- The Successor of Peter as appointed by Jesus (Matt. 18):
  - Appointed to be Christ’s representative on earth
  - Leads and shepherds the Church
  - Wields Jesus’s authority
  - The ultimate defender and proclaimer of pure doctrine
  - The supreme interpreter of Holy Scripture.
- Bishops were originally elected by popular vote: Ambrose of Milan (340-397) a famous example – A secular governor who was appointed bishop by popular demand.
- Bishops could also be appointed by their successors (if candidate was generally accepted) but later became tied to politics – kings used their power to either influence appointments or just appoint bishops themselves. Not a healthy situation for the Church!
- To stop corruption and favouritism, the College of Cardinals was established in 1059 to elect the Pope. These were Church officials who would nominate candidates, debate the choices and then vote. When the new Pope has been selected, a signal is given to the outside world in the form of white smoke coming from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel.
- Using the word ‘Pope’ is a matter of convention and does not entail accepting Roman Catholic claims regarding the office.

### 2. MOVING THE CAPITAL

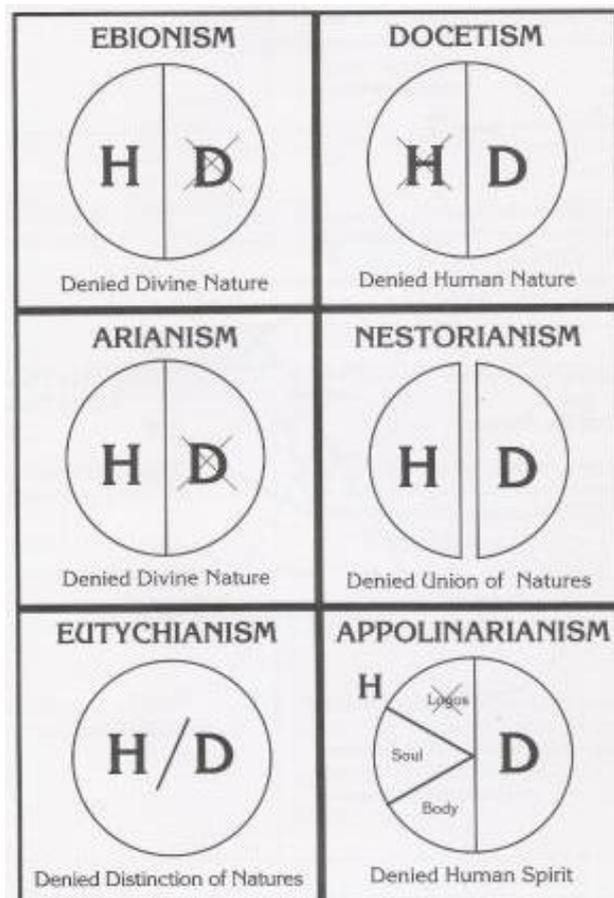


- Last week we ended off with Christianity becoming the state religion of the Roman Empire under Theodosius I who was the last emperor to rule over the united Roman Empire.
- This empire was bordered by deserts to the East and South, hostile Germanic tribes to the North and the Atlantic Ocean to the West.
- Remember that Constantine had moved the capital of the Empire to Constantinople...and so what do you do if the emperor says, 'hey I'm moving to new city?' Well you had any ambition you would say well "I was just thinking about moving there!" and so you pack up and you move to the new city with the emperor. In this way many prominent people left Rome and settled in the "New Rome".
- If you compare the locations of Rome and Constantinople and you'll see that has a capital city Constantinople is in a much better location than Rome. Rome is situated inland, and with no access to a port it was not a major trade city. Constantinople was based on a very important trade route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.
- Rome was cut off from Europe by the Alps. In wintertime it was almost impossible to cross these mountains and so it caused great delays in land travel to and from Rome. Constantinople is situated in the Strait of Bosphorus, which is 500m wide at its narrowest point and thus it served as the link of land-based trade between the Middle East and Europe.
- Constantinople became a very influential city, such that it was not renamed by other Emperors who took up residence there. It would remain the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire until the year 1453 when it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks under Mehmed the second, that's more than a thousand years!
- The church in Rome, as the only major Western church, had grown in influence over the major churches in the East (Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) in settling of disputes. If there was disagreement between them, they would refer to Rome for it's input.
- Now it was left with a big problem: it always regarded itself as the most important church because it was the capital church; but now that the capital that moved to Constantinople what gave the Roman church it's importance?
- What had been a popular argument early on the church really began to come to prominence: the idea that the Roman church was important because it was founded by the Apostle Peter. In Matthew 18 Jesus had given the keys of the kingdom to Peter. It was also the place where Paul, but especially Peter had been martyred. This city is where Christ had founded his Church. With all this uncertainty regarding the Fate of the Western Empire the church was the one thing that stood as a pillar where everyone could find stability and so the Roman Bishop really began to come into his own.
- The church relied heavily on the arguments of Augustine of Hippo as we will see shortly.
- Just for interest sake the Roman church claimed to have been founded by the Apostle Peter; so who do you think the church of Constantinople claimed to be the one who started the church in Constantinople, which was called the new Rome? The Apostle Andrew, Peter's brother.
- After the death of Theodosius in 395 his kingdom was divided between his sons and it remained a divided Kingdom up until the fall of the Western Empire. His son, Honorius, who inherited the Western Empire did not make Rome his capital, rather the city of Ravenna, a port city in Northern Italy.

