

# His-Story

Church history and why it matters to me

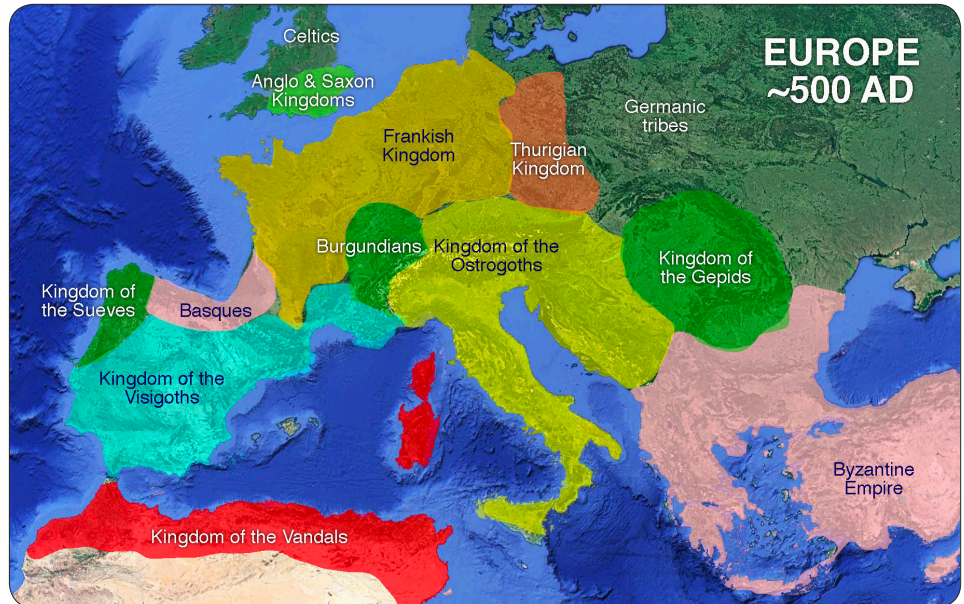
## THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES AD 476-1000

*If only to this end have the barbarians been sent within Roman borders... that the church of Christ might be filled with Huns and Suevi, with Vandals and Burgundians, with diverse and innumerable peoples of believers, then let God's mercy be praised... even if this has taken place through our own destruction.*

—Paulus Orosius

### I. The fall of Rome: Around 400 AD

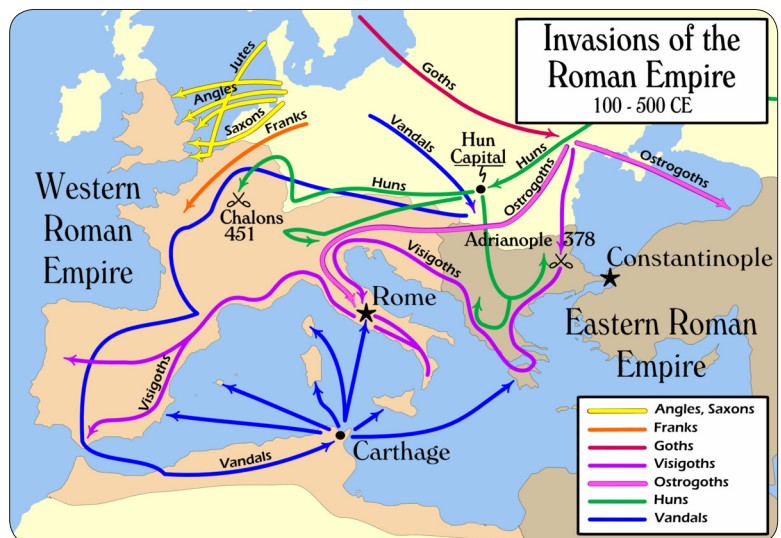
- A. Vandals had taken northern coast of Africa
- B. Rome sacked by Goths
- C. Western Roman Empire crumbles
- D. Invading tribes set up their own kingdoms (in the west)
- E. The Imperial Church continued to exist in the Byzantine Empire
- F. Much of the Roman Empire's contributions to culture were destroyed:
  1. Civil contributions: roads, buildings, aqueducts, etc.
  2. Art & literary contributions
  3. The church and the Christians maintained continuity to the past, guarding civilization and order
  4. It was through the work of Christians in coming centuries who resurrected much of what was destroyed in the west



