

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“THY KINGDOM COME: THE WITNESS OF CHURCH HISTORY”

“The Dark Ages (1): Light in the Darkness”

IV. The Decline of Rome and the Dawn of the Dark Ages

A. The Council of Chalcedon – on May 23, 451, the Roman Emperor Marcian summoned an ecumenical council of 520 bishops (all came from the Eastern half of the Empire except two from North Africa, and two as legates of Leo 1 of Rome to represent the West) to “*end disputations and settle the true faith clearly and for all time.*”

1. the main issue - while the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) had defined the Trinity and that Jesus was fully God, the issue remained, how was he human? And if human and divine, how did they coexist? Recall from last study that we can see an example of a creedal-like statement in Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

Colossians 1:15-20: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

The deity of Christ is explicitly stated though you can see how Arians could take words like “image” and “first-born” as ways to describe a lesser created being. But the Greek word for “image” means “exact representation” as when one looks at oneself in a mirror and “first-born” in the Greek does not mean that you have a beginning but rather it means that you have first priority and recognition like a first-born son. Of course, these and many other Scriptures reveal the deity of Christ as the omnipotent God with no beginning or end. Christ has to be God incarnate and not a created being. Otherwise, to worship Him, would be committing the sin of idolatry and violating the very first commandment that we have “no other gods but Me (God).” We find further clarification by Paul in

Colossians 2:8-15: *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.*

2. the theological and political divide – there were two main competing theological views that often were intensified by political rivalries. The See (bishop’s authority of office) of Alexandria held to a Monophysite view that held that Christ had only one nature – divine – and that his human nature was temporary and absorbed into His divine nature. The See of Antioch leaned more toward a Dyophysite view that Christ had two distinct separate natures – human and divine. Enter Leo I – the See of Rome. He had written what was called his *Tome* on the matter. He used the Holy Scriptures to show that Christ is only One person with two equal natures. He was to strike a careful balance between the interchange of attributes and qualities of the human with the divine. So for example, is it appropriate to say that God died on the cross or that as man did Jesus know all things? Leo was able to express how each “form” of Christ as God and human” carries out its proper activities in communion with the other.” As a result, Leo was able to keep together the distinctiveness of nature with the unity of person.

3. the resolution - after fifteen arduous sessions in October and November of 451, the Council agreed that Jesus is “*one person*” existing in “*two natures.*” This is known as “hypostatic union.” Mary is the God-bearer, mother of one who is always fully God and fully man. Leo I succinctly described the doctrine when he said, “*Both natures and substances are kept intact and come together in one person.*” While this formula did not prevent further quarrels by splinter groups who usually emphasized one nature over the other, it did show that the Church could come to deep theological affirmations and conclusions even in the midst of cultural division (East vs. West) and political church strife (competing bishops). It is this understanding that is still held today by Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant Churches.

B. The Rise of Monasticism – if the conversion of Constantine and the acceptance of the Christian faith by the Roman Empire was one of the two greatest events in Church history in the post-apostolic age, the rise of monasticism would be the other. Monasticism would positively impact Christianity for the next thousand years.

1. a spiritual reaction to the “world” - Monasticism is the term for the movement of believers away from cities and villages and into the rural areas to reside in inaccessible areas like a secluded mountain cave, valley, oasis, or cemetery to be in solitude for prayer, contemplation, and spiritual purity. It comes from the Greek word, *monachoi*, monk, which means solitary. Another term, anchorite, derives from this idea and literally means withdrawn, fugitive. It is like someone putting a permanent “do not disturb” sign on their place of residence. Eventually however, this individualism gave way to monastic communities especially as the numbers of believers seeking to leave the distractions and pressures of contemporary society increased. The goal was to exist only for God and to live from the strength of His grace alone. In order to accomplish this a threefold vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience was followed.

