

The History of the Catholic Church
The 9th Century: The Rise of Christendom

Events

800: Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day

809-815: Bulgarian-Byzantine wars

813: Byzantines heavily defeated by Bulgarians

813: China is reunited

814: Charlemagne dies in Aachen

815: 30-years peace agreement signed by Bulgarians and Byzantines

825: Battle of Ellandun: King Egbert of Wessex defeats Mercia and becomes King of England

827-902: Aghlabids established emirate in Sicily and starts raids on southern Italy

840: death of King Louis the Pious

844: First Viking raids in Iberia

845: Buddhism is persecuted and banned in China

846: 11,000 Saracen Arabs desecrate Christian shrines in Rome including the tombs and basilicas of Sts. Peter and Paul

850-875: First Norse settlers arrive on Iceland

871-899: Reign of Alfred the Great, the first king of English

885: Sts. Cyril and Methodius arrive in the Slavic nations

888: Carolingian Empire decline and falls after the death of Charles the Fat (III)

Inventions: Gunpowder in China, Chess in Japan, the rotary grindstone, Quadratic equations, vulgar Latin develops into the Romance languages.

Politics

The political and church atmosphere of the 9th century is one and the same; it is hard to distinguish between the political and church spheres. Beginning in the 8th century with King Pepin I converting to Christianity and bringing the Frankish people into the Church with him, a line of kings will form that will both increase and decrease the Church's power. The first several kings, Pepin I, Charles, Pepin II, Charlemagne and Louis the Pius, will do more to advance the cause of the Church than almost any other king in church history. These five men will swear their allegiance to the pope and create a system of power whereby the church is both in full command of the people but also in tension with the kings.

King Pepin I is the first king in history to publicly swear allegiance to the Pope and begin the defender of the papacy for western Christianity. His single act set off a new era in Church history whereby the pope will become supreme sovereign of the Church and the nations. His son, Charles, will continue to swear allegiance to the pope and lead the people into a dual allegiance to him and the church. The most notable of these five figures is Charles the Great also known as Charlemagne. King Charlemagne showed his allegiance and the truth of his oaths by conquering all of Germany and France for the sake of the new empire: Christendom or the Holy Roman Empire. He began his conquests in 770 and will continue to advance the size of his kingdom until his coronation on Christmas Day of 800. The crowning of Charlemagne radically changed the history of the church and western Europe. Charlemagne was not simply a ruler, he was a divine ruler.

For ages in the Church the Pope would attend all coronations of emperors and hand the emperor a sword. The symbolic act of handing the emperor a sword symbolized that the authority of temporal rule comes from the church, or God. Only through God's action and will does an emperor or king get his rule. The coronation of Charlemagne was different. Not only did Charlemagne get the standard sword of temporal rule, he pledged himself to defend the papacy and the church. He would then engage in wars with the Lombards and the other nations to solidify church rule. This relationship greatly heightened the power of the pope, solidified the church-state relationships of the 9th century, and led to a blossoming of Christianity across western Europe. This new empire, titled Christendom, would not include Spain and England.

Although we would like to assume an empire bounded by both temporal and divine rule with the pope and the king acting as one would last indefinitely, it was short lived. After the reign of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, his son, ascended to the throne. Louis, although he followed in the footsteps and tradition of Charlemagne, was a weak and simple man. At his death, his three sons, Charles the Bald, Louis the German, and Lothar, fought for the right to solely rule the empire. They didn't agree and no one won. Instead they divided the kingdom into three parts with each of them ruling a part of the empire. The great Christian empire fell in just under 40 years.

The next series of kings would have mixed relationships with the pope. The papacy supported Charles the Bald angering his two brothers. The next successor, Charles the Fat, would follow the suit of his brothers and try to reclaim temporal rule from the pope. These two men, and their successors, would spend the next several centuries embroiled in a great battle with the pope over his sovereignty and the rights to rule. Some of the great popes of this century, like Nicholas I, will adamantly express and demand the freedom of the church and the universal sovereignty of the pope.

