

Church History I

(Early Church to Scholasticism)

Week 7 – Charlemagne and Carolingian Reform

Introduction: With the weakening of the eastern church and a strong stance by the Western political powers, the history of the Christian church, particularly in Europe, became the focus of the world in church history. The idea of a full and Christianized Europe began and was moved forward by the recombination of Church and State.

I. Charles to Charles

A. From winning battles to forming alliances. (Charles Martel)

1. "Charles also worked consistently to ally himself with the ecclesiastical authorities of the day, and the relationship that he forged with the church in his Frankish kingdom, and with the pope, would help lead to the birth of Europe as a cultural idea."¹ **PTQ**
2. "The church helped him consolidate his authority, and he aided the church in evangelizing the unreached Germanic peoples of the Frankish Empire. Living along the Rhine River (in modern Germany) and northern coasts of what is today the Netherlands were the Saxons and the Frisians, peoples who, if they were Christianized at all, probably regarded the Christian God as just one among many deities..."²
3. The church would seek help from the Frankish leaders for military protection, while the church would send missionaries to help convert people to the Frankish Christian cause. One such example is well known as Saint Boniface.
4. St. Boniface's story is well beloved. He was a well-educated monk who tried to accomplish mission work to the Frisians, unfortunately, timing was not on his side. His message was ill-received, and he returned to a monastery for two years. He did end up going and witnessing to the Frisians and Saxons in the Germanic realms.
 - i. "The most legendary story of Boniface's work is known as the felling of the Donar Oak, or Oak of Jupiter. Germanic pagan tribes attached a great significance to trees, and one of the most revered was a colossal oak in a place called Gaesmere. To show that the tree was empty of any true spiritual power, Boniface resolved one day to cut it down. In front of a crowd of skeptical but curious onlookers, Boniface took a mighty thwack at the great oak, and aided by a fortuitous wind, felled it in only one blow."³ **PTQ**
 - ii. Boniface found great success in winning the people and even became the archbishop of Germany.
 - iii. However, He had outstanding issues with the new Germanic clergy and thus leading him to request a council to be held by Carloman the next Frankish King (over the southern regions). The results of this council, called the *Concilium Germanicum*, brought a new set of rules to those governing the Frankish church.

¹ William J. Bennett, [*Tried by Fire: The Story of Christianity's First Thousand Years*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016) 305.

² Ibid., 306.

³ Ibid., 308.

- a) Bishops and archbishops would now be in charge of the dioceses (plural) once headed by nobles. (A diocese is an administrative district of the Christian church) **PTQ**
- b) Bishops were required to visit their parishes.
- c) Clergy had to give an account of their parishes and conduct before a bishop once a year.
- d) Clergy could no longer carry weapons or hunt (sport hunting was considered an activity too luxurious for bishops).
- e) The Rule of Saint Benedict, which governed monastic life, became mandatory for all monasteries.⁴ **PTQ**

B. Pepin the Short

1. Debated Rule

- i. I. Unfortunately, although Carloman and Pepin were children of Charles's first wife, they did not have enough of the ruling bloodline in them. (Merovingian)
- ii. Pepin, as one of the sons of Charles Martel, along with his brother Carloman, worked behind the scenes and puppeteered a man named Childeric, who was acting King, who was better accepted by the public for a time.
- iii. Once Carloman left the picture for the monastic life Pepin decided he could not rightly rule but ended up having to go against Childeric.
- iv. Pepin, in his shrewd planning, instead of fighting Childeric, used his close relationships with the Pope at the time, Zacharias, to get himself declared as king of the Franks. **PTQ** Thus, he was coronated, and Childeric was shipped off to a monastery.