Certainly, the precursors for such behavior can be in the life of the prophets, to John the Baptist and the Essene communities of Jesus’ day. Even Jesus withdrew from society, though this was only for short periods of time like his forty days stay in the wilderness of the Judean desert. Monasticism greatly expanded once Christianity became a recognized state religion during the “peace of Constantine.” Many saw the increased number of “lukewarm” pagans in the church as well as the state influence in the Church as a sign of spiritual decay. The rich and powerful began to dominate the Church. Security and comfort were seen as enemies of true faithfulness. The meaning of baptism and the cross became watered down. Comfortability and security were considered by many to be enemies of true faithfulness as the potential for martyrdom and forced depravation were no longer options. How can one overcome the temptations of the world and the snare of Satan? For many the answer was to go into the wilderness! As a result, thousands of men and women fled into the desert and rural regions of the empire to for solitude and escape. Eventually monastic communities developed.

Of course, such an exodus wasn’t just for Christians. There were others who fled the cities and villages to get away from the reach of government control and taxes. For believers, however, Jesus’ words of taking

up one's cross and denying self, as well as Paul's words to crucify the desires of the flesh reinforced the importance to resist the temptations of the world, especially sex. As a result, many took Paul's words in **I Cor. 7** that it would be better not to marry as well as Jesus' words that in heaven there is no marriage led to the idea that superior spirituality means that one should remain celibate. This thinking was intensified by the popular understandings from Greek philosophy made famous by Plato and the Stoics, that the body held the spirit back and that the passions must be subdued as they were the true enemy of wisdom. It is why in the Roman religious cults there were vestal virgins, eunuchs, and celibate priests who denied themselves for fuller service to the gods. Thus, if one could find gross sexual immorality in certain quarters of Roman religion, one could also find extreme asceticism. These among other factors led to a trend in the Church to view sex as less spiritual and even evil. It even led to some clergy to castrate themselves. It became such an issue that at the Council of Nicaea in 325, the bishops agreed to depose any clergy who had castrated himself and forbid anyone from being ordained who had done such a thing to themselves! But even at this time, there were some bishops who supported clerical celibacy.

A monk's diet would consist of bread, occasional vegetables and fruit, and oil. They would only have the basic clothing, a mat to sleep on, and some form of shelter. Some would plant gardens. Many were basket weavers and made sleeping mats that could be traded for bread and oil. Such tasks would enable one to pray, recite a Psalm, or memorize Scripture while working. Many viewed bishops and clergy as corrupt. The worst fate would be to end up ordained! As a result, some went without communion for years. Still some communities would gather at a local church on Sunday and leave for the rest of the week. Of course, what developed in some quarters was the idea that monks had the true authority for what makes for true faith and practice.

What do the Scriptures teach concerning rules and regulations that are meant to accentuate one's spiritual development and standing before God? While self-denial and spiritual purity are important, one has to be careful not to add additional rules and apply them to all believers. This leads to legalism and spiritual pride. Both are condemned by Jesus and the Apostle Paul. In fact, again we find helpful words from Paul's letter to the Colossians in **Colossians 2:16-23**: *Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.*

20If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

2. earliest adherents and expansion - While it is hard to pinpoint the exact beginning of the monastic movement, the earliest known adherents date to the middle of the 3rd century AD. Paul and Anthony are the first two well-known monastics, made known by their famous friends Jerome and Athanasius. Paul, a rich man, fled the persecution of Decius and found an abandoned hiding place for counterfeiters. He lived alone in the desert for most of his life living on dates. Athanasius lifted up Anthony as a defender of the Nicene faith as well as much of the monastic movement playing a pivotal roll in defeating the errors of Arianism. However, it would a man by the name of Benedict (480-550) who would have the most influence on monasticism and therefore the Church. He first began with his own solitary time and then found twelve monasteries with twelve monks each. Later he traveled south of Rome to Monte Cassino where he established

a monastery that exists to this day. It has been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times, the last coming in World War 2 when Allied commanders bombed the monastery in the mistaken belief it was held by Germans. It was there that he wrote his “Rule” to reform monastic life. It was met by universal approval in the West and in the East. Patrick’s Celtic monasticism that was spread by Columba (521-97) in the British Isles would be the only serious rival (in a good way). It’s not by accident that Benedict’s Rule became so popular after the fall of Rome in 476 AD. For it offered guidance and structure for maintaining a a stable Christian community in an unstable world.

