

## History of the Catholic Church

### The 7<sup>th</sup> century: the Fall and Rise of Kingdoms

#### **Events:**

- 600: Smallpox spreads from India to Europe causing the world population to fall.
- 603: The last mention of the Roman Senate in the Gregorian Register.
- 606: Pope Boniface III sought to obtain from the Emperor the title of “Universal Bishop” and be the head of all Christian churches.
- 614: The Sassanid Empire sacks Jerusalem and takes the relic of the True Cross
- 622: Year 1 of the Islamic Calendar and Muslims move from Mecca to Medina
- 626: The Slavs and Persians jointly invade Constantinople
- 627: End of the Roman-Persian wars
- 629: The Arab-Byzantine wars begin. Much of the Roman Empire is conquered by Islamic forces
- 632: Muhammad dies and the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, takes over the Muslim world
- 636: Muslim forces invade and conquer Persia
- 638: Muslim forces conquer Palestine
- 639: Muslim forces conquer Egypt and Armenia
- 650: Age of the Vikings. Vikings develop the narrow longships and invade the northern parts of Europe.
- 651: The Sassanid Empire ends with the murder of Yazdegerd III
- 670: Muslim forces conquer North Africa
- 674: The 1<sup>st</sup> Muslim siege of Constantinople begins
- 688: Emperor Justinian II defeats the Bulgarians and annexes them into the Empire
- 690: Empress Wu Zetian seizes power in China and makes Buddhism the state religion
- 690: Dome of the Rock is completed on Temple mount
- 698: Active but unofficial anti-Christian persecution begins in China

#### **Politics**

The world of the 7<sup>th</sup> century is one of massive conflict. From the events listed above anyone can grasp that the nations are so intermingled and divided and they are almost at constant war with each other. In order to grasp the internal conflicts between nations and amongst the world

powers, I will discuss each empire independently and their interrelations. The century begins with a Smallpox epidemic that spreads from India to Europe. The death toll from both the Smallpox epidemic as well as the constant wars will bring the total world population to around 200 million.

Turning towards the northern part of Europe, we left the 6<sup>th</sup> century with northern and western Europe divided amongst different leaders who are all Christian or convert to Christianity by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. For the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the status of western and northern Europe doesn't change. The leaders maintain their status as heads of minor empires and war is limited to small skirmishes. By the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century new wars begin. A few leaders change hands over the course of the century but otherwise remain peaceful. The Frankish forces, who control western-central Europe. Will join forces with the Slavic empire to attack Constantinople. Then, by mid-century the Vikings reach their pinnacle by inventing the longboat. These new boats will allow them to sail quickly across the sea and begin their invasions of northern Europe. The Vikings were not conquerors but invaders. Their goal was to pillage for resources and then leave. Many northern European towns will be devastated by their onslaught including many newly established monasteries.

As we turn our attention further east we reach the Byzantine Empire, or the last stronghold of the Roman Empire. Over the course of this century the remnant of the Roman Empire will be reduced to almost nothing. Already affected by the Smallpox epidemic and struggling to regain its power after years of war and tumult, the Roman Empire is now besieged on all sides. The century begins with the Persian conquest and conquer of Jerusalem. Through this conquest, the Persians will steal the relic of the True Cross, which will be returned by another conquest at the end of the century. Although Persia and the Roman Empire have been at war for centuries, this is the first time that Persia successfully conquers part of the Empire. Rallying their forces, Byzantium begins its conquest and vengeance against the Sassanid/ Persian Empire. Joining with the Slavic and French forces, the Persians will return to conquer Constantinople. In their failure to conquer Constantinople the Byzantine forces rally and finally defeat the Persian forces and end the Roman-Persian war in 627. Eight centuries of war has finally come to an end.

As the Persian-Roman wars come to an end, the Islamic forces rise to power in the Middle East. Already united under the preaching and influence of Muhammad, the tribal nations of the Middle East are immensely strong and ready for war. Although Muhammad was peaceful for most of his life as the leader of the Islamic people, the end of his life turned towards war. In order to grasp this change, we must understand Islam. Islam considers itself a branch of Judaism and shares the same history and religious locations. Muhammad's death in 632 marked a pivotal change in Islam. Following his death becomes the age of the Caliphs. The Caliphs rule the Islamic world as divine leaders mixing religion and civil rule. The Muslims believe the Muhammad ascended into Heaven on Temple Mount in Jerusalem making that site a holy site for them. Following the death of Muhammad, the first goal of the Islamic forces is to conquer Jerusalem. They succeed in 636. This successful invasion will lead to almost 40 years of war for the Islamic nation. They will succeed, by the end of the century, in conquering all of north Africa, Egypt, Persia, the Middle East, all of the Byzantine Empire except Constantinople including Israel and Palestine. Imagine

the incredible military efforts to conquer two of the largest and most powerful nations of the world: the Roman and Persian Empires.