In the midst of King Pepin's historic move, a new system of governance is beginning in Europe: Feudalism. Feudalism divides the nations into chunks of land with the king owning all the land. As sole owner of the land, the king can give it to whoever he wants, accept tribute from the land, and decide the use of the land. Since land was both a source of income and a source of power, kings were absolutely unwilling to give up the land. Where does the church fit into feudalism? Not well. Since the king owns all the land, the church must lease its land from the king or be given the land by the kings. Hence, if the king doesn't like what the priest is preaching or feels

he wants the land for another purpose, he can depose the priest and install his own or take the land from the church. The land being at the whim of the king greatly reduces the power and stability of the church. The church is at the mercy of the kings to be able to preach or maintain a church building. Similarly, the church is losing authority to establish her own bishops and priests.

Although feudalism may seem to degrade the church, ultimately the church accepted this new order. The Feudalistic order provided income for clergy through taxation. Since the church was on land, the bishop or priest who presided over that church could expect tax income from those peasants who worked the land. The age of feudalism will be the only time in church history in which clergy have a regular income until the mid-20th century. The stable income produced through feudalism caused priests and bishop to be reluctant about preaching against the king or stirring up the people. Why cause a rebellion and lose your income? The greatest threat to the churches was the king. If the king disliked the church, the priest, the or bishop who presided over the church, he would wait until the priest or bishop died or was removed. Upon being removed, the land was his again since bishops and priests did not have successors and he could do as he wished with the land. If the land fell out of church hands, then the church was at odds with the king. Hence a complicated set of political dynamics were formed.

Viking raids began over 100 years before the onslaught and wars of the 9th century. Small raids were common on the northern front of Europe. A new form of war was coming to the English beginning in 784. The Vikings came to the land of England as raiders and began constant raids throughout the first half of the 9th century. Then the tides turned towards conquering. Beginning around the middle of the 9th century, the Vikings came to England with between 500 and 1000 troops intent on conquering the land for themselves. Annals from this time indicate that most of the battles did not go well for the English. After years of conflict, Egbert of Wessex died in battle giving Alfred the role of king. Under his leadership the English began defeating the Vikings and taking back their country. Alfred became the first king of the English people and one of their greatest rulers. After being defeated, the Vikings would try to fight in the Iberian peninsula, then head north to invade Iceland, and eventually sail to the Americas.

A new battle emerges between the East and the West. As the west fights for the primacy of the pope, the east is fighting against the Filioque controversy where the western church added "and the Son" to the Creed and defied the pronouncements of the Council of Nicaea. The churches clash in the election of the new Patriarch of Constantinople. Whoever is appointed, will set the stage in this theological controversy. Emperor Michael III wants Photius to be the next patriarch since he will establish the rights of the east and challenge the west. Pope Nicholas I wants Ignatius to be patriarch since he will understand the position of the west. Ignatius is elected patriarch and calls an ecumenical council in Constantinople. During this council, Ignatius anathemizes Photius. When Ignatius dies in 877, Photius becomes the new patriarch, calls a council, and annuls the previous council which anathemized him. The west accepts the first council presided over by Ignatius as legitimate whereas the east only takes the second council presided over by Photius as legitimate.

The Church

The church of the 9th century was both in the most placid and easiest time of her history but also one of the most challenging times in her history. With the rise of Christendom, the church received an era of peace. The first 30 years of the 9th century saw a great flowering of church and state relationships with Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. These two men greatly heightened these relationships but set the church up to fall. Although we like to think that relationships between the king and the pope were good, they were not. Even Charlemagne set up a relationship where he was still greatly in control. As the conqueror of the Lombards and the one to solidify the empire, the church was largely at his command. The church needed him against wars and other political issues. Hence when Christendom falls after the reign of Louis the Pius, these relationships come to an end. The rest of the 9th century is a fight to remain in power.

The successors of Louis the Pius will fight for the right to be sovereign over their land whereas the pope will fight to remain the sovereign over the church. Pope Boniface III began this drive to solidify church power in 708 when he wrote to the Emperor to receive the title of Universal Bishop. This act was simply a need and a political game to establish himself and western Christianity in the power it already had. No one expected the pope would need to fight kings to maintain his rule.