2. Papal Authority

- i. Although the Papacy stepped in and helped Pepin it found itself also in need of Pepin's assistance.
- ii. Pepin came and saved northern Italy from the Lombards' invasions, which seemed like they could soon sack Rome itself.
- iii. After successfully running them off, the Pope at the time called Pepin King of the Romans.
- iv. Now this brings up the question, can the Pope elect Kings? The answer given for this question was answered by the Donation of Constantine. (A Forgery) **PTQ**
- v. The Donation of Constantine stated, "We decree that his holy Roman church shall be honoured with veneration; and that, more than our empire and earthly throne, the most sacred seat of Saint Peter shall be gloriously exalted; we giving to it the imperial power, and dignity of glory, and vigour and honour..."⁵ **PTQ**
- vi. "the *Donation* had enormous implications for medieval history. For one thing, it served as a kind of legal basis for many papal claims to political power for centuries to come. Secondly, it established the legitimacy of the Frankish kingdom over the lands it occupied now and in the future. Lastly, the cooperation of church and state in the Merovingian period—especially in the conversion of the Saxons, Germans, and Bavarians—proved that both parties could enjoy a relationship that proved mutually beneficial to each other."⁶

⁴ Bennett, [*Tried by Fire*](#), 309.

⁵ Ibid., 311.

⁶ Ibid., 312.

- vii. Although Peppin was an excellent ruler, little is remembered of him because his son certainly overshadowed him, that would be Charles the Great or Charlemagne.

II. The Story of Charlemagne

A. Who was the man?

1. Charlemagne was a large and forboding figure.
 - i. Charles was large and strong, and of lofty stature, though not disproportionately tall (his height is well known to have been seven times the length of his foot);⁷ **PTQ**
 - ii. Although potentially not as physically strong as one might expect.
2. He was an eloquent speaker and something of a scholar.
 - i. "He was not satisfied with command of his native language merely, but gave attention to the study of foreign ones, and in particular was such a master of Latin that he could speak it as well as his native tongue; but he could understand Greek better than he could speak it. **PTQ**
 - ii. He was so eloquent, indeed, that he might have passed for a teacher of eloquence. He most zealously cultivated the liberal arts, held those who taught them in great esteem, and conferred great honors upon them . . .
 - iii. The King spent much time and labour . . . studying rhetoric, dialectics, and especially astronomy; he learned to reckon, and used to investigate the motions of the heavenly bodies most curiously, with an intelligent scrutiny."⁸
 - iv. He loved to listen to music and stories.
 - a) "The subjects of the readings were the stories and deeds of olden time: he was fond, too, of St. Augustine's books, and especially of the one entitled "The City of God."⁹ **PTQ**

B. Charlemagne, king of the Franks.

1. Charlemagne continued the work of Pippen in protecting the Papacy from invasion.
2. He even semi-successfully helped drive the Muslims from the bottom reaches of France. **PTQ**
3. Charlemagne battled with the Saxons for more than 30 years and at times in a brutal fashion. **PTQ**
 - i. "In one battle, near the town of Verden, he lost a total of two envoys, four counts, and about twenty nobles. The loss made him furious. As retaliation, he ordered that all the Saxons in the vicinity be rounded up and brought to him. In a single day, he ordered forty-five hundred of them beheaded, and then attended Easter Mass."¹⁰
4. He won great battles and made great exploits in Austria, Hungary, and the Balkans.
5. "Charlemagne was an absolute monarch, but generally tried to rule with a spirit of justice and reason. His system of imperial administration was highly developed for its time, and as we will see, he generally inserted a Christian ethic into his court (massacres of Saxons notwithstanding)."¹¹

⁷ Bennett, *Tried by Fire*, 313.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 314.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 315.