### 3. CHRISTOLOGICAL HERESIES

Now, while all of this is going on, the Church is still in the process of working out its 'Christology' (doctrine of Christ).

- The council of Nicaea (325) settled that Jesus was fully divine, of the same substance as the Father.
- Yet questions still remained as to how His divinity and humanity fit together (the *hypostatic union*). Many efforts were made to try and explain this union, but most of them were heretical and so further Church councils were needed and called to come to the Biblical position on this issue.
- On this issue, more than almost any other, we need to heed the quote that is attributed to Charles Spurgeon: **"Discernment is not telling right from wrong, but telling right from almost right."**
- What you believe about Jesus has real implications for our salvation:
  - If Jesus was not 100% God: He could not be the blameless and sinless Lamb of God.
  - If Jesus was not 100% human: He could not be our substitute.
  - "What has not been assumed has not been healed" – Gregory of Nazianzus.
  - This is a very narrow line to tread, and it is easy to fall off to either side into heresy.
- Church councils agreed on correct doctrines by voting (Nicaea, bishops voted 316-2). Not by Papal proclamation. The Popes didn't even attend early Church councils, they sent representatives.
- Why did they, as 'heads' of the Church, not just decree what must be done and which belief is incorrect? Because no-one in the Early Church believed the Pope had that authority!



H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992. p. 55.

These two charts are from an excellent book called *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*. It gives great summaries of the different views on doctrines, it's a wonderful study tool. There is a copy in the Church Library.

Many people today will claim to believe in Jesus, the question is *which* Jesus they believe in.

Viewpoint	Ebionism	Docetism	Arianism	Apollinarianism	Nestorianism	Eutychianism
<b>Denial</b>	Genuine Deity	Genuine Humanity	Genuine Deity	Completeness of Humanity	Unity of Person	Distinction of Natures
<b>Explanation</b>	Christ had the Spirit after baptism; He was not pre-existent; "adoptionism"	Jesus had the appearance of a human ('seemed' to be human), but He was really only divine.	Christ was the first and highest created being; <i>homoiousios</i> , not <i>homoousios</i>	The divine Logos took the place of Jesus' human mind/spirit	The union of divinity and human was moral, not organic, resulting in two persons. The human was completely controlled by the divine.	Monophysitism; the human nature was swallowed up by the divine nature, resulting in a hybrid third nature – a <i>tertium quid</i> .
<b>Church response</b>	No official response	No official response	Condemned at Council of Nicaea (325)	Condemned at Council of Constantinople (381)	Condemned at Council of Ephesus (431)	Condemned at Council of Chalcedon (451)
<b>Primary argument for</b>	They are monotheistic	They affirm Christ's deity	They teach that Christ is subordinate to the Father	They affirm Christ's deity	Distinguished the human Jesus, who died, from the Divine Son, who cannot die	Maintained the unity of Christ's Person
<b>Primary argument against</b>	Jesus is only worthy of worship if He is truly divine (John 1:1; 20:28; Heb 13:8)	If Christ were not truly human, He could not redeem humanity (Heb 2:14; 1 John 4:1-3)	Jesus is only worthy of worship if He is truly divine; Arianism tends toward polytheism. If Christ were not truly Divine, He could not save us (Phil 2:6; Rev 1:8)	If Christ did not have a human mind/spirit, He was not truly human (Heb 2:14; 1 John 4:1-3)	If the death of Christ was the act of a human person and not of God, it could not be efficacious to save (Rev 1:12-18)	If Christ were neither God nor man, He could neither redeem as man nor God (Phil. 2:6)
<b>Time</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Century	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> Century	4 <sup>th</sup> Century	4 <sup>th</sup> Century	5 <sup>th</sup> Century	5 <sup>th</sup> Century
<b>Proponents</b>	Judaizers	Basillides; Valentinus; Patripassians; Sabellians	Arius of Alexandria; Origen (?)	Apollinarius of Laodicea; Justin Martyr	Nestorius	Eutyches; Emperor Theodosius II
<b>Opponents</b>	Irenaeus; Hippolytus; Origen; Eusebius	Irenaeus; Hippolytus	Athanasius; Ossius	Basil; Theodosius I; Gregory of Nazianzus; Gregory of Nyssa	Cyril of Alexandria	Flavian of Constantinople; <b>Pope Leo I</b> ; Theodoret; Eusebius

