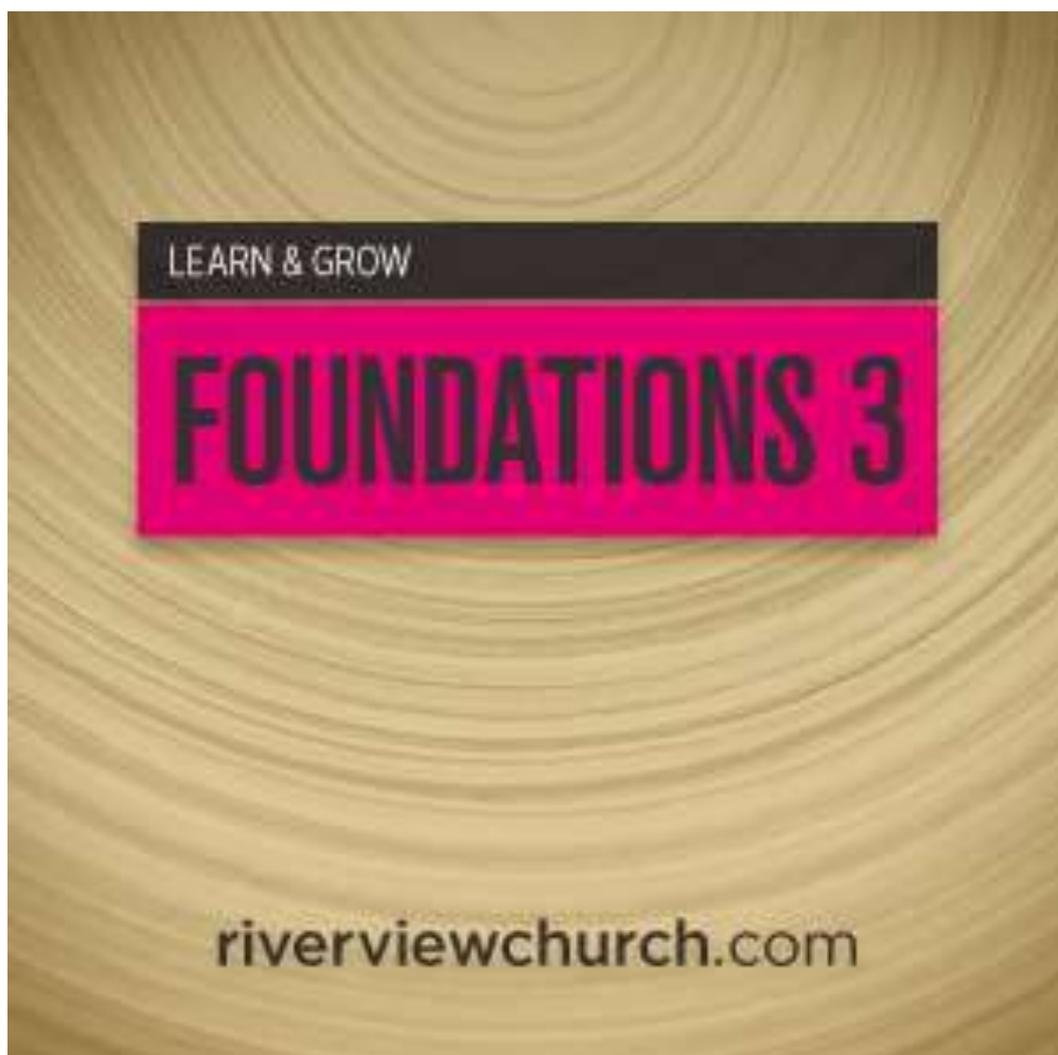
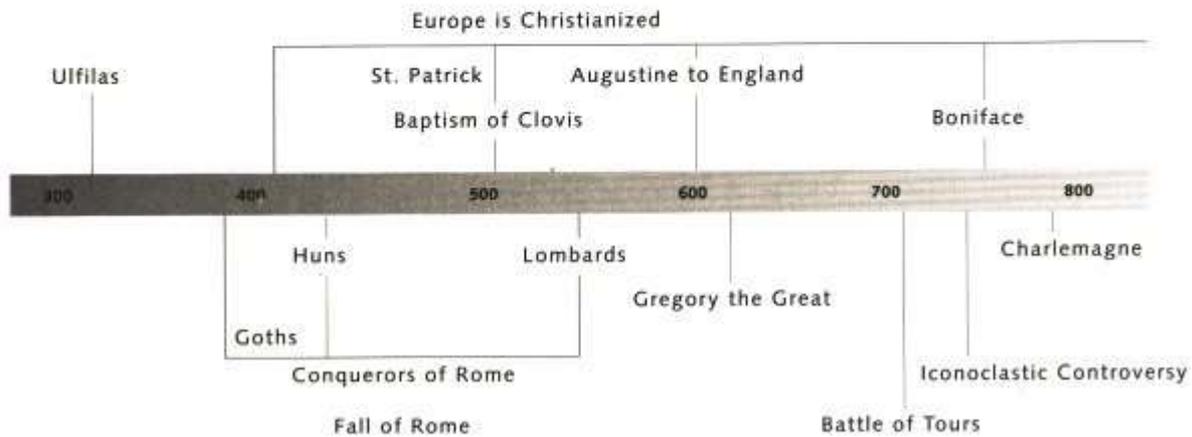