- C. Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor,
 - 1. "In 799, the new pope, Leo III, was a victim of an attack instigated by his rival claimants to the papacy. An angry mob had tried but failed to cut out his tongue and eyes." ¹²
 - 2. As a token of gratitude, Leo invited Charlemagne to a celebration (Whether he knew it was a coronation is debated) on Christmas Day.
 - 3. At that time, the Pope crowned him king of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, reinforcing the idea that Rome had the power to set up and replace kings. **PTQ**
 - 4. Now this title brought with it some added difficulties.
- D. East and West relations intensify.
 - 1. The Byzantine kings saw themselves as the true leaders of the Roman Empire.
 - 2. This new Western powerhouse duo threatened the Byzantine influence in its more Western provinces. More and more places are intended to follow and seek the West instead.
 - 3. Then there was the difficulty with the Byzantine Empress Irene.
 - i. She no longer had much favor in the eyes of the Roman Catholics, nor would she much longer look favorable in the East.
 - ii. To attempt to bridge the gap, Charlemagne asked for her hand in marriage, which could have helped unify the nations and their Christians.
 - iii. Irene's advisors instead kidnapped her, shaved her head, and locked her in a monastery until her death in 805. **PTQ**
 - 4. Charlemagne's anger about this even caused him to team up with the Muslim Caliphate for a short time. (No battles were fought together, but it did get Charlemagne a cool clock and a baby elephant.)
 - 5. The Council of Aachen, held in 809, was convened for the purpose of putting the Filioque clause (Claiming the Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son) into the Frankish Nicene Creed. Charlemagne also attempted to get the Pope to say this would be required for salvation. Thus, driving a wedge between the West and the East. Pope Leo, however, refused this decision; instead, he made silver tablets with a copy of the original with an inscription, "*Haec Leo posui amore et cautela orthodoxae fidei*" ("I, Leo, put these here for love and protection of orthodox faith").¹³ **PTQ**

III. The Carolingian Renaissance

- A. Charlemagne's Christian empire was in a pitiful state to say the least.
- B. The country was spiritually weak as the church through various parts of the empire was disorganized and uninformed.
 - 1. Most clergy were undertrained and illiterate. **PTQ**
 - 2. Many lived carnal lives exhibiting weaknesses in sexual purity, greed, and pockets of idolatry.
 - "Many Christians' idea of worship was fanatical and nugatory (valueless) devotion to local ascetics or holy men and women. Few were well taught in the doctrines of the faith."¹⁴
- C. Charlemagne was determined to work on this.
 - 1. Thus, there was a time of light in the midst of darkness.

¹² Bennett, *Tried by Fire*, 316.

¹³ Ibid., 318.

¹⁴ Ibid., 319-320.

2. The king worried that a lack of literacy especially among clergy could lead to wrong understandings of the Bible and the Christian faith as a whole put in practice some educational reforms.
 - i. These included instructions in singing and reading of music, computations of years and seasons, Grammar, and were necessary in his hope to make sure books of the Bible and antiquity were being reliably copied and understood.
 - ii. A key instructor in this endeavor was Alcuin of York. **PTQ**
- D. Alcuin and Charlemagne's contributions were far-reaching.
 - i. Alcuin emphasized studying Scripture alongside the liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).
 - Creating a standardized Frankish Minuscule (including lowercase letters) helped with mathematics, historical works, and much more. **PTQ**
 - ii. He Advocated for schools in every monastery and cathedral to train not only monks but also future priests and lay administrators.¹⁵
 - iii. Both men promoted pure Latin grammar to ensure correct understanding of the Bible and liturgy.
 - iv. Stressed Nicene Trinitarian theology and Augustinian doctrines of grace and the church.¹⁶
 - v. Charlemagne through his urged rulers and clergy to pursue personal holiness and moral reform as a reflection of divine order.¹⁷
- E. Others during this time.
 - i. Some of the best missionaries from his time actually came from Thessalonica and Gottschalk, the 9th-century preacher and theologian, following after Augustinian ideals (and even Double predestination), was alive and spreading the Word.¹⁸

IV. **Big Picture Changes from the Charlemagne**

- A. *"The result was that Christianity, which until that time had existed mainly around an axis running from east to west across the Mediterranean, now began to revolve around a new line running from north to south, from the kingdom of the Franks to Rome.*
- B. *However, although here in the West the church seemed to be quite powerful, the truth was that it had difficulty trying to stem the surrounding chaos—and that to a degree the strife within the church itself contributed to the chaos.*
- C. *The measure of order that was achieved took the form of "feudalism," in which each feudal lord followed his own policies, making war as he pleased, and sometimes even falling into brigandage."*¹⁹
 - This occurred post the time of Charlemagne because his sons were not the functional leader that he was. Eventually, the people who had been given land for war efforts ended up acting

¹⁵ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019) 218.