H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992. pp. 53-54.

- With regards to the Eutychian heresy, Pope Leo I - rightly called 'the Great' - wrote a very carefully argued statement that was straight down the middle of this narrow line, showing that the human and divine natures of Christ were both necessary and reasonable.
- It was sent to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, read out, and accepted as the Biblically correct position.
- He had argued from his perceived position as Head of the Church, and his careful and impressive argumentation resulted in many turning to the Pope with theological queries.
- It also caused another problem for the Roman Catholic claims to the Pope's office:

Pope Honorius was condemned as a heretic in 682 for promoting a form of Eutychianism... after he was already dead. How could the man, who according to the Roman Catholic Church, was appointed to be Christ's representative, the shepherd of the Church, the ultimate defender and proclaimer of pure doctrine, turn out to be an unbeliever?!

#### 4. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

- Augustine's theology was broadly shaped by two major controversies in his life.
- The first was the Donatist Controversy, which erupted after the great persecution under the emperor Diocletian in the year 303 - 311.
- The Donatists argued that anyone who had handed over Christian scriptures or had offered sacrifice to the emperor we're not true Christians. If you were a bishop and you had lapsed then your entire office was invalid, meaning that you and any other bishops you ordained were not Christians and therefore any baptisms you performed, any communion given or a burial done was done by non-believers and therefore invalid.
- In dealing with the Donatist controversy we come to that side of Augustine that is loved by the Roman Catholic church in that Augustine argued that salvation is only to be found in the church. In a way it's very similar to what Cyprian argued: you can't break away from the universal church and just start your own church; it's only in the one true church that you can have salvation. Now there's a sense in which that is true, but Augustine took it too far; that was almost saying that it is the church that dispenses salvation and so contradicts his doctrine of Grace.
- In order to defend the one true church and suppress the Donatist Movement, Augustine requested help from the Roman army, which he justified by quoting Luke 14:23:

"Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.' (MEV)

- Of course, in hindsight we can see that this was extremely unwise:
  1. Firstly, because we cannot establish or enforce doctrinal purity with the sword. Our battle is spiritual, for the hearts of men with the truth of the Gospel.
  2. Having an army at its back puts the Church in an unhealthy position of power.
  3. These are the unhealthy ties between the Church and State:
    - Augustine was greatly influential in the idea that baptism removes original sin. Infant baptism slowly began to be practised.
    - Baptising babies helped the State keep track of births and taxable people.
  4. It is inevitable, with our story today, that there will come a day that the Church calls for the help of the army to settle disputes, but no army comes.
- Secondly was Augustine's battle with a bishop named Pelagius.
- Pelagius rejected the idea that human beings are born in sin and therefore need God's grace for salvation. He said that every human being was born neutral and that we are able through good works and through our own devotion to God to earn our salvation.
- Augustine argued that Adam and Eve had the ability to sin but also the ability not to sin. After their disobedience to God's command and the Fall that resulted from it, human beings

now no longer have the ability not to sin. All we have is the *inability not* to sin. In other words, we are born sinful because we have inherited Adam's sin nature and as soon as we are able, we begin to sin against God.