The Development of the Papacy

Church History 1 (306) – Week 4



Early Middle Ages



1. Leo 1

Leo 1, in stopping the advance of Attila the Hun’s armies before they sacked Rome in June of 452, established the Bishop of Rome in a new and powerful role, the representative of both God and Emperor.

Regardless of the idea of the supremacy of the Pope, the Church of Rome was recognized from the get go as a church with honour and significance.

First, Rome was the imperial capital, the Eternal City; and the church of Rome was the largest and wealthiest church, with a reputation for orthodoxy and charity. It stood without a rival in the West.

Second, despite persecutions of all kinds, the Roman congregation quickly grew in numbers and significance. By the middle of the third century its membership probably approached 30,000; it counted 150 clerics and 1,500 widows and poor people. Then, just as today, size meant influence.

Third, several early Christian writers, beginning with Irenaeus in the second century, referred to Peter and Paul as founders of the church in Rome and to subsequent bishops as successors of the apostles. These roots in the

apostolic age were important in a day when gnostic teachers appealed to a secret tradition arising from Christ. Many catholic Christians felt that a list of bishops traced back to Peter and Paul was a sure means of safeguarding the apostolic message.¹

At a synod in Rome in 381, bishops from the West argued: “The Holy Roman Church takes precedence over the other churches, not on the ground of any synodal decisions, but because it was given the primacy by the words of our Lord and Redeemer in the gospel, when he said: ‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.’ ”

Thus, we have the first mention of the “primacy of the Roman Church.”

In 445 the Emperor Valentinian III issued a decree instructing Aetius, the Roman commander in Gaul, to compel the attendance at the papal court of any bishop who refused to come voluntarily. The emperor’s edict turned Leo’s claim into law.

2. Gregory the Great

Appointed Bishop of Rome in 573.

By the end of Gregory’s reign as Pope the following claims were being made;

- a/ He is supreme over all churches and all bishops
- b/ The development of the doctrine of ‘Real Presence’
- c/ The development of the doctrine of purgatory.
- d/ Prayer to the saints and for the dead.

One of the better examples of Gregory’s belief in the power of the sacred mass is found in his *Dialogues*. While the incident is a bit long, it serves as a revealing picture of medieval piety. After telling of the death of one of his monks who had been found guilty of hoarding money and had been severely punished, Gregory writes:

Thirty days later, I began to feel strong compassion for the deceased Justus. As I considered with deep anguish the penalty he was enduring, I thought of a way to relieve him of his suffering. With this in mind, I called Pretiosus, the prior, and said to him sadly, “Justus has now been suffering the torments of fire for a long time and we must

¹ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX.: Word, 1995), 134.

show him our charity by helping as much as we can to gain his release. Beginning today, offer the holy Sacrifice for his soul for thirty consecutive days. Not one of these days is to pass without a Mass being celebrated for his release.” The prior obediently accepted the instructions and left.

Days passed, and being busy with other affairs, I lost count of them. Then, one night, Justus appeared to his brother Copiosus, who asked him at once why he came and how he was. “Up to this moment I was in misery,” he said, “but now I am well, because this morning I was admitted to communion.”

Copiosus hurried to tell the monks the good news. Taking exact count of the days, they discovered that this was the thirtieth consecutive day on which Mass had been offered for him. Previous to this Copiosus did not know that the brethren were offering Masses for Justus, nor did the brethren know that Copiosus had seen him in a vision. At the very moment, therefore, when they became mutually aware of what had taken place, they realized that the vision and the completion of the thirty Masses occurred at one and the same time. They were now convinced that the brother who had died was freed from punishment through the Sacrifice of the Mass.

The doctrine was widely accepted in the Western Church from Gregory’s time on and helped to give its peculiar tone to the Christianity of the Middle Ages.²

e/ Mary assumes the title ‘Mother of God’ and is worshipped.

² Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 2nd ed. (Dallas, Tex.: Word Pub., 1995), 171.

f/ Sins needed to be confessed in private before a person could be restored to the Church.

g/ Church building reflected the increase in the power and prestige of Christians and the Church.

h/ The altar came to take a prominent place in churches and only the priest could approach it (paganism) This affected the way the priesthood related to the ordinary people and even the way the churches were built.

i/ Incense was burnt in the church as a form of worship.

3. The Rise of Islam

During the 700's Europe was again attacked by numerous tribal kings. The rise of Islam brought a grave challenge to Christianity.