3. its influence and impact – many key church leaders from the late days of the Roman empire through the Dark Ages were monks, many more were strongly influenced by the monastic movement. Well-known monks include Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Jerome (342-420) who translated the entire Bible into Latin. Gregory the Great (540-604) not only led the Roman Church through plague and invasion but was an avid hymn writer as was Bernard of Clairvaux. Patrick (390-460), Bonaface (680-754), and Cyril (826-69) to name a few more. And of course, Benedict! Monasteries provided stability during unstable times. It would be monks who became missionaries. Monks would also translate, transcribe, and preserve Holy Scripture as well as important Church documents and writings. Sometimes due to their remoteness, monasteries would not be affected by the numerous barbarian invasions that plagued Europe. Of course, as already noted Benedict’s Rule provided a simple balanced and disciplined approach to individual and communal spirituality. This eighty large page manual became the standard for most monasteries in Europe. Monasteries with its monks and nuns provided for the stability, continuity, and preservation of the Church throughout much of the Dark and Middle Ages.

C. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD) – considered one of the greatest theologians of the Christian Faith. His influence is still with us today both in Catholic and Protestant theology. However, he did not start out as a Christian. He was first a man of the world, both in fleshly pursuits and in esteemed intellectualism. Born in Tagste, North Africa, his father was a pagan Roman official, but his mother, Monica, was a devout Christian whose prayers for her husband’s and son’s conversions were eventually answered! Early on both parents recognized Augustine’s gifts and sought the best education possible. At seventeen he arrived in Carthage to pursue his studies but also engage in the pleasures of the world. His concubine bore him a son named *Adeodatus*, meaning “given by God.” A student of rhetoric (the skill of speaking and writing elegantly and convincingly without regard for the truth) his reading of Cicero the philosopher impressed upon him that seeking truth is important.

This search led Augustine to the Persian based religion of Manichaeism, founded in the 3rd century by a man named Mani. He taught that each person has light and darkness. The light is spiritual and the darkness is matter. Salvation is breaking free from the matter or physical and preparing our spirit to the return to the realm of pure light. Since any admixture of light and darkness is evil, people must avoid procreation! According to Mani, this doctrine had been revealed through the teachings of many prophets including Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus and of course, Mani, himself. As this new religion expanded throughout the Mediterranean world, it also ridiculed the teachings of the Bible. Mani seemed to addressed two issues Augustine had with the Christian faith. The first was that from the point of view of a rhetorician, the Bible seemed to be inelegant and basic, even barbaric, in its writings, especially those of the Old Testament. How could such be the work of a good God of the universe? The second involved the origin of evil. How could God be a good and all powerful God and allow evil to reign? And yet, for the next nine years, while a Manichee, Augustine remained only a “hearer” without becoming a “prefect” (full member). He still had questions that the leading teachers of Manichaeism could not address.

He moved on to Milan where there was need of a teacher of rhetoric. It was there he met Simplicianus who introduced him to the writings of Neoplatonists which stressed the reality of a supreme being from which

all reality was derived from a series of emanations from this being who is infinite goodness. Therefore, evil is the turning away from this One Being. This seemed to answer Augustin's problem with evil. But how can the Bible be the Word of God with its stories of violence and evil? His mother Monica encouraged him to hear Ambrose's sermons.

Bishop Ambrose often interpreted the Scriptures allegorically and a greater understanding of the faith gripped Augustine. He converted and gave up being a professor of rhetoric and was baptized by Ambrose. His mother died after that and he travelled to Tagaste, North Africa and then settled in the small town of Hippo where he became a priest, unwillingly, and four years later bishop! He began writing many works and was able to articulate how the goodness of God gives us a free will and evil originates when we choose to do those things that are not of God or approved of God.