The Feudalistic system gave the church an income that she had never had before. Each church had serfs that it controlled who would pay tithes due to working the land. Priests and bishops alike became complacent due to the regular income and their status as feudal lords. Not only did the income change their habits but the status of lords gave them a new sense of political and social power. Although this will change by the high middle ages, priest and bishops were required, as lords, to perform military service. The first and last time in church history. Now expected to act like everyone else, priests and bishops spent more time in secular matters neglecting their spiritual duties and living a secular life. Through many decrees by councils and popes, the church attempted to reform the clergy and return them to their role as spiritual leaders. Some were successful, others were not. Why change when life is good? Bishops and priests became increasingly lax because they didn't want to offend the king or the people who gave them income.

Two issues greatly affected the church of the 9th century: simony and concubinage. Simony is the paying for church offices or lands. A person, whom the king wants as a bishop or priest, would pay the church a sum of money or deed him land to have that person in power. This practice was common as a way for the king to express his authority over the church and the church to gain the lands or funds she needed. Ultimately this practice greatly reduced the power and stability of the church and led to kings choosing church officials. The practice of simony was officially condemned (having been condemned years prior at the 2nd Council of Nicaea and the Council of Nicaea). The second major issue was concubinage. Since the 6th century, clergy were forbidden to marry or have children. The Feudal system was a system of inheritance. The father gave his lands to his son who would work the land like his father. If a man had no children, he lost the land. Only direct descendants could inherit the land. Priests and bishops didn't have children and therefore no successors. Many priests and bishops then took on concubines and had children in order to pass on church land to their children. One may think of their actions as supporting the

church and keeping church lands out of the hands of the king. This would be far from the truth. The children of these bishops and priests wanted the land for themselves and to keep it away from the church as well.

Papal primacy was the central issue for the church of the 9th century and will set the tone for the rest of church history. After an age of forced papal authority due to the fall of Rome in the 5th through 7th centuries, the pope was seen as a sovereign or a king. The east did not experience the rise to power of a patriarch like the west. The west, without a ruling authority for over 200 years, defaulted to the pope. The popes took this opportunity to solidify the church's power and to establish western Christianity. Throughout the 5th through 8th century, minor squabbles challenged papal authority but for the most part no other king had enough power to fully challenge the pope who was the spiritual leader of their people. All this changed with Charlemagne. Although Charlemagne supported the authority and power of the pope, he was more powerful than any other leader the church had dealt with in over 400 years. As both a political and spiritual leader, he could easily challenge the pope and take away his authority or church lands. Neither of these actions happened during his lifetime. His grandsons would begin this degradation of the papacy. Until the reign of Charles the Bald, everyone knew that both temporal and spiritual powers came from God and were hence given by the popes. Kings and emperors were handed a symbolic sword to show the handing on of temporal rule from God by the popes. The rise of Feudalism took the control of lands out of the hands of the pope and put them into the hands of the kings. For the rest of the century and the next 9 centuries, the popes will continue to fight to remain as sovereign over the church. Pope Nicolas I was one of the great popes of the 9th century who will fight kings to remain as sovereign over the church.

In the midst of these battles, more developments are happening within the church. A major development is the establishment of Canon Law. Back in the time of Pseudo-Dionysius in the 6th century he wrote a set of laws taken from both the Councils of the church and the functional laws of the bishops. This document was resurrected and used as the laws of the church. Although the council quotations were correct, scholars of the 14th century will declare the rest of the laws to be a forgery. Nevertheless the beginnings of church law are in the 9th century with a solidification of church power.

The spiritual lives of the people take a massive turn in this century. With the desire for order and the unification of Christianity, the church begins to reflect on the sacraments. Some of our first documents on the Sacraments and their theology are written in the 9th century. Similarly the first Sacramentaries are written in this century. Sacramentaries are books that codify the rules and rituals for the sacraments. In the midst of issues of simony, concubinage, and laxity amongst the clergy, the church returns to the 4th century debate that the Sacraments function on their own and are not based on the holiness of the priest.