For the last part of the section on the politics of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, we will turn far east to China. Although China may seem unimportant in the realm of Christianity, its value is greater than most people understand. Archeologists found evidence of Christianity in China as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Many believe that either the Apostles or some of the earliest missionaries of Christianity were sent to evangelize China. Regardless, China becomes much more of a world influence and increases in power during this century. Not only does one of the most powerful rulers of China, Empress Wu Zetian, lead the Empire but religion becomes important to the Chinese people. For centuries the Chinese people lived under a form of religion called Confucianism which functions as a moral code or practice. Under Empress Wu Zetian China adopts Buddhism and makes it the official state religion. Prior to Buddhism influencing China, China was tolerant of other religions. Empress Wu Zetian changed that policy. Now Christians were persecuted for not being the state religion and encouraging people away from the practices of Buddhism. China's influence will help to end the Sassanid/Persian Empire and encourage trade and new resources across the continents. China, however, will not put political or military pressure on the west.

#### **Church:**

The 7<sup>th</sup> century for western Christianity is hard to express. The previous several centuries saw a mix of political turmoil, militaristic conflicts affecting rulers and lands but not the Church, and religious conflicts with the east. Even with the massive theological and religious conflicts from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman church remained steadfast and unified on basic Christian beliefs. These unifying principles will remain the same for the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The theological conflicts we saw from previous centuries are largely over due a series of more important conflicts.

The century begins with a large-scale Smallpox epidemic and the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians. In the midst of this turmoil, Pope Boniface III sent a letter to the Emperor in Constantinople requesting that the bishop of Rome become the "Universal bishop" and seated above all other bishops. Clearly this request was unacceptable to the east and made them even more furious at the west. Their fury was short lived due to the next series of events. With the Sassanid Empire attacking the eastern churches for the first half of the century and the Muslim forces attacking for the second half of the century, the eastern churches didn't have time or people to engage in theological controversy or exert their power over Rome. Instead Rome, and western Europe, was receiving numerous refugees from across the Empire as people were fleeing their homelands due to invading forces.

The Persians have the smallest impact on the political structure of the east. Islam's influence cannot be overstated. When the Islamic forces invaded and conquered the Holy Land as well as all the historical patriarchates except Constantinople, Christianity in the east basically died. Monasteries were abandoned, churches were burned, the political and religious leadership for these areas were over. The Muslims were more peaceful than most people like to admit. Although they conquered these lands and became their rulers, they did not force conversions to

Islam. Instead they imposed heavy taxes encouraging the people to convert. Muslims were required to pay 4% tax whereas non-Muslims paid a 10%. With money becoming the driving force for many people, lots of people converted to Islam. Many, however, also remained Christian even in this new and politically challenging environment. The major change, however, was the loss of the patriarchates and the massive power shift in the Christian world.

Back in the western part of the Empire, many other major changes were on the horizon. The effects of a century of missionary efforts across western Europe led to the conversion of many peoples and the establishment of many monasteries. The monasteries will have the largest impact of any religious group on the peoples, political climate, and religious climate of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The monasteries became the center of Christian life. People in the small agrarian communities would come to the monastery for Mass, religious education, and support. As Christianity spread, more monasteries were built. The central problem for the 7<sup>th</sup> century was the structure of the monastery. Most monks lived a life similar to those of the desert Fathers living a life of penance, fasting, and solitude. Pope Gregory instituted monastic reform across the monasteries of the Roman church. He imposed and required all monastic communities to live the Rule of St. Benedict, which caused the monasteries to flourish.

The monks of the 7<sup>th</sup> century were the driving force behind missionary and evangelical efforts. If a king was Christian, he would invite the monks to his land and they would convert and evangelize the peoples. If he didn't favor Christianity, the monks would work to convert him. A good example of the political challenges with evangelization is the northern land of Northumbria. The northern lands were hostile towards Christian influence. The King Oswald being the main ruler and the one to discourage Christian influence. Once he married a Kentish princess, who is Christian, everything changed. He then encouraged missionaries and monks to come to Northumbria and convert the people. He established bishoprics and installed bishops. He even consulted with monks on politics. The conversion of the king was necessary for the good of the establishment of Christianity.

