

The New Western Order of the Church

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the rise of Benedictine monasticism and the papacy in response to the fall of Rome
2. aim – to cause us to understand how the vacuum of Rome gave rise to a new church order

b. outline

1. The Rise of Benedictine Monasticism
2. The Rise of the Papacy
3. The Reality of a New Church Order

c. overview

1. the *Medieval Church* – c. 470–1517AD
 - a. medieval = the period of history known as the “Middle Ages” (i.e. between two periods)
 1. the period between the *W Roman Empire* and *Western Civilization*, or
 2. the period between the *orthodox* church of antiquity and the *Reformation*
 - b. dark ages = the period of *W history* after the Fall of Rome from c. 450 – 700AD marked by frequent warfare and the virtual disappearance of urban life and high culture; a period of intellectual darkness and barbarity (i.e. the history of the W, not the E)
 1. it is the rise of the “official” W church that is (usually) attributed with the end of the “dark ages”
 2. so, our lesson tonight focuses on two (2) elements of a new church order in the W, in the *vacuum* created by the fall of Rome, the rise of the church to *end* the dark ages

I. The Rise of Benedictine Monasticism

Content

a. general monasticism

1. monasticism = a commitment by believers to various forms of “withdrawal” from official church structure(s) in order to pursue a life of greater commitment and discipleship
 - a. which started under the Imperial Church and its focus on the *powerful*
 - b. which started (largely) in the E, particularly in Egypt
 - c. but, which also had a Western component, but was *different* in a number of key ways:
 1. it was more *practical* – it focused on *more* than renunciation of the world (and discipline)
 2. it was more *communal* – it built communities of believers rather than solitude
 3. it was more *connected* – it did not live in constant tension with the hierarchy of the church
 - a. monasticism in the W was often the **right arm** of the popes and bishops

b. the Rule of Saint Benedict

1. the *main figure* was **Benedict** (c. 480) – from Nursia in Italy
2. he moved away (at about 20) to become a hermit (in response to Arianism)
3. but, his fame grew and he collected a number of “disciples” who came to live with him
4. so, he developed a monastery at Monte Cassino, and *codified* the “rules” of the place
 - a. there were two (2) specific elements of the monastic life:
 1. stability – no “roaming” from monastery to monastery
 2. obedience – a willingness to submit to the *abbot* (or “father”) of the monastery
 - b. a wise ordering of the monastery, with strict discipline, but without undue harshness
 1. two meals a day, with two cooked dishes, and fresh fruits and vegetables (grown there)
 2. a little wine per monk, and a separate bed for each with a cover and pillow
 3. regular physical labor (shared by all)
 4. a consistent life of *prayer* (7 times a day [**see Psalm 119:164**]) and Scripture recitation
 5. a study of Scripture and theology – which led to the practice of *manuscript copying*
 - a. and to the problem of *textual variants* due to 1) errors, 2) interpretations, etc.
5. the results: a combination of *both* physical *and* spiritual discipline
 - a. including the opening of new lands – marginal lands brought into production by the monks
 - b. including the establishment of discipline – even within the “established” church

II. The Rise of the Papacy

Content

a. the beginnings of the papacy

1. pope = father – used in early times to refer to any important and respected bishop
 - a. note the transition of the Greek word for “elder” to bishop then to pope
 - b. the discussion here is the rise of the *bishop of Rome*
2. the Early Church and the Imperial Church had their *greatest* strength in the E
 - a. in the Greek-speaking side of the Empire
 - b. in the Latin-speaking side, the church was *far less* influential
 1. **e.g.** at Nicea, the *bulk* of the bishops were from the E
 2. **e.g.** the great theologians were from the E (Tertullian, Athanasius, Augustine)
 - c. the rise of the papacy, then, was the result of the *Germanic invasions from the N*
 1. because the *church* in the W became the guardian of what was left of ancient civilization,
 2. the *leader* of the church in the W grew in prestige and authority, and
 3. the *leader* of the church in the W became the *focal point* for rebuilding a church unity
3. the origins of the episcopacy in Rome are *totally* unclear
 - a. most scholars agree that Peter *did* visit Rome (and may have died there), but
 - b. lists of the early bishops of Rome (from the late 2nd C) do not agree with who was in charge
 - c. thus, it is *likely* that that the church of Rome had (at the beginning) a *collegiate episcopacy*
 - d. the *modern* Roman contention of an *unbroken succession* of popes from Peter is poppycock
 1. the church at Rome goes *unmentioned* in **Acts 15** (James is leading from Jerusalem)
 2. Paul has *far greater influence* than Peter (even correcting Peter)
 3. the most *influential* decisions of the early church occur *outside* of Rome