Although the practice is not new and even mentioned in the New Testament, infant baptism receives its theology and standardization of practice. Since baptism is necessary for salvation, the church advocates for infants to be baptized. The people raised the issue about the ability to choose Christ and choose the faith. The church will respond to their complaint by stating that we must always make the choice and infant baptism doesn't take away that choice. The debate

includes the issues of membership in the church. This debate is not new and was described in detail by St. Augustine in the 4th century. Those who are baptized are part of the Church, those who are not baptized are not in the Church. In the 9th century the debate changes direction. Most of the people of the 9th century are baptized. Does that mean that everyone is in the Church? The Church will respond, no. Even those who are baptized may not be acting in such a way as to be in the church and will therefore not be. Some, who have not had the chance for baptism, may be in the Church simply by God's grace. Therefore the ritual of baptism does not ensure that the person will remain in the church.

The 9th century saw the rise in the definition and theology of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Until this century the clergy were largely functional for the spiritual needs of the people or the ordering of the church. In the 9th century the church developed the rungs or stages of the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the ministry associated with them. The lowest rung is the deacons. Deacons are servants who assist the priests and bishops with the celebration of the Sacraments and the care of the people. Priests are the second rung and must be ordained a deacon first. Priests celebrate the Sacraments and take on a the pastoral role of caring for a church. Bishops are the highest rung and they function as the overseers of a group of churches. This new theology defined both roles, ministries, function, and order.

The restructure of the monasteries under the Rule of St. Benedict in the 7th and 8th centuries had greater effects than on only the monasteries. As the center of Christian life, the rule of the monasteries gave stability to the people and encouraged their spiritual growth. Some of the clergy saw the example of the monasteries as something useful for parish life. In larger cities with priests who desired a way of life and holiness, developed a type of monastic rule for the secular clergy. This rule and structure is called a canon. Canons are rules set for clergy that give an order to life, a common fraternity, and a communal way of life. Where groups of clergy can live together and function as canons, the practice grew.

Key Figures:

Sts. Cyril and Methodius: Two 9th century brothers from Thessalonica, Greece. They came from an aristocratic family and were trained in law. They were both civil officials until Methodius became tired of politics and became a monk. The emperor granted the requests of the people to send missionaries to the Slavic people and Constantius and Methodius were sent as missionaries. Their first attempt failed. Then they were called to Rome by the Pope who sent them with the Latin liturgy. This second attempt was very successful since the people knew Latin. They would then create a written language for the Slavic people before Constantius (now Cyril) became the first bishop of the Slavs and Methodius retired to the monastery.

Pope Nicolas I: born in Rome to a noble family. His father was a Defensor and Nicholas learned law and civil society from him. Already noted at a young age for his abilities, he was ordained a subdeacon by Pope Sergius and then became deacon. The emperor came to Rome at the death of Pope Benedict to influence the election. Nicolas was elected pope on April 24, 855. He would become one of the greatest popes of the middle ages. His reign came during the time of the fall of the Carolingian empire, Europe is on the brink of anarchy, and the church is in moral decline.

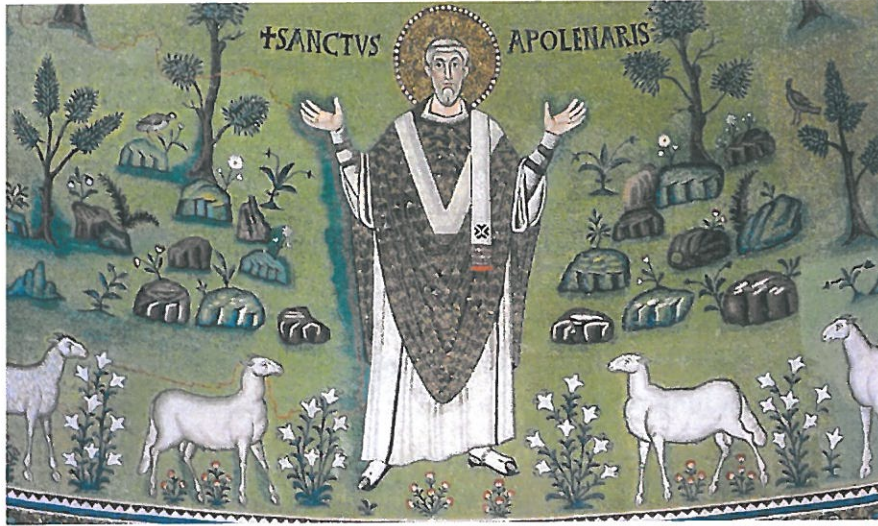
He worked through all these challenges to encourage a moral life among the clergy, establish his role as supreme pontiff not under civil authority, and the authority of the church over the east.