The impact of the Irish monks was greater than the evangelization and establishment of Christianity. Starting in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Irish monks began a practice of private confession with penitentials. Following from the age where a person must publicly confess their serious sins to a bishop and receive a penance, the Irish monks began confessing their major and minor sins to each other and receiving a minor penance in return. These minor penances were recorded and standardized in a book called the penitentials. The practice of personal, secretive confession with a penance would spread to northern Europe in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and become standardized by the Church in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

In an effort to regain power over the west, Emperor Constant II issues an edict called the "Typos." The Typos required all Christian doctrine to be limited to the five Ecumenical Councils. Pope Martin I refused to sign this document causing him to be seized, exiled, and banished to Crimea where he will die a martyr. He will be the last pope to be venerated as a martyr.

With the fall of Byzantium, the rise of Islam, and many eastern Christian refugees coming to the western part of Europe, Byzantine Christian ideals and theology were also spreading to the west. These ideals were not problematic with the exception of the two-natures controversy which never ended in the east. Instead of rehashing the same controversy over the two-natures of Christ, a new controversy arose from its root. If Jesus has two-natures, does he also have two-wills? Namely if Jesus is fully human and fully divine, does he have a human will and a divine will or a mix between the two? The controversy will embroil the Christian world in another major dispute leading to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Constantinople in 680. The view, called Monothelism, held that since Jesus is one person, he can only have one will. Some other proponents of this belief held that Jesus can only will as one person even the union of human and divine meant that he had only one will, one operation of his person. The main proponent of Dithelitism was Maximus the Confessor. After reflecting on Jesus' prayer to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, he concluded that Jesus has two wills. His human will directs everything to the human nature such as sadness, hunger, fatigue, and those desires that are intrinsically human. His divine will orients itself to those things that are of God. Therefore during his prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' human will, which desires self-preservation and avoidance of pain and suffering, was fighting against his divine will, which desires the will of God. Therefore not only are they separate in Jesus but he can unite them together and subsume his human will to the divine will like any other human. The Council declared that Jesus has two-wills coming from his two-natures and thus settled the dispute.

The church in the east will continue to crumble and collapse into the church of Constantinople. As more powers emerge, Constantinople will be the only ruling authority remaining in the east. In the west, the challenge will be uniting the disparate Christian groups into one. Over the next 100 years, the Pope continues to establish his power and authority over the church and the kings. Many kings will try to control the Church for themselves and become its ruler over and above papal authority. Similarly, the Christianization of the west will set the stage for the middle ages and the age of kings.

## **Councils**

### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Constantinople (680)

We want to believe that the pronouncements of a Council were well received by all Christians and united the churches together again. As we saw with the previous five Councils, this unity was almost never the result of a council. Following the edicts of Chalcedon that Jesus has two-natures, many churches in the east refused to accept this theological dogma. Instead, they insisted that Jesus has only one nature and one will. In an effort to heal this division forming throughout the Christian world both Emperor Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius worked to unify the various splinters of Christianity. Emperor Heraclius largely ignored the issues and allowed churches to hold contrasting ideas as long as they were not fighting each other. With the new wave of wars starting at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Emperor had bigger issues to worry about than theological doctrines. Patriarch Sergius, however, felt a great need to unify the Christian world. He asked the bishops of Egypt, who held the Monophysite position to further explain their position. In their writings he found that they not only believed in the one nature of

Jesus but also that he has one will or power. Seeing this as a bridge that might reunite the world, he proposed and promoted the view that Jesus has one will or energy called Monoenergism or Monothelitism. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Constantinople Patriarch Sergius will present a letter written by Menas to Pope Vigilius claiming support for Monoenergism. The Council found this document to be a forgery. The east adopted this position as favoring a pseudo-acceptable of Chalcedon while promoting their own theology.

With Christians moving all over the world due to conflicts throughout the Christian world, new ideas were also emerging. The new idea, coming from the Council of Chalcedon, was Jesus' will. If Jesus has two natures, does he also have two wills? The eastern Christians were holding to the notion that Jesus really only has one nature and that Chalcedon was wrong. In an attempt to prove that Jesus should have only one nature, they began to speculate that a person can only have one power, namely you can only have one will. Any being cannot have two separate wills that operate against or in conformity with each other. Jesus should not be the exception. He has only one will.