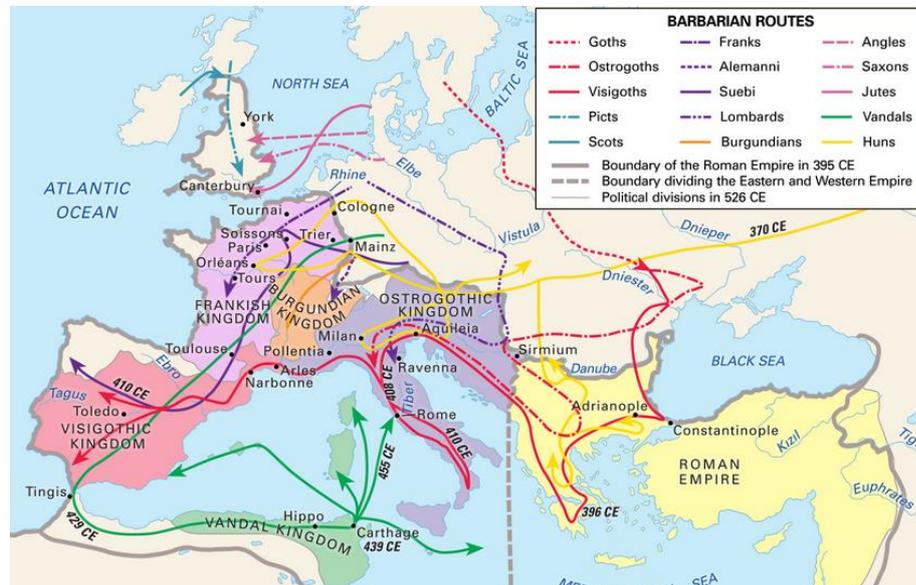
- People often ask the question: Do we sin because we are sinners or are we sinners because we sin? Augustine's answer is yes. It is both of those.
- So, Augustine is mightily appreciated by the Protestant church for saying that salvation is only possible by grace. If God had not first given us his grace, then none of us would ever seek after God, we would have stayed trapped in our sin. There is nothing in us that seeks after God, as the book of Romans says.
- Once one is born again, they now again have the ability to sin and the ability *not* to sin; and when we receive our Resurrection bodies and we are with Christ forever we will only have the *inability* to sin (We will only want to do that which is pleasing to God).

## 5. THE DECLINE OF ROME

- The Roman empire had grown at a phenomenal pace over a period of about 600 years, and it did so largely through conquests.
  - I mean it began from the city of Rome - it wasn't the Italian Empire - it was the Roman Empire - so literally from this one City the Empire spread out over Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa.
  - The problem is though is that once you've conquered territory you had to hold on to it. Western Europe has many natural barriers, so it was very difficult to keep conquered territory under Roman rule.
  - There were constant mini invasions and attempts at taking territory from the fringes of the Roman empire by various Germanic tribes who were looking to expand their own land or because they were being driven from their lands by other tribes that forced them to move into Roman territory.
  - Hadrian's Wall in Britain was very successful in policing the border, but you couldn't build a wall across the entire European continent.
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- The Roman Empire was fundamentally upheld by the strength of its army. It was a well-trained, disciplined, battle-hardened fighting machine.
  - The army was almost permanently at War or involved in War or border skirmishes with invaders.
  - The inevitable casualties meant that the army regularly had to be resupplied with fresh soldiers. But it takes time to train soldiers, especially horseman and archers.
  - So at first you bring over additional units; then you make use of your reserve soldiers; then you start conscripting the best men that you have in the empire; then the mediocre guys and after while you're left with only the inept. Remember that a lot of Christians still did not wish to fight in the Roman army for various reasons.
  - Slowly but surely over time the quality of soldiers in the army began to decline, the size of the army began to decline, and the army was forced to rely heavily on mercenaries.
  - Mercenaries are soldiers of fortune. They fight for whoever pays them the most money or promises them the most plunder after the war is over.
  - They had no particular loyalty and so if they saw that the battle was taking a turn for the worst they often just packed up and left. Or worse, defected to the other side!
  - So, they were very unreliable and extremely expensive.
  - The Romans then began to bargain with some of the Germanic tribes on the borders and basically paid them not to invade. Now that is a terrible position to be bargaining from

because inevitably in a few months the Chiefs of these tribes and come back and say that they need more money, or more supplies, and so it put Rome on the backfoot.

- Loss of territory, either by being driven back by invaders or in treaties with allied tribes, may have resulted in the loss of Roman gold and silver Mines, which impacted the income of the empire.