King Charlemagne: Born in 747 in the land of the Franks he was the eldest son of Pepin the Short. After the conversion of the Franks by King Clovis I, the Christian faith came to Charlemagne's family. Charles, as he was called, was the illegitimate son of Pepin when he became king. Pepin was originally the mayor, which caused great confusion upon his ascension to the throne. Charles was the legitimate heir being the eldest son of Pepin. Charles had great political ambitions. He continued to conquer and acquire new lands for the kingdom forming the Carolingian kingdom. Pope Leo III crowned him Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day 800. He continued to rule until he contracted a lung infection. He died in 814 leaving his eldest son, Louis the Pious, in his place.

John Scottus Erigena: most scholars believe he was born in Ireland. We know little about his early life before he moved to France and was asked to run the school for King Charles the Bald. During his time running the school and teaching, he was commissioned to translate the work of Pseudo-Dionysius from Greek into Latin, a document for which is best known and got the most acclaim. Through this translation, he entered the world of letters and education and became one of the greatest scholars of the middle ages. Although he continued to teach in France, the later years of his life are disputed with little evidence regarding the end of his life.

Art and Music:

No major developments in art or music during this century.



Documents:

Prayer from St. Hilda of Whitby (614-680)

BLESSING (based on the teaching of St Hilda)

Trade with the gifts God has given you.

Bend your minds to holy learning, that you may escape the fretting moth of littleness of mind
that would wear out your souls.

Brace your wills to action, that they may not be the spoils of weak desires.

Train your hearts and lips to song, which gives courage to the soul.

Be buffeted by trials; learn to laugh. Be reproved: give thanks.

Having failed, determine to succeed.

And until we meet again, may God keep us in the palm of his hand.

Amen.

John Climacus wrote, “We should love the Lord as we do our friends. Many a time I have seen people bring grief to God, without being bothered about it, and I have seen these very same people resort to every device, plan, pressure, pleas from themselves and their friends, and every gift, simply to restore an old relationship upset by some minor grievance.... In this world, when an emperor summons us to obedience, we leave everything aside and answer the call at once without delays or hanging back or excuses. We had better be careful then not to refuse, through laziness or inertia, the call to heavenly life in the service of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the God of gods.... Some people living carelessly in the world put a question to me: ‘How can we who are married and living among public cares aspire to the monastic life?’ I answered: ‘Do whatever good you may. Speak evil of no one. Rob no one. Tell no lie. Despise no one and carry no hate. Do not separate yourself from the church assemblies. Show compassion to the needy. Do not be a cause of scandal to anyone. Stay away from the bed of another, and be satisfied with what your own wives can provide you. If you do all this, you will not be far from the kingdom of heaven.’”

Commenting on the opening verses of the Gospel according to John, John Scottus Eriugena wrote, “When humanity abandoned God, the light of divine knowledge receded from the world. Since then, the eternal light reveals itself in a two-fold manner through Scripture and through creation. Divine knowledge may be renewed in us no other way, but through the letters of Scripture and the species of creature. Learn, therefore, to understand these divine modes of expression and to conceive their meanings in your soul, for therein you will know the Word.”

Pseudo-Dionysius wrote, “Let us hold on to the scriptural rule ‘not in the plausible words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the power granted by the Holy Spirit’ (I Corinthians 2:4) to the scripture writers, a power by which, in a manner surpassing speech and knowledge, we reach a union superior to anything available to us by way of our own abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or of intellect. This is why we must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from that the sacred scriptures have divinely revealed. Since the unknowing of what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself, one should ascribe to it an understanding beyond being. Let us therefore look as far upward as the light of sacred scripture will allow, and, in our reverent awe of what is divine, let us be drawn together toward the divine splendor.”

