Sunday, February 6, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 21 The "Christian" Middle Ages: Brief History of the Early Middle Ages

The Rise of Islam

- "Muhammad lived in Mecca, a small Arabian trading post." (Jones, 65) "There were no large settlements in Arabia, except for some on the Red Sea cost, primarily Mecca. Mecca possessed a great shrine called the Ka'ba, a black building which incorporated in its structure a mysterious black stone, revered since ancient times, and possibly a meteorite. Many Arabs who knew Jewish and Christian legends believed that the Ka'ba had originally been built by Adam, the first man, and latter restored by Abraham, the first Jew." (Hill, 118)

- "In the year 610, Muhammad claimed that the angel Gabriel had entrusted Muhammad him with a message from Allah, the only true God. Muhammad quickly began to preach against the idols that surround him (the Ka'ba). At first, no one minded this message. But around 622, angry idol-peddlers forced Muhammad to flee." (Jones, 65)

- "Forced to leave Mecca for Medina in AD 622 (the starting date for the Muslim calendar), he subsequently united Medina, marched on Mecca with a huge army and captured it without a struggle." (Hill, 118)

- "Muhammad's new religion was called Islam, for a word meaning 'submission', referring to the need to submit to God; a 'Muslim' is one who submits. By the time Muhammad died in AD 632, the whole Arabian peninsula had been united under Islam." (Hill, 118)

- "Muhammad himself would be honored as 'the prophet', the last and greatest in a long line of messengers that the Muslims believed had been sent by God throughout history." (Hill, 118)

- "After Muhammad's death, his followers conquered Arabia, Syria, and North Africa. In 638 Jerusalem fell to the Muslims. By 711 Muslim troops had invaded Europe, conquering Portugal and Spain." (Jones, 65)

- Within 100 years of the death of Muhammad, Muslim forces had established an empire stretching from the borders of China in the east, to Spain in the West.

Charles Martel and the Battle of Tours

- Having secured Spain under Moorish domination, Muslim armies turned their attention north of the Pyrenees to the heart of Catholic France. In AD 732 a mighty Muslim army, crossed the mountain into the Loire Valley.

- Early on, Moorish armies enjoyed enormous success as they pressed Northward through France. If events played out in France as they had everywhere else the Muslim invaded, the future of Christian Europe and world history for that matter laid in the balance.

- Charles Martel was a powerful Frankish warlord who had inherited from his father the title 'mayor of the palace', a role a bit like that of a prime minister. Martel confronted the invaders at Poitiers (Tours), where during a battle, the Muslim emir, or ruler, of Spain was killed. (Price and Collins, 88)

- "The advance of the Muslims was thus checked for a while, and in 739, when they advanced as far as Lyons, Martel's army again routed them and drove them back into Spain. The threat of all of Europe being conquered was neutralized, the spread of Islamic power slowed down, and the rate of conversion to Islam became less dramatic." (Price and Collins, 88)

- Not only was Charles billed as the savior of Catholic France but he passed his title 'mayor of the palace' on to his son Pepin who founded the Carolingian dynasty.

- "Charles Martel also directly assisted Boniface and other Anglo-Saxon missionaries who were busy among the Germanic tribes of northern Europe. Since Boniface was acting in his mission work as the direct agent of the pope, Charles Martel's support for this activity also enhanced the status of Frankish power in the eyes of Rome." (Noll, 120-121)

- "After Charles Martel's incredible victory in AD 732, the Franks felt that God himself had blessed their nation and given them the right to rule, but Pepin III was keen for this to be ratified by the pope and he worked hard at building a good relationship with the papacy. Pope Zacharias endorsed Pepin's claim to the throne. His successor, Stephen II, declared him *patricius Romanorum*—the defender of Rome. (Hill, 174)

- "By demanding—and receiving—the endorsement of the church, Pepin III helped to increase the church's power. After all, if the great Pepin required the pope's blessing to take the throne, then the pope was clearly a person of note." (Hill, 174)

Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire

- "Charlemagne eventually succeeded to the alliances that his grandfather (Charles Martel) had initiated and his father Pepin had developed. From the beginning of his rule as king of the Franks in 768, Charlemagne acted in concert to expand his own power and to strengthen connections with the pope." (Noll, 121)