¹⁶ Bennet, *Tried by Fire*, 314-320.

¹⁷ Joseph Early Jr., *A History of Christianity: An Introduction* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 129.

¹⁸ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *In the Year of Our Lord: Reflections on Twenty Centuries of Church History* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 98

¹⁹ Justo L Gonzalez, [*Church History: An Essential Guide*](#) (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010).

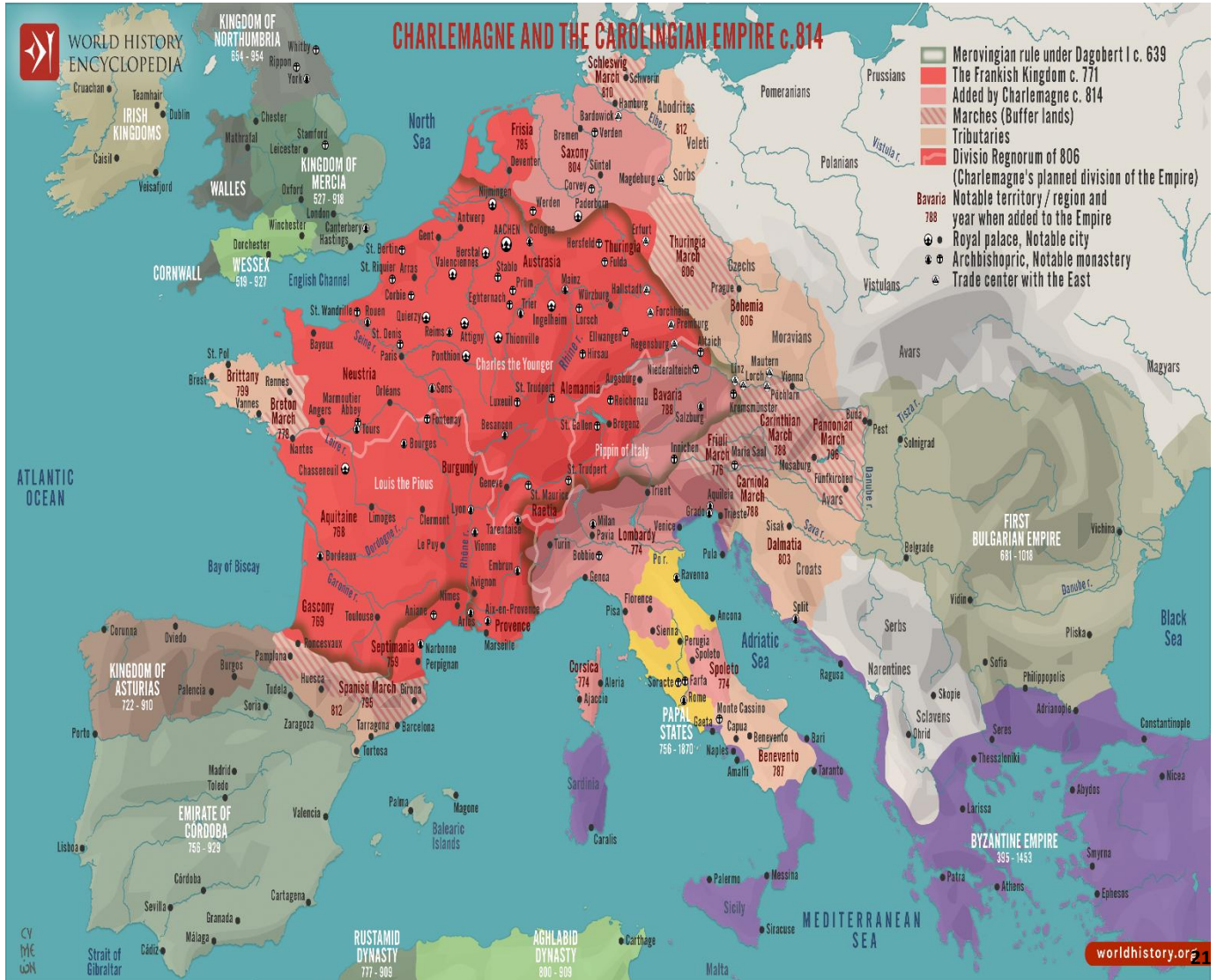
as Lords of fiefs who would maintain and work it. They essentially became citizens of that noble.

