

# The New Western Empire

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – the rise of a new empire under the western church, and its quick decay
2. aim – to cause us to understand some of the intrigue of the period, especially papal in authority

### b. outline

1. The Status of the West
2. The New Western Empire
3. The Decay of the Papacy

### c. overview

1. the *Medieval Church* – c. 470–1517AD
  - a. the church in the W has brought order, converted the barbarians to faith or to Nicene orthodoxy, and has established itself as a “political” force under a single bishop in Rome
  - b. the church in the E continues on, deals with a number of Christological struggles, calls a number of ecumenical councils to resolve those issues, and *slowly* begins to divide from the W
  - c. but now ... the rise of a new empire to replace the old empire, and its attendant effect upon the church herself, including its theological “moorings”

## I. The Status of the West

### Content

#### a. a review of the W

1. in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> C. – the Fall of the W Roman empire, the rise of the papacy in the W
2. in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> C.
  - a. the rise of Islam from Arabia around the Mediterranean basin
  - b. the Christological and iconoclastic debates in the E, spilling over into the W
3. (**now**) into the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> C.
  - a. the *formation* of a *new W* empire, along with a renaissance of learning & theological activity
  - b. the *continuing* decay of the papacy, followed by a period of intense renewal & reform
  - c. the *inevitable* clash between the new empire and the church, leading to the Great Schism
    1. **tonight**: we will only *begin* this discussion, and continue it into another lesson

## II. The New Western Empire

### Content

#### a. Charles, king of the Franks (aka. Charlemagne, 742-814)

1. by the 6<sup>th</sup> C., the western Germanic Franks (in central Europe) had been Christianized
2. by the 9<sup>th</sup> C., Francia became the most powerful kingdom in the W since the W Roman Empire
3. Charles inherited the throne of the Frankish Kingdom in 768, following his father’s death
4. Charles expanded the kingdom into an empire (most of W and C Europe [excluding Spain])
  - a. known as the Carolingian (**carol-in-gee-in**) Empire
  - b. he subdued the Saxons (N) and Bavarians, and pushed his frontier even into Spain
  - c. forcing the conquered peoples into Christianity, even during *continual* rebellions
  - d. often called “the Father of Europe” – the French and German monarchies are traced to him
5. on December 25, 800 he was crowned emperor by Pope Leo III (the “Holy Roman Empire”)
6. Charles continued the policy of support of the church, becoming its *protector*
  - a. he began to appoint bishops in the church, and establish new “church laws”
    1. **e.g.** tithing as a tax, preaching in the language of the people, Sunday as a day of rest
  - c. he began the long process of **monastic reform**
    1. by this time, many abbots viewed their office as a means to riches and power
    2. he appointed Benedict (not of Nursia) to head the royal abbey of Aniane, a model to bring the other monasteries into line with the *Rule of Benedict*
6. unfortunately, his kingdom began to fall apart almost immediately after his death in 814

## b. Louis the Pious (814-840)

1. Charles' son, Louis the Pious, continued the monastic reforms his father had begun
  - a. the **Diet of 817** ordered monastery reforms: the clergy would not wear ostentatious attire, tithes were obligatory (2/3 to the poor), and the clergy were to be elected by the people
2. his later years were marred by constant civil war; after forgiving the rebels, they would rebel again
3. after his death, the empire fell apart, was briefly reunited under Charles the Fat (his grandson), but fell apart again with the advance of invaders (**it ended c. 924**)
  - a. the Scandinavians (Norsemen) had become expert shipbuilders and masters of the sea, moving out from the Arctic sea to attack Britain, N France, circling around into the Mediterranean
    1. they adopted the Christian faith as they conquered C Europe
  - b. the Hungarians (Magyars) came from the Latin W, invading Germany and crossing the Rhine
    1. they were named Hungarian because they revived the memory of the ancient Huns
    2. they were converted by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> C. through missionary activity from the E
4. during this time, because of Arab conquest, Europe was cut off from Mediterranean commerce
  - a. thus, the continent fell into a time of near self-sufficiency (money almost ceased circulating)
  - b. the main source of wealth was land; **feudalism** was born based on land-holdings and vassals
  - c. because the church held much land (in bishoprics and abbeys), economic and political influences were strongly wielded *by the church* during this time

