

Church History - Early Middle Ages (Part 1)

Christendom, Chalcedon, and Monasticism

Constantine and Christendom

- 312 - Constantine defeated his rival Maxentius and gained more power in Rome. He credited God and Christ for his victory.
- 313 - Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which ended persecution of Christians and allowed Christians to begin to hold positions of power.
- 324 - Constantine became sole emperor of Rome and began to promote Christianity as a state religion, thus beginning the era of Christendom.
- A mixed legacy:
 - Constantine claimed real faith in Christ, but did not fully understand the doctrines of Christianity and often embraced/promoted heresy.
 - He was known for his fierce temper and refused to be baptized until on his deathbed in 337.
 - Constantine brought the church relief from persecution and helped to settle church disputes, most notably the Council of Nicea in 325.
 - However, with the official endorsement of the empire, belief in Christ became more a means to political advancement than a matter of faith and repentance. Christianity became a cultural norm, and the church became confused with the world.
- After Constantine was a succession of emperors who veered between orthodoxy, Arianism, and paganism, until Theodosius I at the end of the century ordered the destruction of all pagan temples and made Christianity the official state religion of Rome.

Council of Chalcedon

- Previous Councils
 - 325 - Council of Nicea: The Divinity of Christ
 - 381 - Council of Constantinople - The Humanity of Christ
 - 431 - Council of Ephesus - The Relation of Christ's Two Natures
- 451 - Council of Chalcedon
 - There was still much uncertainty and unclarity following the Council of Ephesus.
 - Eutyches began to argue that the two natures were thoroughly blended, the human nature being dissolved into the divine much as a drop of wine is dissolved into the sea. The nature of Jesus, therefore, was neither perfectly divine nor perfectly human.
 - Dioscorus, bishop of Alexandria, and Leo, bishop of Rome, headed the two sides of the debate. The council affirmed orthodox Christology, but also continued to lay the groundwork for the Great Schism.

“Following the holy fathers, we confess with one voice that the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, **is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man**, and that he has a rational soul and a body. He is of **one substance [homoousios] with the Father as God**, he is of **one substance [homoousios] with us as man**. He is like us in all things except sin. He was begotten of His Father before the ages as God, but in these last days and for our salvation he was born of Mary the virgin, the theotokos, as man. This one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten **is made known in two natures [which exist] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation**. The distinction of the natures is in no way taken away by their union, but rather **the distinctive properties of each nature are preserved**. [Both natures] unite into one person and **one hypostasis [that is, substance]**. They are not separated or divided into two persons but [they form] one and the same Son, Only-begotten, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets of old [have spoken] concerning him as the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us and as the creed of the fathers has delivered to us.”

St. Benedict and Monasticism

- Monasticism - the renouncing of worldly pursuits in order to be fully devoted to spiritual work.
- While Monasticism had begun in the third century and had had many influential figures, Benedict of Nursia probably had the greatest impact on monasticism and its influence in Christianity.
 - In the years of persecution, monks removed themselves from the chaos and disorder of the world.
 - As Christianity rose in popularity and prominence, monasticism rose out of concern for the church's worldly success.
- 530 - Benedict writes a handbook, “The Rule of St. Benedict,” on how to be a monk and how to have a monastic order. This handbook became very popular and has been influential throughout Church history.
- Positive Impact of Monasticism:
 - Renouncing worldly success and treasures.
 - Often a zeal for evangelism, missions, and service in the community.
 - Preservation of much orthodox theology.
- Negative Impact of Monasticism:
 - An unhealthy view of the physical world.
 - A potentially harmful view of salvation and sanctification.
 - Promotion of a new type of worldly reward and eventually even became places of power.