*The fall of the western Roman Empire created a number of independent kingdoms, each of which was of great significance for the later history of the church in its territory. It also gave new functions and power to two institutions that had begun earlier: monasticism and the papacy. Finally, new invasions, this time from the southeast, posed new challenges for Christianity (Justo González. *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1. page 231).*

### II. Incoming Kingdoms

- A. Mis-understanding "barbarians"
  1. Romans saw all the barbarians coming into the Empire as looters who wanted to bring destruction (hence how we get the word "vandalism" from Vandals)
  2. In reality, most of the wandering people groups were seeking a new place to live that promised less harsh conditions, fertile land, and a civilized society. Rome had all this and more
  3. Other tribes had simply been invaded by other groups, causing them to seek a new home



## B. Barbarian Kingdoms

### 1. Vandals

- a. East German origin
- b. Crossed Rhine (407); meandered through Spain and France; crossed Straits of Gibraltar (429); took Carthage in 439
- c. Became controllers of the North African coast
- d. Traveled north by sea and took Sicily, Corsica, and Sardina
- e. Sacked Rome in 455, bringing more destruction than the Goths had brought prior
- f. Their rule in North Africa detrimental for the church
  - Vandals were Arian Christians, and thus brought persecution to the Catholics and Donatists
  - Eventually General Belisarius of the Byzantine Empire invaded (under the rule of Emperor Justinian, who sought to restore the Roman Empire to its glory days)
  - Byzantine Empire brought with it its eastern version of Christianity that, while agreeing mostly in doctrine, brought very differing practices
  - The result of all the infighting and divided Christianity made the area susceptible to Muslims, who conquered the area in the late seventh century

### 2. Visigoths

- a. Also of German origin; most adhered to Arian Christianity
- b. Defeated Romans at the Battle of Adrianople in 378
- c. Continued to move west and took Rome in 410
- d. Made their way to Spain (c. 415) and occupied Spain until overthrown by Muslims in the early eighth century
- e. A chaotic political history
  - Roughly half of the Visigoth Kings died in battle or of natural causes; the rest were assassinated or deposed
  - Because of the original Christians, who continued to occupy the area, a measure of stability was maintained
- f. Conversion of the Visigoth King Recared (589) to Nicene Christianity (i.e. not Arian) which led to many in the Visigoth kingdom becoming Catholic (and Arianism slowly died out)
- g. One notable Christian leader in the Visigoth Kingdom was Isidore of Seville
  - Considered the last of the Church Fathers who sought to preserve much of the ancient culture
  - Wrote an influential book called *Etymologies*: an encyclopedia that displayed the knowledge of the time in religious matters, agriculture, astronomy, medicine, arts, etc.

### 3. Gaul

- a. Divided by Burgundians, who were Arian Christians, and Franks, who were pagan
- b. On the eve of a battle, Clovis Meroveus, who became the ruler of the Franks by virtue of dynasty and who was married to a Christian Burgundian princess, promised he would convert to his wife's God if he was given victory. He was

## Notes

victorious and was baptized into Christianity on Christmas Day 496.

- c. Thus Christianity continued to spread throughout the Franks
- d. In 534 the Franks defeated the Burgundians thus unifying what would be modern day France

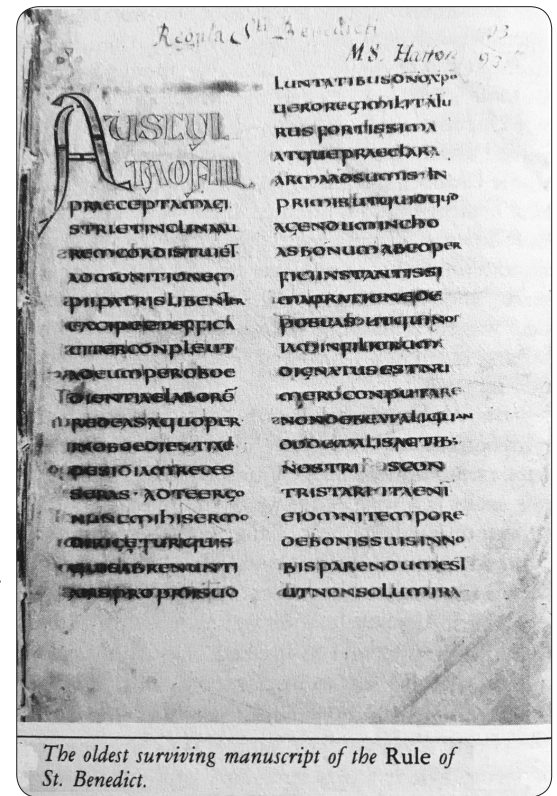
4. The Islands (Ireland, Great Britain, and Scotland)