b. the “official” establishment of the papacy

1. the “beginning” of what we call the *papacy* is traced to Leo “the Great” (440-461)
 - a. his opinions in theological matters in the E was largely *disregarded* by them
 - b. but, his position was strengthened by two (2) significant events
 1. in 452, Italy was invaded by Attila the Hun (pagans from Eastern Europe)
 - a. they had attempted to conquer Constantinople, but had diverted to the W using bribes
 - b. the Western emperor was weak, and the E gave no indications to help
 - c. so, Leo marched out to meet Attila, and convinced him not to attack Rome
 1. legend holds that Attila saw Peter and Paul marching with Leo
 2. in 455, the Vandals sacked the city
 - a. it was Leo who negotiated with them to prevent the burning of the city
 - c. Leo believed that Jesus had made Peter (and his successors in Rome) the “rock” upon which the church was to be built, and that these incidents *proved* that to be the case
 1. his writings contain the “typical” arguments for supremacy of the pope and papal authority
 2. the idea of *papal infallibility*, found its “origins” early in papal activity and expression
 - a. several papal “bulls” (written documents) mention the idea (e.g. 1302, 1441, etc.)
 3. but, was not *officially dogmatized* until the 1st Vatican Council of 1870
 - a. for the pope to speak *ex cathedra* (or, “from the chair” [or seat of Peter])
 - b. used in 1854 to dogmatize the Immaculate Conception of Mary
 - c. used in 1950 to dogmatize the Assumption of Mary
 - d. Catholic theologians also point to:
 1. Leo I (449): the Tome to Flavian on the two natures of Christ (at Chalcedon)
 2. Agatho (680): on the two wills of Christ (at Constantinople)
 3. Benedict XII (1336): on the *beatific vision* of the just (**i.e.** perfect salvation)

c. the effects of the papacy (over time)

1. the embrace of *extra-canonical* beliefs into the W church is traced to Gregory “the Great” (590-604)
 - a. he was in Rome during the siege of the Ostrogoths, and he saw its *beleaguered* nature
 - b. he became a Benedictine monk, but was appointed a “deacon” – an administrator for 6 years
 1. notice the contradiction of the term “deacon” from the Bible, and its use in Baptist circles today
 - c. in 586, Gregory returned to his monastery and became abbot
 - d. after the Lombards attacked Rome, Pope Pelagius (with Gregory and his monks) organized the sanitation of the city, the burial of the dead and the feeding of the hungry
 - e. so, after Pelagius died, Gregory was elected pope (even though he resisted it)

1. his training as a monk equipped him to continue the organized measures of food distribution, supervising the rebuilding of aqueducts, and building up the defenses of the city
2. in essence, he became the *de facto* leader of the city
- f. but, he then began to see himself as **the patriarch of the W**
 1. he wrote prolifically, especially in the tradition of his hero, Augustine of Hippo
 2. although he deeply admired Augustine, his *time* was so different that
 - a. he was deeply affected by the *superstition* and *mysticism* of his day
 - b. he treated Augustine like an *infallible teacher* (which Augustine would have denied)
 - c. what Augustine treated as conjecture, Gregory embraced as certainty
 1. **e.g.** Augustine speculated on a place of post-mortem purification, and embraced an early form of the dogma of *purgatory*
 - d. in salvation, Gregory set aside the Augustinian view of predestination and irresistible grace
 1. instead, he was more concerned about the question of how to offer satisfaction for sin
 2. this led to the Western ideas of confession and penance, along with the (later) development of *indulgences* and *masses for the dead*
 - e. in the mass, Gregory believed that Christ was sacrificed *anew*
 1. although *denied* by (some) Catholic theologians, most Catholics see in the mass (at least) a *re-presentation* of the sacrifice of Christ or a *renewed* sacrifice for their sins

III. The Reality of a New Church Order

Content

a. the reality of this new (church) order

1. the rise of monasticism at the *local* level and the Bishop of Rome at the *universal* level creates a form of “stability” (politically and spiritually) in a time when the emperors of the waning empire were too weak to prevent the chaos that comes when the Germanic peoples invade
 - a. monasticism creates a sense of *discipline*: people looking for “sanity” (and spirituality) in a world that seems to be focused only on the temporal find hope in these communities
 - b. the papacy creates a sense of *orthodoxy*: in the early days, the establishment of a singular church stretching N into Europe allows for a “common” (**i.e.** catholic) faith to be sustained
2. however, the *continuing* chaos of the various “hordes” coming into Italy places extreme pressure on the early popes, and they begin to see themselves as the functional “head” of the church
 - a. even against the church in the E – a schism between the two “churches” will form early in the E empire (**i.e.** under Justinian and his successors) as the bishop of Rome asserts himself as the *literal* head of the church *across the world* (**i.e.** not just the W)
 - b. thus, the bishop of Rome rises in stature across about 400 years of time (up to Charlemagne in 800), and much of “orthodoxy” is replaced by various forms of Catholic heterodoxy, much of which continues to today
 1. **i.e.** flowing out of the superstitious and mystical nature of the times