He also refuted Donatism which contended that ordinations and other rites done by bishops who were unworthy are invalid. Augustine exposed this error by showing that the rites and sacraments of the Church are valid by the words and action in the authority of God and are separate from the character of the bishop or priest presiding over them. Otherwise, for example, no one could be sure if their baptism was truly valid! He also articulated the Just War theory that there are times that war can be justified. He also was able to refute another heresy – Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that we did have free will but because we do, we can come to the point of not sinning. Augustine argued that sin is part of our nature as human. We are born with “original sin” and only by God's grace can we overcome it. This led to what Augustine called “irresistible grace.” We can only break free from sin's power through the grace God give us. This means that the initiative of conversion is God's not ours. Moreover, God gives it to those He has predestined for salvation.

While Pelagianism was eventually rejected by the Church, and many accepted much of Augustine's theology, his views on predestination and irresistible grace did not gain wide acceptance. One hundred years after his death they were eventually embraced in a limited way by the Synod of Orange in 529 by simply affirming the “primacy of grace.” Later during the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin made such views famous in his theological masterpiece, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Augustine is also well known for his spiritual autobiography *Confessions* and for his classic work, *The City of God*, in which he responded to allegations that Rome had fallen (410) because it had turned from its ancient pagan religion to the Christian faith. In the book he speaks of two cities, one built on the love of God, and the other self. These two “cities” have coexisted together throughout human history. They are diametrically opposed to one another and even though these earthly kingdoms rise to great power they eventually come to end. Only the city of God will prevail and remain at the end of time. God allowed Rome to thrive so that the gospel could be spread but not that its purpose has been fulfilled God is allowing Rome to be judged for its sins. When Augustine died in 430 AD the Vandals were at the gates of Hippo. Even as the Roman Empire in the West eventually fell, Augustine's words were quoted more often than any other theologian in the Middle Ages. He became one of the great doctors of the Roman Catholic Church and greatly esteemed by the Protestant Reformers a thousand years later. As a result, he is considered the most influential theologian in the entire Western Church of today.

D. The Fall of Rome and the Expansion of the Gospel

Eventually the pressures of the bordering tribes who wanted to experience the benefits of the Roman Empire led to numerous invasions and the collapse of the Roman Empire. The Western portion of the empire devolved into many different kingdoms. As the political apparatus of the Western empire fell apart, it would be the Church in Rome that would provide political leadership and even stability at times. This led to the rise of the authority of the bishop of Rome who became known as the Pope and in the Western mindset, the lead bishop of all bishops. While his authority was respected by the East and often used as a mediator or a support

among the three sees of Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople, the reality of political separation, as the East became more independent as the Byzantine Empire, led to the eventual break between the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054 AD. The rise of Islam in the 7th century also acerbated the split especially as Muslims overran portions of the East and even moved into the Western parts of the former Roman Empire. And yet, with all these political and religious setbacks, there were a number of key developments that led to the further spread of the gospel and strengthening of the Church. Below are a few of the key leaders and events that highlight how the light of Christ penetrated the darkness of the “Dark Ages.”

1. The Rise of the Papacy – the title “pope” comes from the Latin *papa* which means “father.” Originally it had been used to denote any important bishop. In the West the title eventually became reserved only for the bishop of Rome. From the beginning Rome had been the center of political rule for the Roman Empire. This changed when Constantine moved the capital of the empire to a new city, Constantinople. The center of Church strength and leadership had traditionally come from the East as after Pentecost the new movement of the Church spread from Jerusalem to Antioch, Asia Minor, Greece and then to Rome. As the Church grew in the West, many in the West viewed Rome as the true center of Church leadership. This coupled with the fact that both of the leading apostles, Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome, gave the Roman Church a sense of primacy among the rest of the sees of the Church in the East. Since the East was beset by competing jurisdictions, there was less unity among the Church. In the West, however, the lack of other sees led to the centralization of Church government. This coupled with the strong leadership of two “great” popes, Leo I and Gregory, during the Germanic invasions that solidified Rome’s conviction of superiority.