The main proponent of Jesus two wills, called Dithelitism, was Maximus the Confessor. In his challenging style of writing he would convince the people that Jesus has two wills. His reflection on Jesus prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane would be the deciding factor. In the Garden Jesus' human will doesn't want to suffer and die but his divine will wants to do the will of his Father. These two wills are not only in conflict but resolved in their union in Jesus. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Constantinople declared the two wills of Jesus as dogmatic.

Following from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Constantinople was a political mess for the east. Emperor Justinian II, was not pleased with the status of the Church nor the pronouncements from 3<sup>rd</sup> Constantinople. He makes it his aim and goal to solidify church law and solve many of the political problems plaguing the church. He will be the first person in the east to establish canon or church law.

### **Key Figures**

**St. Augustine of Canterbury:** we know little of the life of St. Augustine. As a monk, Pope Gregory I sent him as a missionary to Britain to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons. Hearing the ferocity of the Anglo-Saxons he returned to Rome to be assured that these fears were false. He then went to Britain and was well received. The queen converted to Christianity and it spread throughout Britain. He was named the first archbishop of Canterbury.

**St. Isidore of Seville:** Born in Cartagena, Spain in 560 he was from a family with three other saints as siblings. Throughout the political turmoil with the Visigoths, Arian Christianity and the rulers, he unified Spain. St. Isidore is best known for his history of the Christian Church and his writings. He is often called the "school master of the Middle Ages." His encyclopedia will become the standard text for nine centuries. He required seminaries to be established in every Diocese, founded schools of learning for all ages, and wrote a rule for religious orders. He founded the Mozarabic Liturgy, which is still used today.

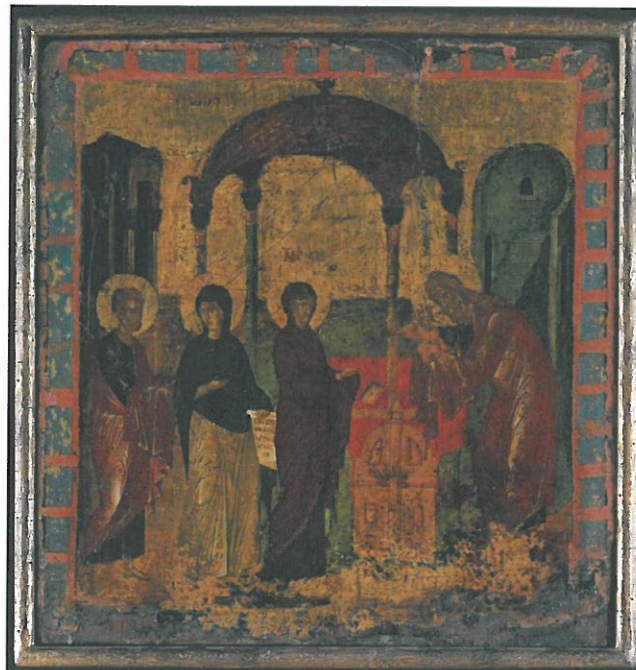
St. Maximus the Confessor: Born in 590 in Constantinople from an aristocratic family, he was educated in law. He became the scribe to Emperor Heraclius. After years of secretary work, he left that life and went to the monastery. When the armies invaded Constantinople, he moved west where he would settle in north Africa and began his career as a writer. He would spend the rest of his life both in exile and writing about theological matters. His work on the Garden of Gethsemane became the defining text at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Constantinople. He would die in exile in 662.

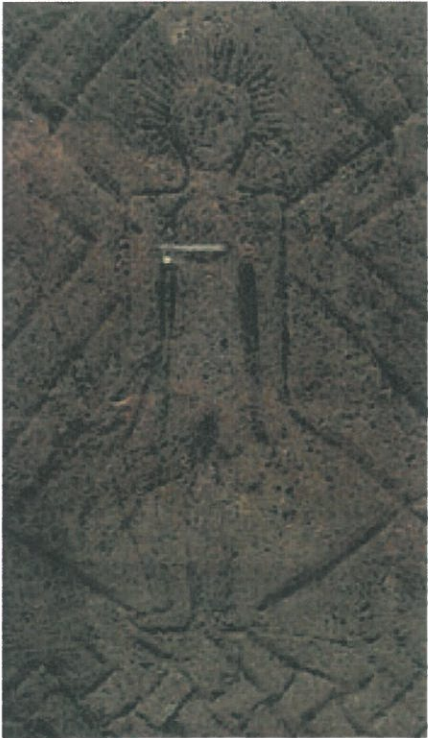
St. Columban: After struggling for many years with sins of the flesh, he sought the advice of an Irish woman monk. Her advice encouraged him to abandon the world and become a monk. As a monk he was sent to Gaul to evangelize. Through his efforts he would become the greatest of all the Irish missionaries. The French, however, didn't like his "brand" of Christianity. So Columban appealed to the Pope who backed his orthodox teaching of the faith. His challenge of the unlawful marriage of the king got him exiled. While returning to Ireland, he got in a shipwreck, returned to Rome, and spent the rest of his life fighting the Lombards in Italy.