- Accounts differ as to the nature of Pope Leo III's peril (kidnapped by supports of a rival candidate for the papacy, removed his tongue, and accused of embezzling church funds) but he called upon Charles King of the Franks for protection. In the year 800 AD, Charles crossed the Alps with an army prepared to settle the Pope's problem once and for all. (Shelley, 173)

- "By the time he came to Rome in 800, Charlemagne's success against the Saxons to his north and east, the Spanish to his west, and the Lombards to his south made him lord over more of Europe than anyone since Theodosius at the end of the fourth century." (Noll, 121)

- "In December, the king presided over a large assembly of bishops, nobles, diplomats, members of the royal household, and rebels. On December 23, the pope, holding the Gospel in his ring hand took an oath purging himself of the accusations against him." (Shelley, 173)

- "On Christmas Day, Charles came to St. Peter's with a large retinue for Christmas worship. Leo lead the mass and Charles prayed on his knees in front of the crypt of the apostle Chalres saw the pope approach. In his hands was a golden crown. Leo placed it on Charles' head as the congregation cried: To Charles, the most pious, crowned Augustus by God, to the great peace-making Emperor, long life and victory!" The pope prostrated himself. Charles the Great, King of the Franks, had restored the Christian Roman Empire." (Shelley, 173-174)

- "Thus it was that, when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne the new emperor, it only solidified a connection hat had been developing for more than half a century. The popes had turned to the north, where a strong imperial household was emerging. In terms of medieval society, Charlemagne never considered himself a vassal of the pope. Rather, he held himself to be responsible to God alone for the welfare of his people." (Noll, 121)

- "For the next 800 years and more, the politics, learning, social organization, art, music, economics, and law of Europe would be "Christian"—not necessarily in the sense of fully incorporating norms of the gospel, but because the fate of the Western church centered in Rome had been so decisively linked with the new "Roman" emperor over the Alps." (Noll, 121)

- Charlemagne enforced water baptism by the point of the sword; if you didn't get sprinkled you got executed. Charlemagne massacred 4,000 Saxons at Verdun for refusing to be baptized. During the 83 year struggle to "Christianize" the Saxons, 10,000 of them were driven from their homes. The war of Charlemagne against he Saxons was the first church-approved massacre for the extension of the church. Unity and Power rather than truth and righteous were the primary concerns of Rome. (Ruckman, 285-286)

- Charlemagne's 50 military campaigns against the Lombards, Aquitanians, Bavarians, Avars, Danes, Slaves, and Saxons were designed to unit all of the Teutonic and Latin peoples of Europe under himself and a Roman Catholic pope. (Ruckman, 287)

- "From this point on, the state (Kingdom of Heaven) and the church (Kingdom of God) were to work conjointly to bring in the kingdom; but at the inception of this blessed merger, the church was obviously the winner, for the head of the Roman church (the pope) had just been accepted as God, while the reigning emperor of the state only Caesar. . . Under this divine arrangement, future popes, as "top dog," have the right not only to select which king can reign over which

kingdom, but they also have the right to excommunicate any king they don't like." (Ruckman, 291)

- From henceforth, any ruler who will obey the Roman dictator and keep his subject in line with Roman Catholicism will be a good ruler, while any ruler who allows rebellion against Roman doctrine, teaching, law, sacraments, priests, officials, or councils will be a bad ruler.

- Andrew Miller, author of *Miller's Church History* comments on Pope Leo's view of his authority. Miller writes:

  - ". . . the pope sought to reconcile his character, as vicar of Christ, with his new position. As all men are subject to Christ, he reasoned, so likewise are they subject to his vicar and representative on earth in all that appertains o His kingdom. But that kingdom extends over all; therefore nothing belonging to this world or its affairs can be above or beyond this jurisdiction of St. Peter's chair." (Miller, 333)

- "However, until Charlemagne died, the Roman popes could not enforce everything they had planned. Charlie still held the royal flush because he was still an active commander of an army. He presided at the Council of Frankfort in 794 instead of the pope, and he continued to appoint his own bishops and abbots without the pope's consent. If Pope Leo had croaked during Charlie's lifetime, he would undoubtedly have filled the vacant papal throne with one of his own bishops." (Ruckman, 292)

The Christianity of Christendom

- "The Christendom of the European Middle Ages affected the practice of the Christian faith in every way. The "medieval synthesis," as it is sometimes called, harmonized (at least in theory) what we today regard as separate sacred and secular spheres of life. The ideally symbolized by the cooperation between Charlemagne and the Pope Leo II was an integrated view of life in which everything—politics, social order, religious practice, economic relationships, and more— was based on the Christian faith as communicated by the Roman Catholic Church and protected by the actions of secular rulers." (Noll, 122)