- a. Had never really been under complete control by Rome
- b. Emperor Hadrian had built a wall which separated the southern part of Britain (from the northern peoples of the Picts and Scots)
- c. During the fall of Rome, troops had to withdraw from southern Britain to help retake Rome, thus leaving the islands exposed to invaders
- d. Angles and Saxons invaded and established seven kingdoms: Kent, Essex, Sussex, East Anglia, Wessex, Northumbria, and Mercia.
- e. Patrick evangelizes Ireland
- f. Ireland begins to send out missionaries, many Scotland
  - Columba: he, along with 12 companions, set up a monastery on the Island of Iona (563) that became the center of missions to Scotland
  - Missions efforts reached Scotland and made their way south to the Angles and Saxons
- g. Augustine of Canterbury to England (Kent)

Tribe	Conversion Date	Missionaries & Leaders
Goths	c. 340	Ulfilas (Arian)
	c. 720	Boniface
Picts (Celtics)	c. 400	Ninian
Irish	c. 435	Patrick
Franks	c. 496	Clovis
Scots	c. 563	Columba
Angles & Saxons	c. 600	Augustine of Canturbury
Frisians (Netherlands, NW Germany)	c. 690	Willibrord

III. Monasteries

- A. Rise of western monasticism, chiefly influenced by Benedict (b. 480 in Italy)
- B. Much different than eastern monasteries
  - 1. More practical: sought to use the monastery as a way to prepare the soul for mission to the world
  - 2. Didn't stress solitude, but rather sought for ways to organize life in the community (González, pg. 238).
  - 3. Didn't get into the drama of hierarchy in the church (unless they needed to step in and correct corruption)
- C. Benedict's greatest contribution to the monasteries was the Rule
  - 1. Shaped community life
  - 2. Insisted on permanence and obedience: a monk was not to leave and join a different monastery unless he was ordered to go to another. *"The commitment to permanence on the part of Benedictine monks proved one of the sources of the institution's great stability in a time of chaos."* (González, pg. 239)
  - 3. Insisted on physical labor, which was to be shared
  - 4. Committed to reading, studying, and copying: the monks became experts in copying not only the bible but other books so as to preserve writings for future generations





#### IV. The Papacy

- A. During the early middle ages, the Papacy began to take shape
- B. Leo, Bishop of Rome, when the Vandals sacked the city
- C. Leo who taught Peter as the first Pope of Rome
- D. Gregory the Great (540 - 604)

#### V. Why this segment of history matters (or *should matter*) to me

- A. How does this lesson enhance your knowledge of God?
- B. In what new ways are you challenged in your own walk with Christ?

## Gregory the Great

**Harry Rosenberg**

Of the approximately 180 bishops of Rome between Constantine the Great and the Reformation, none was more influential than Gregory the Great. Indeed, the medieval papacy clearly makes its appearance with the career of this remarkably able churchman. Gregory, who came from a distinguished Roman aristocratic family with a long tradition of imperial service and, later, service to the church, also began his career in public administration.

But Gregory turned away from public life and became a monk. He was the first pope who had been a monk. Monasticism, especially Benedictine monasticism, was from this period closely allied with the papacy. Together these institutions gave medieval Catholicism its distinctive character.

Gregory marked his period as pope by his claim to 'universal' jurisdiction over Christendom,

notably in a controversy with the Patriarch of Constantinople over the latter's right to use the title of 'Ecumenical Patriarch', and in Gregory's efforts to cultivate the rulers of Germanic kingdoms in western Europe. One matter of outstanding importance was Gregory's decision to send a team of monks to the kingdom of Kent in Britain. The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons and the victory of Roman Christianity over the Celtic church were the long-term result of Gregory's missionary policy.

Gregory's prolific writing resulted in the production of a basic textbook for training the medieval clergy, and increased the popularity of allegorical interpretations of the Bible, and interest in saints' lives—the truly popular Christian literature of the Middle Ages. He gave to early medieval Catholicism its distinctive character, stressing the cult of saints and relics, demonology, and ascetic virtues. Finally, Gregory confirmed the authority and hierarchy of the papacy and the church, and he proclaimed the 'Christian Commonwealth' in which the pope and the clergy were to be responsible for ordering society.

—Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity