

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 (2): Light in the Darkness”

V. The Split Between East and West

As noted in our last study, the Western half of the old Roman Empire collapsed under the weight of numerous invasions by various barbarian tribes. During this cataclysmic upheaval, the two most important institutions that helped maintained some semblance of order and stability were monasticism and the Papacy (Pope/Bishop of Rome and his administration). The Papacy began to operate on a more political basis as the civil authorities lost their power to outside tribes. In short, the Roman Church became a political as well as religious institution.

In the East, however, the emperor was head over the church and therefore when there were doctrinal disputes it was not unusual for bishops to curry his favor. As time when on, due to linguistic (Latin in the West and Greek in the East), cultural, political, and even some religious differences, the rift between the East and West continued until there was a full break between the two Churches in 1054 AD. For the first time in Church history, the Church was irreparably divided. This division led to further divisions especially during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Tonight's study will look at the major factors that led to the split between the Churches as well as how God still moved in the lives of His people and continued to build His True Church.

A. From Arian to Trinitarian – conversion of the barbarian tribes. One of the truly remarkable developments in Christian Europe was the transformation of the beliefs of Arian Christian tribes into recognition of the Trinitarian faith. Recall Arianism (not to be confused with “Aryanism” of Hitler's racist ideology) is the belief – made famous by the 4th century charismatic presbyter Arius of Alexandria, Egypt that Jesus, the Son of God, is not God but rather a created divine being and subordinate to God the Father. Therefore, Jesus is not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent like His Father. This belief is in contradiction to the clear teachings of God's Word. We will see how Arianism died out in each of the following tribes.

1. The Goths -

2. The Vandals – in 407, crossed the Rhine from the Germanic territories and continued on through France and Spain and eventually settled in North Africa taking Carthage and going all the way to the border of Egypt. In 455, during the reign of Pope Leo I they sacked Rome. They were originally Arian in their beliefs but they were eventually by the Eastern Christians from Constantinople of the Byzantine Empire during the reign of Justinian. This division in beliefs (see next section) lead to the easy conquest of North Africa by the Muslims a century later.

3. The Visigoths – were another German Arian tribe who first defeated the Romans at the battle of Adrianople in 378 then swept through the Balkans, took Rome in 410 and then went on to Spain where they settled there until they too were overthrown by the Muslims in the beginning of the 8th century. What helped was the fact that the Catholic Christians provided stability for the kingdom. Such positive

influence led to the conversion of the Visigoth King Recared (586-601) who converted to the Trinitarian (Catholic and Orthodox) faith. The vast majority of his nobles followed suit and Arianism soon died out. Isidore of Seville is considered the greatest of all the Visigoth Christian leaders. A scholar, he worked to preserve as much as possible of the knowledge of the time. His book, *Etymologies*, is an extensive encyclopedia of all major fields of knowledge – religion, agriculture, medicine, astrology, government, etc. But even despite the influence of the Church most leaders of the Visigoths were unstable and prone to violence. This led to political instability with 19 of 34 kings either assassinated or deposed. King Recesvinth (649-672) killed seven hundred of his enemies and gave their wives and children to his friends. It was this kind of instability and ungodly leadership that allowed Muslims to invade and conquer the territory in 710-711 (see “B” below). And yet Christianity had been firmly planted in what would eventually become Spain and would serve as a rallying cry against the Muslim invaders until the day all Muslims were kicked out of Spain by El Cid in

4. The Burgundians and Franks

5. The Ostrogoths and the Lombards

B. Great Britain – Celtic and Roman Christianity - when the Roman legions withdrew from England they were replaced by the invading pagan Angles and Saxons. But these Angles and Saxons were exposed to Christian natives from Roman times. At the same time, Christianity as a result of St. Patrick’s ministry was flourishing in Ireland (Celtic Christianity) and the Irish began sending missionaries to other lands including Scotland. The most famous was a man by the name of Columba, a monk who settled on the small island of Iona where he founded a monastery in 563 with 12 other monks. That monastery became a center of missionary activity and from there other monasteries were established in Scotland which paved the way for missions in territories held by the Angles and Saxons. It was the Irish who introduced private confession to the priest. It is also interesting to note that the popular hymn, “Be Thou My Vision” is a translation of a Celtic prayer or loric to thwart the evil influence of the Druids. Scottish-Irish (Celtic) Christianity organized itself under the leadership of abbots rather than bishops. Recall it was Gregory who sent a mission under the leadership of Augustine to the Angles and Saxons and this mission ended up converting King Ethelbert, whose wife was already a believer. As a result of this conversion the various surrounding kingdoms converted to Christianity and Canterbury became the ecclesiastical capital for all of England with Augustine being the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

C. The Rise of Islam – Mohammed, a very religious Arab who had been exposed to Judaism and Christianity had a series of visions and dreams supposedly from the angel Gabriel. around 620. Arabia was an area that had been neglected by both the Roman Empire and Persia. The Christianity that had taken root remained divided among the various groups over different understandings of the nature of Christ. Add to this the heretical group called the Donatists, it is no wonder that Mohammed thought there had to be a better way. The main message was that there is One God who is just and merciful and rules all things. He requires strict obedience by all. Mohammed claims to have heard the words, “*Recite in the name of your Lord Creator, recite!*” These recitations were then written down in rhythmic fashion to make for easy memorization. They were written down in Arabic (the true language of God (Allah) in what is called the Quran which means “recite.” Mohammed claimed that he was not forming a new religion but he was revealing the culmination of God’s revelation already begun by the Hebrew prophets and Jesus who is viewed by Islam as a great prophet but not God’s Son or divine. So basically, Mohammed, in his view, was giving the world an improved version of the faith of the Bible! The core beliefs of Islam consist of what are called the Five Pillars – 1) radical monotheism – There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet. 2) ritual prayer – ideally five times

a day. 3) almsgiving – including taxation of the rich to help the poor. 4) fasting – during the month of Ramadan which is the month when the Quran was supposedly given to Mohammed. 5) pilgrimage to Mecca – where every adult male is required to travel there at least once in their lifetime.

Galatians 1:6-9: have those three verses written out

Mohammed was against all polytheistic religions and all idols and images. He was first able to establish a Muslim community in which he controlled worship, as well as civil and political life. When many Arab Christians, Jews and pagans rejected his message, he turned to more forceful methods. 622 AD is considered the beginning of the Muslim era. It is when merchants in Mecca left to go to a nearby oasis called Medina to get away from Mohammed as they felt he was taking business away from them. He then began a military campaign to impose his views on the surrounding communities. All idols were removed and upon being victorious enemies were forgiven but they were now under his rule.

Mohammed died in 632 and without a male heir, a successor – called a *caliph* - took over and continued to conquer by force of arms! What followed was a series of military victories and take overs of all the key cities Damascus (635), Jerusalem (638), Alexandria (642) and then Persia in the east. By the time of the 4th caliph (656-661) a rift occurred between the Shiites who believed the caliph should be a direct descendant while the Sunnis believed the caliph should be chosen. Only one of the first four caliphs died a natural death. In fact, the chosen caliph of each group, Ali and Uthman, ended up both being murdered! This This division between Shia and Sunni Muslims continues to this day.

Muslims conquests continued. Carthage fell in 695 and then all of North Africa. What drove the Muslims to conquer? The demands of their religion which is as much as a political as it is a religious ideology as well as the control of trade routes which would insure adequate supplies and resources for the new empire. Why did these lands of Christianity fall so suddenly? Division between Catholics, Donatists, Arians, and the oppression of the Byzantine rulers in Constantinople all were contributing factors. In addition, the Monophysites who held that Jesus had a divine nature with a temporary human one, as well as the Nestorians. Muslim forces then crossed into Spain from Gibraltar and overran the Visigoths kingdom which included much of Spain except for the extreme north. They then crossed over the Pyrenes and threatened the heart of Europe but were stopped by Charles Martel (“the hammer”) at the Battle of Tours in 732. Upon taking over territories Jews and Christians were respected but still had to pay tribute/taxes. However, if one converted to Christianity or Judaism, he or she would be severely punished, even killed. In addition, any criticism of Islam or its prophet Mohammed, was considered an offense punishable by death. Sadly, these things are still true in many Islamic nations today. Over time in most areas where Islam had taken control, Christianity dwindled and in some cases died out. Meanwhile the Byzantine Empire was relegated to holding Greece and Turkey. It no longer had to deal with the Menophysite believers in the West who held that Jesus only had a divine nature whose human nature was only temporary and the Nestorians in the East who believed Jesus had separate divine and human natures.

As a result of Islam, not only had the Byzantine Empire been permanently weakened, it also weakened the bonds between the Western (Rome) and Eastern (Constantinople) branches of the Holy Catholic Church. It moved the center of Christianity’s strength geographically from the Mediterranean basin to Western and Northern Europe. It would be crowning of Charlamagne in 800 AD that would solidify this shift. Islamic aggression also led to the militarization of the Christian faith. Early Christians tended to be pacifists. Over time, however, Christians began to serve in the Roman Army and when Constantine came to power and supported the Christian faith, most in the Church felt obligated to support the state. A century later, Augustine of Hippo, in articulating his Just War theory also gave credence to the idea that Christians could take up arms

for self-defense and for the removal of an evil and oppressive regime. In addition, with the assimilation of the Germanic tribes, some of their warlike customs were adopted by the Church. As a result, in 1095, when Pope Leo III said that Christ was calling His people to take up arms against the Islamic armies who controlled the Holy Land, many responded with hearty enthusiasm and the first of seven infamous Crusades began. We will look at those Crusades in our next study (Lent 2023).

D. The Eastern Church

- 1. Justinian**

- 2. Iconoclast Controversy**

- 3. John of Damascus**

- 4. The Dissident Churches**

- 5. The Slavs, the Bulgars, and the Russians –**
 - a. Cyril and Methodius**

 - b. King Boris**

 - c. Queen Olga and King Valdimir**

- 6. The Final Straw**

E. Charlamagne – was crowned emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day, 800 in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome with the words "*May God grant life to the great and pacific emperor!*" Pope Leo in doing so, was proclaiming a new Holy Roman Empire that was under the direction of the Church.

VI. Impact of Christianity on the World during the “Dark Ages”

A. The Calendar Year

B. Religious Holidays

C. Workweek

D. Society

E. Learning

F. Legal Codes

G. Agriculture

H. Art and Entertainment