- So, with the decline of the army and of the persistence of the various Germanic tribes the Unthinkable happened:
  - In the year 410 Alaric the Visigoth walked into the city of Rome having defeated the army of the Western Emperor.
  - The Eternal City had been conquered by Barbarians.
  - This is a tremendous blow to the morale of the Roman Empire which had been all about the *glory* of Rome and those days were now over.
  - If Rome could not hold out, which city could be safe?
- Alaric and His Army did not sack the city. They were Arian 'Christians' and while they stole everything they could carry they did very little damage and urged citizens to take refuge in Churches where they would be safe. Then they packed up and left.
- This was embarrassing: The enemy conquered the most prized city in the Empire and didn't occupy it, they just left!
- After the Visigoths showed that the Roman army could be defeated, you could almost install a revolving door to Rome as many tribes tried to come against the city.
- In the year 452 when Attila the Hun crossed the Alps with an unstoppable army in order to conquer Rome, Pope Leo the Great, went out to meet Attila the Hun and convinced him (monetarily and theologically) to turn his army around and not sack Rome.
- Unfortunately, he could not convince the Vandals to do the same in the year 455; but did get them to promise that they would not burn down the city or slaughter civilians.
- In the year 476 finally fell to Odoacer, a former rebellious Roman general of Germanic origin.
- He was pronounced king of Italy.
- By this time Rome itself had gone from a population of more than a million people at its peak to about 50,000.

- The emperor in the East, Zeno, claimed that as the only remaining Emperor he was now the rightful ruler of the Western Empire as well. In practice, that is like me proclaiming myself emperor, because Zeno didn't have the resources to win the Western Empire back.
- Because he had no real hope of conquering the territory, he said that the Bishop of Rome would be his representative in the West.
- The emperor Justinian (482 -565) made an attempt to reconquer some of the Western lands including Carthage, but again, the trouble with conquering territory is keeping hold of it – surrounded by hostile neighbours, a constant supply of soldiers, horses, equipment and provisions was a necessity, but greatly expensive.
- Bubonic Plague (a precursor to the Black Death) broke out in The Eastern Empire in 541, and Constantinople suffered the brunt of the outbreak and thousands of people died.
- The Germanic tribes slowly thus were able to wrestle these territories back.

By the Year 500, the Western Empire had completely dissolved and was replaced with various Germanic kingdoms:



## 6. THE RISE OF THE POPES

- The appointment of the Popes as the Eastern Emperor's representative gave them a lot of power and influence with the Germanic Kings.
- Many of them had converted to Christianity, and the Popes would grant titles and give legitimacy to their rule.
- The Pope also became their channel of negotiation with the Eastern Emperor.
- The Popes therefore became important and influential figures on the European political stage. Ironically, it took the fall of Rome and of the Western Empire for the Popes to rise to their place of prominence.
- A document, *The Donation of Constantine*, stated that the Popes were entitled to large portions of land in Italy and sole authority in the Western Empire.
- Now Pope became a landowner as well. Although this document was proven to be fake in 1407, it had been extremely influential, and the Popes held on to these lands until 1870!



- The masterstroke of the Popes' political manoeuvring was in crowning Charles, king of the Franks, as "Emperor of the Romans" on December 25, 800. He is known to us as Charlemagne (Charles the Great) and established what eventually became known as the *Holy Roman Empire*.
- Popes began to use *excommunication* as a weapon. Being kicked out of the Church meant you could not receive communion, have yourself or your children baptised, receive a Christian burial or be in fellowship with other Christians.
- The closest modern equivalent is if your smartphone breaks or is stolen: You are unable to communicate, to do banking, to access social media.
- In 1077, Henry IV and the Pope had a disagreement about who had the right to appoint German bishops. Pope Gregory then issued a decree saying that Christians were released from their allegiance to Henry, who was excommunicated.
- Knowing he now faced rebellion and invasion from all Christians loyal to the Pope, Henry was forced to apologise, but only after the Pope made him wait outside in the snow for 3 days.
- What an incredible rise to power: From humble shepherds of the church in Rome to exercising authority over kings and manipulating events throughout Europe!
- It was the power of the Popes that gave rise to the infamous Crusades.

## 7. IN CONCLUSION

- Christians should not fret if we see Empires falling. For many, when Rome fell Armageddon was around the corner, they had given up hope – Augustine, in the aftermath of Rome falling in 410, wrote of the City of Man, which is earthly and temporary, and the City of God, which we await, which is eternal and unconquerable. As Christians our abode is the City of God, we are but visitors to the City of Man.
- We need to immerse ourselves in sound theology, knowing the difference between right and almost right! Make sure you are fed with the Word and sound teaching and preaching.
- The Church should be very careful how it involves itself in politics – we should lobby for good and just laws, and pray for our country to have wise, Christian leaders, but not seek to get our way using coercion or manipulation. We should never become the Church of any political party...We are the Church of Christ!
- We can easily forget our main mission: We are to proclaim the gospel first and foremost. That in itself will bring about more transformation in this world than we can imagine.