## c. the Carolingian Renaissance (late 8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> C.)

1. a revival of learning and theological activity during a time of (relative) peace
2. the *single* great systematic thinker of the period: **John Scotus Erigena**
  - a. a native of Ireland, who fell heir to the knowledge of antiquity preserved in Irish monasteries
  - b. he settled at the court of Charles the Bald (heir to Louis the Pious), and gained great prestige
    1. because he was highly intelligent and versed in both Latin and Greek
  - c. he translated the works of the **false Dionysius the Areopagite** (a 5<sup>th</sup> C. work purporting to be of a witness to Paul at the Areopagus in **Acts 17**)
  - d. this *confused* the theology of Paul with Neoplatonism in the W church
3. the main theological controversies of the time (**in the W**)
  - a. one involved the issue of the sonship of Jesus
    1. involving the *Mozarabs*, Spanish Christians under Moorish (Muslim) rule, who kept their traditions from *before* the Muslim conquests
    2. they had come to embrace the "sonship" of Jesus in two senses: one eternal and one by adoption (vs. true Adoptionism = the human Jesus adopted by God and made divine)
    3. the position was condemned by the Frankish theologians and the pope
  - b. one involved the definition of *predestination*, as put forth by Gottschalk of Orbais
    1. he studied Augustine, understood the doctrine, and insisted the church had moved away
    2. he defended it too bitterly; he seemed to rejoice over the damnation of the reprobate
    3. after a debate, he was declared a heretic and imprisoned in a monastery
  - c. one involved the presence of Christ in communion
    1. Radbertus, a monk of Corbie (eventual saint) proposed an early form of **transubstantiation**
      - a. that the bread and wine are *transformed* into the very body and blood of Jesus
    2. although initially questioned as the result of *popular exaggeration*, it began to take hold in the W church, and was formally adopted by the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council in 1215

## III. The Decay of the Papacy

### Content

#### a. the decay of the papacy

1. although wielding much power through the emperor N of the Alps, the popes struggled to maintain control of Rome itself
  - a. the position itself became easy prey for the ambitious
  - b. although ... the decline of the office was less rapid than the Carolingian empire
2. Pope Nicholas I (858-867)
  - a. with the wane of *imperial* authority after Charlemagne, the popes were seen as the *only* source of universal authority in the W
  - b. Nicholas governed with unprecedented energy, derived from a series of *supposedly ancient* documents known as the **False Decretals**
    1. probably forged by lower echelons in the German or Frankish ecclesiastical hierarchy which attempted to bolster the authority of the pope over their direct superiors

2. purported to be a collection of decrees of various councils and decretals of previous popes during the first seven (7) centuries of the church
  3. Nicholas used these documents bolster his position as “absolute” in the church; to stop warring factions and control those in power “under” him
3. the intrigue to follow
    - a. Hadrian II – he cursed Lothair II of Lorraine who died from an epidemic
    - b. John VIII – was rejected by Charles the Fat and the Byzantines in the face of Muslim attack
      1. he was murdered in his own palace, first poisoned by an aide, then skull-crushed with a mallet
    - c. then, a series of popes in rapid succession
      1. Stephen VI had his predecessor Formosus disinterred, then tried, found guilty, and mutilated
      2. Sergius III had his two rivals Leo V and Christopher I incarcerated and killed
      3. popes were suffocated, strangled, poisoned, starved in prison, etc.
      4. by 1045, there were three popes, all deposed by King Henry III of Germany
        - a. his appointee, Clement II named him emperor (before he died)
        - b. Henry turned to Bruno, bishop of Toul, who refused to be named pope unless elected by the people
        - c. so, to this end, he went to Rome, along with monks Hildebrand and Humbert
        - d. this would usher in a new age in the W ... a period of great renewal, both politically and ecclesiastically, which would “spillover” into the Crusades
- b. the importance of the period (the 9<sup>th</sup> C.)**
1. this period *solidifies* the authority of the pope over the W church and “intertwines” the office *permanently* with the state, in the sense that popes have (since this time) considered themselves “capable” of speaking into all political matters
    - a. **i.e.** papal authority pressed *away* from theological matters to political ones
  2. Europe is solidified in Christianity, and this period begins *western civilization* – peoples began to be governed from this time on the continent by fundamental *Judeo-Christian* law systems
  3. theology, although having a few issues, continues its “drift” away from solid, biblically-centered orthodoxy, and new “ideas” are beginning to be introduced as potential *dogma* into the church
    - a. **e.g.** the doctrine of transubstantiation begins to be seen as “normal”, although it won’t be *dogmatized* for centuries yet
  4. **remember:** in the W, **this is the church** (**i.e.** there is no “other” or “Protestant” church)
    - a. **i.e.** everyone who “converts” to Christianity is doing so within an environment where “conversion” is slowly changing from a true *life of faith in Christ* into a *religious affiliation*