a. Leo I (pope from 440-461) – a nobleman from north of Rome, he was elected as bishop of Rome in 440. On his first day in office, Leo proclaimed “*glory of the blessed Apostle Peter...in whose chair his power lives on and his authority shines forth.*” Leo was convinced that the bishop of Rome should be considered the supreme bishop of all Christendom. He looked to Jesus words to Peter in Mt. 16:13-16, Lk. 22:31-32, and Jn. 21:15-17 as justification for this premise. Peter is the rock upon which Christ would build His Church and the bishops of Rome are successors of that authority. His arguments supporting this position are still used by the Roman Catholic Church today. In 445, under threat of invasion, the Emperor Valentinian III issued a decree that affirmed Leo’s authority. It was meant to promote unity but it reinforced turned Leo’s claim into law: “*As the primacy of the Apostolic See is based on the title of the blessed Peter, prince of the episcopal dignity, on the dignity of the city of Rome, and on the decision of the Holy Synod, no illicit steps may be taken against this See to usurp its authority. For the only way to safeguard peace among the churches everywhere is to acknowledge its leadership universally.*”

As noted above in the section on the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Leo played a pivotal role in conveying a clear understanding of Christ’s dual nature as both human and divine. His writings (The Tome) and letter helped bring unity among the bishops gathered. In fact, Leo was quoted so frequently during the Council (recall he was not present but send delegates to represent him) that sometimes a mere reference to him led the majority of bishops present to shout jubilantly, “*that was the faith of the Fathers, that was the faith of the Apostles...Peter has spoken through Leo.*”

Leo proved to be an astute political leader as well. In 452 during his time as bishop Leo confronted Attila and the Huns, a pagan people from Eastern Europe who had first sought to conquer Constantinople but after the leadership there gave them gold, the proceeded to head to Rome! The emperor did not have the courage or resources to stand against the tyrant. The East could not help. So, Pope Leo left Rome to meet with Attila. While we don’t know the particulars of what was said, Attila decided not to attack the city. It could’ve been that between epidemics and famine, Attila’s army was in a weakened state by the time they approached Rome. For he then turned around, moved northward, and died a short time later! But in just three years, in 455, Rome was under threat of invasion again, this time by the Vandals. While Leo could

not stop the invasion, he did negotiate so that the city was only ransacked for ten days and not burned to the ground. Such leadership strengthened Leo's position and furthered his conviction that Christ had made Peter the first head of the Church and that his successors in Rome had established a supreme line of authority that made the bishop of Rome the head of the Church.

Leo died in 461. The next pope, Hilarius, followed Leo's policies. However, in 476, the last Western emperor fell to Odoacer and a period of chaos and division ensued. This led to a brief schism with the Eastern Church. The Ostrogoths took over who were Arian Christians! This further led to more division with two different popes, one supported by the Ostrogoths and the other Constantinople. By 514 with a new pope Hormisdas unity with Constantinople was restored and the Byzantine Empire experienced a revival of strength under the leadership of Justinian. He rebuilt the cathedral of Saint Sophia (the *Hagia Sophia*) dedicated to the Christ of Holy Wisdom. It is said that upon completion of the restoration, Justinian said, "*Solomon, I have outdone thee!*" During this time in the West, the Lombards invaded Italy and would have taken all of it had it not been for their internal squabbles. Justinian died in 565 and the Byzantines could not maintain a strong army in Italy. This left the popes in Rome to respond to the Lombard threat alone. Pope Pelagius II paid the Lombards off in 579. He tried to gain the support of the Franks to the north but to no avail. However, a seed was planted as the Franks would later become the main supporter of the papacy and a center of Christendom for most of Europe centuries later. It would be the next pope who would leave an indelible mark on the Church and strengthen Rome and set the stage for a number of major doctrines in what eventually became the Roman Catholic Church. His name was Gregory.