### **Art and Music:**

The 7<sup>th</sup> century saw no advances in art. The only major change was the beginning of the proliferation of art across the empire. As different cultures and people encountered Christianity, so did their interpretation of the Christian message. The various cultures would adapt their culture to Christianity and Christian art would take the flavor of those peoples or cultures.

Another major movement peaking at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century is a desire for accurate depictions of people. People in the Roman world became obsessed with painting themselves and painting the ancient version of a selfie. With the rise is a desire for realistic paintings depicting people also came the desire to accurately depict Jesus.







**Quotes from St. Isidore of Seville**

“Confession heals, confession justifies, confession grants pardon of sin, all hope consists in confession; in confession there is a chance for mercy.”

-- **Isidore of Seville**

“If a man wants to be always in God's company, he must pray regularly and read regularly. When we pray, we talk to God; when we read, God talks to us.”

-- **Isidore of Seville**

“Nothing exists without music, for the universe itself is said to have been framed by a kind of harmony of sounds, and the heaven itself revolves under the tone of that harmony.”

-- **Isidore of Seville**

“In the active life all the vices are first of all to be removed by the practice of good works, so that in the contemplative life a man may, with now purified mental gaze, pass on to the contemplation of the Divine Light.”

-- **Isidore of Seville**

“War with vices, but peace with individuals.”

-- **Isidore of Seville**

“We, as Catholics are not permitted to believe anything of our own will, nor to choose what someone has believed of his. We have God's apostles as authorities, who did not themselves of their own wills choose anything of what they wanted to believe, but faithfully transmitted to the nations, the teachings of Christ.”

-- **Isidore of Seville**

“Tolle numerum omnibus rebus et omnia pereunt. Take from all things their number and all shall perish.”

-- **Isidore of Seville**

**Quotes from St. Maximus the Confessor**

The person who loves God cannot help loving every man as himself, even though he is grieved by the passions of those who are not yet purified. But when they amend their lives, his delight is indescribable and knows no bounds.

Four Hundred Texts on Love 1.13,

*The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 2)*

The person who loves God values knowledge of God more than anything created by God, and pursues such knowledge ardently and ceaselessly.

Four Hundred Texts on Love 1.4

Sometimes men are tested by pleasure, sometimes by distress or by physical suffering. By means of His prescriptions the Physician of souls administers the remedy according to the cause of the passions lying hidden in the soul.

Four Hundred Texts on Love 2.44

When you are insulted by someone or humiliated, guard against angry thoughts, lest they arouse a feeling of irritation, and so cut you off from love and place you in the realm of hatred.

Four Hundred Texts on Love 1.29

If we detect any trace of hatred in our hearts against any man whatsoever for committing any fault, we are utterly estranged from love for God, since love for God absolutely precludes us from hating any man.

Four Hundred Texts on Love 1.15

Do not say that you are the temple of the Lord, writes Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 7:4); nor should you say that faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ can save you, for this is impossible unless you also acquire love for Him through your works.

As for faith by itself, *the devils also believe, and tremble* (Jas. 2:19).

Four Hundred Texts on Love 1.39

Stop defiling your flesh with shameful deeds and polluting your soul with wicked thoughts; then the peace of God will descend upon you and bring you love.

Four Hundred Texts on Love 1.44

# Europe c. 530

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|----|---------------------|
| 1  | Byzantine Empire    |
| 2  | Vandal Kingdom      |
| 3  | Ostrogothic Kingdom |
| 4  | Visigothic Kingdom  |
| 5  | Suebian Kingdom     |
| 6  | Burgundian Kingdom  |
| 7  | Franks              |
| 8  | Anglo-Saxons        |
| 9  | Britons             |
| 10 | Frisians            |
| 11 | Saxons              |
| 12 | Thuringians         |
| 13 | Bavarians           |
| 14 | Lombards            |
| 15 | Gepids              |
| 16 | Basques             |