- "The distinctive medieval shape of these convictions was the belief that saving grace comes to people through the sacraments in a social setting defined by the cooperation of church and state." (Noll, 122)

- "The sacramental system as it developed in Christendom required that the organized church play an indispensable role as the agent through which the sacraments brought God's grace to every state of life. As the sacraments mediated God's grace in Christ to needy sinners, so the church was the sole mediator of the sacrament. The theology of the Middle Ages, expanded upon earlier hints to show how Christ had commissioned the church to fulfill its role in distributing the sacraments and designated the ordained leaders of the church, especially the pope, to act as successors to the apostles in fulfilling the mandate of Christ to guide his people." (Noll, 124)

- "In other words, with the widespread agreement that salvation was the most important reality, and the further agreement that salvation was communicated through and by the sacraments, it had to follow that the church, as the administrator of the sacraments, should offer a foundation for everything else in life." (Noll, 125)

- Herein lay the true power of the papacy and the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. Since only the church could administer the sacraments and the sacraments were a means of grace church official possessed to great powers of persuasion, excommunication and interdiction.

- Excommunication meant exclusion from taking the sacraments. In the Dark Ages this was a fearful thing since all Catholics believed that baptism and continual partaking of the Eucharist were essential for getting to heaven. Their souls would literally be damned to hell is they were excommunicated permanently. (Ruckman, 325)

- Bishops could excommunicate anyone except a pope, and only a pope could excommunicate a bishop. Meanwhile the pope was sinless and could not be excommunicated by anyone.

- The interdict was a political lever used to pry a king off a throne if he didn't submit to the spiritual, political, or economic demands of the Roman pontiff. Interdiction was a chain-of-command thing where all the priest in a given area closed the cathedral doors and cut off the sacraments from everyone, thereby temporarily damning all the people in that area because the sacraments are said to be the means of grace and are essential to the salvation of the soul. (Ruckman, 325)

- "Only baptism and extreme unction could be performed under an interdict (and some authors say that extreme unction was denied), while the mass and the rise of marriage and burial were withheld. All Catholics had a deadly fear of not being buried in a Catholic graveyard. This gave the local populace a half-completed salvation; that is, a washing away of original sin but no mass to take care of daily and weekly sins." (Ruckman, 326-327)

- "The greatest thing about the interdict form the standpoint of Biblical Christianity was that it forced political rulers (barons and kings) to use their police forces and armies to kill or imprison Bible-believing Christians under their jurisdiction. The European ruler was faced with the choice of having his own subjects rebel against him—for they would naturally blame him for the closed church doors and lack of sacraments—or he could obey the pope and kill anyone the pope told him to kill. . . That is the Roman church by AD 900 had become a religious Mafia of professional killers engaged in staying in office." (Ruckman, 328)

The Decline into Feudalism

- After Charlemagne's death his empire disintegrated due to civil war and the Viking invasions.

- "When the Vikings began sweeping out of the Northland, people increasingly surrendered both their lands and their persons to the many counts, dukes, and other local lords in return for protection. These disintegrating conditions presented a new challenge to the church and to the unity of Europe. We call it feudalism" (Shelley, 178)

- "Feudalism was a type of government in which political power was exercised locally by private individuals rather than by the agents of a centralized state. One popular text explains it this way: Fully developed feudalism was a fusion of three basic elements: 1) the personal element, called lordship or vassalage, by which one nobleman, the vassal, became the loyal follower of a stronger noblemen, the lord; 2) the property element, called fief (usually land), which the vassal received from his lord to enable him to fulfill the obligations of vassalage; and 3) the governmental element, meaning the private exercise of governmental function over vassals and fiefs. (Shelley, 179)

- "Central to feudalism was the personal bond between lord and vassal. In the ceremony known as the act of homage, the vassal knelt before his lord, and promised to be his man. . . The feudal contract thus entered into by lord and vassal was considered sacred and binding upon both parties. Breaking ties of mutual obligation was considered a felony, because it was the fundamental bond of early medieval society. The lord for h is part was obliged to give his vassal protection and justice. The vassal's primary duty was military service." (Shelley, 179)

- With no clear central authority, the Catholic Church and the power of the papacy continued to grow.

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