b. Gregory (pope from 590-604) - born in Rome around 540 to an aristocratic family, little is known about his early years. He witnessed the ongoing conflict with the Lombards and may have been an important Roman official before entering the Benedictine monastery. Once a monk, Pope Benedict made him a deacon and the next pope, Pelagius II made him an ambassador to Constantinople. After six years he returned to Rome to become abbot of the Benedictine monastery. Soon the Lombards had unified and were threatening Rome once again. At the same time, a plague broke out in the city. Many died and were gravely ill. Due to years of neglect, the city's aqueducts and system of drainage had fallen into disrepair. Worse, floods had destroyed much of the grain supply. Pope Pelagius and other monks helped organize the sanitation of the city, the burial of the dead, and the feeding of the hungry.

During such ministry Pope Pelagius became ill and died. Gregory seemed a likely successor, chosen by the clergy and people. But he initially refused sending a letter to Constantinople which had to approve the consecration. The letter was intercepted and Gregory eventually gave in and became bishop. He took over with wisdom and determination, organizing the distribution of food among the needy in Rome and working to maintain shipments of grain from Sicily. He oversaw the rebuilding of the aqueducts and defenses of the city, and the retraining of the army. He opened direct negotiations with the Lombards, securing peace.

Beyond his political achievements, Gregory excelled in directing the faithful. He preached fervently in many of Rome's churches. He promoted clerical celibacy which was slowly becoming the norm in Italy. Unlike Leo he did not claim universal authority but saw himself as the leader (patriarch) of the West. He helped convert the Visigoths in Spain to the Nicene understanding of the faith. He sent Augustine's mission to England which would lead to all of the British Isles under the Roman Church. He tried to make inroads into the Frankish territories, but the Frankish rulers did not want to relinquish control of their churches.

Gregory was also a prolific writer albeit one who prided himself in not saying anything new but simply upholding important tenants of the Church Fathers of earlier centuries. He prided himself a student of Augustine of Hippo. But where Augustine would often speculate and consider things conjecture, Gregory instead moved with certainty in areas that were not settled. So, for example, Augustine had suggested

the possibility of a place of purification for those who died in sin before they would go to heaven. Gregory turned this conjecture into doctrinal certainty when he affirmed the existence of such a place and called it *purgatory*!

Where Augustine had articulated (see above) the doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace, Gregory concerned himself with the question of how sin is satisfied. While Christ paid the penalty for our sins, we still had to make amends to God for sins committed after baptism. This led to the practice of *penance*. Penance would include four steps: contrition (sorrow for sin), confession, actual punishment or satisfaction (extra good deeds or prayers) and absolution by the priest which confirms the forgiveness granted by God. However, for those who die in the faith but do not satisfy all their sins, upon death they go to purgatory for a time before they attain final salvation. Moreover, the living can help the dead out of purgatory by offering masses in their favor. Gregory believed that in the mass or communion, Christ was crucified anew.

The new doctrines of purgatory, the sacrifice of the mass, and penance all eventually became official doctrine of the Western Church (Roman Catholic). Such doctrines were rejected by the Reformers of the Protestant and English Reformations of the 16th century. As Anglicans we completely reject them as unbiblical even though one can appreciate the sincere concern Gregory and others had for Christians who live fleshly and spiritually sloppy lives. After Gregory's death, the papacy struggled in part due to weak leadership and the pressures put on it by the Byzantine rulers in Constantinople. We will look at those tough centuries next study.