- D. There was a short-lived Renaissance, which was nearly copied on a broader scale in Europe later.
- E. There was a reformation that occurred on the part of the monastics, and many books of antiquity and biblical knowledge were preserved.
- F. The Papacy had solidified a power to affirm and depose secular leaders.

Church and State in the West (754–1309)

PERIOD	DATES	KEY EVENTS	LEADING FIGURES	CHARACTERISTICS
Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne	754–962	754 - Donation of Pepin Mid 8th century-Donation of Constantine (forged) 800 - Crowning of Charlemagne Mid 9th century - Pseudo-Isidorean Decretals (forged) 840 - Division of empire among Charlemagne's grandsons	Pepin the Short (c.714–768) Charlemagne (742–814) Nicholas I (c.800–868)	Creation of Papal States made pope temporal ruler. Crowning of Charlemagne set stage for power struggle between church and state. Feudal fragmentation of society occurred. In latter part of period, papacy was held by unworthy men under domination of Roman barons ("Pornocracy").
Holy Roman Empire of Otto I	962–1059	962 - Otto I crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope 1044–1046 - Papal schism 1054 - Schism of Eastern and Western churches	Otto I (912–973) Leo IX (1002–1054)	Period was characterized by constant German interference in Italian and papal affairs. Popes were generally weak, puppets of Italian or German overlords. Growth of Cluny reform developed strong leadership for church.
Increase of Papal Domination	1059–1216	1059 - Papal elections entrusted to College of Cardinals 1077 - Henry IV humbled at Canossa by Gregory VII 1095 - Crusades begin 1122 - Concordat of Worms brings compromise in lay investiture controversy 1215 - Magna Carta 1215 - Fourth Lateran Council	Hildebrand (Gregory VII) (c.1021–1085) Urban II (1042–1099) Henry IV (1050–1106) Innocent III (1161–1216)	Hildebrandine reform greatly enhanced power of papacy. Lay investiture controversy reached its peak. Excommunication and interdict became potent weapons in papal arsenal. Papal power reached its zenith as Innocent III claimed absolute spiritual and temporal authority.
Decline of Papal Domination	1216–1309	1291 - Fall of Acre, end of Crusades 1302 - Papal bull Unam Sanctum	Boniface VIII (c.1234–1303)	Popes continued to make grandiose claims of temporal power but were less and less able to back them up.

		1309 - Beginning of the so-called Babylonian Captivity; papacy moved to Avignon, France	Philip IV (the Fair) (1268–1314)	By the end of the period, the papacy fell completely under French domination after Philip IV kidnaped Boniface VIII. ²⁰
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²⁰ Robert C. Walton, *[Chronological and Background Charts of Church History](#)*, Revised Edition, ZondervanCharts (Zondervan, 2018), 34.

²¹ Simeon Netchev, *Map of the Carolingian Empire under Charlemagne (814)*, **World History Encyclopedia**, last modified October 25, 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/uploads/images/16359.png>.

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