2. The Spread of the Gospel beyond Rome and Constantinople – while the political and religious challenges constantly rocked the Church in both East and West over the first five centuries and presented opportunities to both strengthen and weaken the Church, the gospel of Jesus Christ continued to expand. We will briefly look at how this expansion took place.

a. British Isles – the gospel probably came to England early on during the reign of Tiberius a few years after Pentecost. Emperor Hadrian built his wall in 122 AD. It was during the persecution of Decius' persecution that a man named Alban was martyred. He is considered an Anglican saint. However, little is known of the extent of the Christian faith in the British Isles. In 596 Pope Gregory sent a group of Benedictine monks under the leadership of another Augustine to “barbaric” England. Much of England had fallen under the control of the Anglo-Saxons. Augustine secured a hearing from King Ethelbert as a result of his Queen Bertha who already was a Christian. Ethelbert was convinced and granted Augustine land for a monastery at Canterbury, where Augustine became the first archbishop of Canterbury. From then on, the Church took root across that region and north into Scotland and Ireland.

b. Ireland – a young lad by the name of Patrick was captured in Great Britain by Irish raiders, Patrick served as a slave in that island country. He eventually escaped but later on God gave him a vision to return and share the gospel! He did go back and after a number of setbacks, he eventually met success with thousands baptized and many churches planted. Soon monasteries were established, and it was their monks who gave us punctuation and the learning and preservation of the writings of antiquity became a major interest. Since Ireland was bypassed by the various barbarian invasions that overwhelmed Europe, much of what we now know of ancient Rome had been preserved by those monks!

c. Germanic Tribes – while Constantine's son Constantius reigned in the mid-4th century, Arianism gained strength and missionaries were sent across the Danube River to begin a mission among the Goths. The most well-known of those missionaries, Ulfila, developed an alphabet for the language of the Goths which enabled the translation of the Bible into it. This was the first of hundreds of examples since of a language of a people group being put into written form as a result of missionaries who seek to share God's Word in the language of their hearers. Many Goths in the imperial guard also came to faith. These and others

through trade and commerce brought the gospel home with them. And then as the Goths were converted neighboring tribes followed suit. However, at the time it was a Christian faith with an Arian bent. They developed their own churches apart from Rome and Constantinople (like the Celts of the British Isles) but eventually, as they took over various former territories of the Roman Empire, they became assimilated into Roman culture and traditions and eventually came to accept faith in the Trinity as defined by the Nicene Creed.

d. Nubia and Ethiopia – as mentioned in our second study, the first Gentile recorded in Acts to personally hear the gospel was when Philip, the deacon, witnessed to the Ethiopian (dark-skinned) eunuch. While Luke does not mention his name, he is considered the first saint among Nubian (modern day Sudan) and Ethiopian believers. Eusebius confirms this when he writes that Christianity came to that region through the testimony of the Ethiopian eunuch. Thriving Christian civilizations resulted in both areas with the Ethiopian Coptic Church remaining strong throughout history until the present day. However, when the Chalcedon Council in 452, defined Jesus as having two equal natures, they rejected the Council's conclusions and held to the "Monophysite" position that Christ had only one nature with his human nature absorbed into the divine. Nubian Christianity flourished until the Islamic conquests of the 15th century. Islam superseded their Christian faith and Arabic replaced Nubian as their language.

e. Eastward into Asia – Christianity spread eastward following the trade routes from Syria into Mesopotamia and onward to India. One of the first known areas that converted beyond the Roman Empire was the city of Edessa and its King Abgarus IX (179-216). However, a well-known legend had already been promulgated by the King that his great, great grandfather King Abgarus V, suffered from leprosy and had sent a letter to Jesus to come and cure him. Jesus instead sent His disciple, Thaddeus with a letter or reply to Abgarus. The king prayed for healing, was cured and came to faith in Jesus. He then urged his subjects to do likewise. While the veracity of the legend is unknown, it does show how the gospel spread beyond the normal borders of the empire.

Likewise, in the nearby region of Adiabene, evidence of a Christian community early in the second century has been found. Their royal family had converted to Judaism during the reign of Claudius (41-54) and many then became followers of Christ.

Continuing eastward, the kingdom of Armenia, a buffer state between Rome and Persia, also embraced the Christian faith. While in exile in Caesarea of Cappadocia with his relative King Trdat III, Gregory Lusavorich and other Armenian natives came to faith. Upon returning to Armenia when Trdat was restored to the throne, he also converted and was baptized on January 6 (Epiphany) 303 AD. (note that this was before Constantine professed faith in Christ ten years later). From that point the entire kingdom became Christian and the Bible was translated into Armenian. The gospel then spread to neighboring Georgia. Ancient historian Rufinus tells of a series of miracle healings that came about through the prayers of a female slave to the queen. So often it was through the "least of these" and those who came from the lower echelons of society that God used to share the life-transforming power of the gospel.

During this time the gospel also went beyond into Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and Persia (modern Iran) under the Parthian dynasty which practice some religious tolerance. The Christian faith spread until it was in every province. However, when the Sassanid dynasty came to power in 224, it began persecuting Christians as followers of a foreign religion. Then when the Roman Empire officially became Christian in 313 AD, this added to the challenges as Persian Christians were seen as Roman sympathizers. Aphrahat, the great Persian Christian sage, wrote "*Demonstration on Persecution*" where he highlights the saints who suffered for their faith in the Old and New Testaments and speaks of the great persecution of "our Western brethren" by Diocletian, as well as the subsequent great change that Constantine brought to the empire. He looked to that freedom from religious oppression as a sign of hope for the persecuted Persian Church.

However, after the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in 452, on the dual nature of Christ the Persian Church rejected the Council's definition. Like some other Eastern Churches, they took the "Monophysite" view that Christ's humanity had been absorbed into His divine nature. While there were also the "Nestorians" who emphasized the distinction between the divine and human natures in Christ as "two persons" – the "Dyophysite" view. This actually benefited Persian believers in terms of tolerance from their rulers as it showed their independence from Rome.

The Gospel naturally came to Arabia due to its close proximity to Egypt and Israel. Arabia became a crossroads between the three main strands of the Christian faith - Rome, Persia, and Ethiopia - with their differing views concerning the nature of the Trinity and of Christ. Add to that a Gnostic Christian sect called the Elkesaites, and we can see how by the seventh century, this confusing picture of Christianity was rejected by Mohammed and replaced with a hyper monotheistic and legalistic religion.

There is ample evidence that shows that the gospel also took route in India. The earliest churches in India claim the Apostle Thomas as their patron saint. Whether or not Thomas ever reached India, there was a vibrant church there at least as early as the 3rd century for by 325 at the Council of Nicaea mention is made of a bishop described as "*John the Persian, of all Persia and great India.*"

The Eastern trade routes went as far east as China. Evidence suggests there may have been a Christian presence there as early as 450 AD. The earliest known official record of the Christian faith in China dates to 635 when Catholicos Yashuyab II commissioned a Persian bishop, Alopen, to lead a contingent of scholars and monks into the court of Emperor Taizong (reign 626-49) of the Tang Dynasty. They were well received and established churches and monasteries in at least ten provinces. By the end of the 8th century, the church in China had its very own bishop, Adam. However, as history always repeats itself, an anti-foreign Taoist emperor named Wuzong (840-6) initiated a persecution against Christians and Buddhists and there is little evidence of the Christian faith gaining strength in the following centuries. Once the Ming Dynasty came to power in the mid-14th century, the Christian was all but extinguished. It should be noted that there was also a Christian presence in the court of Mongol ruler Kublai Khan (reign 1260-94) who is said to have petitioned the Roman pope for one hundred missionaries! A few did make it there, but history suggests that whatever impact was made, much of it died out.

Thus, even as the Western half of the Roman Empire was overrun by various tribes and people groups, the Church remained vibrant and the Holy Spirit had enabled the gospel to spread as far north as Ireland, as far south as Ethiopia and as far east as India and even China. Soon the gospel would penetrate the regions of what is today known as Ukraine and Russia as well as the regions of Scandinavia.