

Medieval Church History
(Part 4: The Holy Roman Empire, 800-1054)

I. Introduction.

- A. This period is shaped by the relationship of the church with the state in both East and West.
- B. “It was the period when the first great schism in the church occurred. The Western and Eastern section separated to go their respective ways as the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Greek Orthodox Church in the East. And the gloom of the Dark Ages was being slowly dispelled by a revival of learning that began under Charlemagne” (191).

II. The decline of the Carolingian Empire.

A. The successors of Charlemagne.

- 1. The empire depended on Charlemagne’s administrative ability.
- 2. When he died neither his son nor grandson was able to keep it together.

B. Teutonic principle of inheritance.

- 1. Put into practice during the time of Louis the Pious (778-840), Charlemagne’s successor.
 - a. The Roman idea of an indivisible kingdom was foreign to the Teutons.
 - b. They believed their empire should be divided among their sons.
 - c. Shortly after his coronation, Louis announced his plans to divide the kingdom.
- 2. When he died in 840, his sons fought over the kingdom.
 - a. Louis, the son, inherited the eastern section.
 - b. Charles the Bald, the western section and central sections.
 - c. The title of emperor went to Lothair.
 - d. Lothair wanted to control the whole area, but his brothers united against him.
 - e. The two brothers met in Strasbourg in 842 and took an oath to be loyal to each other in the language of their people until they had defeated Lothair. Each recognized the common tongue of his subjects by taking an oath in it (French and German).
 - f. In 843, the three brothers agreed to the Treaty of Verdun. France was granted to Charles the Bald, Germany to Louis, and Lothair was given the title of emperor and a strip of land between the two kingdoms about a thousand miles long and a hundred wide (Italy).

C. Feudalism.

- 1. Breakup of the empire was hastened by the rise of feudalism.
 - a. When central government becomes too weak to exercise authority over its territory, feudalism results.
 - (i) Decline in city life and trade forced people back to the land to make a living.
 - (ii) Public authority was put into private hands.
 - (iii) Society became divided horizontally, rather than vertically.
 - (iv) There was little social movement: you generally live your life in the same social rank as your father.
 - (v) There are basically four social ranks:
 - (a) The authority: the lord who governed the land.
 - (b) The protectors: the feudal knights – who had the privilege of land ownership for their services.
 - (c) The produces: the serfs who lived on and worked the manor.

- (d) The prayers: the priests of the universal church.
- b. “Feudalism may be defined as a system of political organization based on possession of land” (193).
 - (i) The local lord would govern the immediate area in which he owned land.
 - (ii) “Until nation-states could emerge in England, France, and Spain in the late Middle Ages, this was the only way in which justice and order could be maintained during the period of weak centralized authority after the decline of the Roman Empire, the failure of the Merovingian kingdom, and the breakup of Charlemagne’s Empire” (193).
 - c. The manor.
 - (i) The basic land unit that provided a living for all classes of society.
 - (ii) Both lord and serf got their living from the soil.
 - (iii) Each manor was self-sufficient, except for a few items such as salt, millstones, or iron bars the smith would make tools from.
 - (iv) The manor was an area that could support an armed knight.
 - (v) Some lords would own several manors.
 - (vi) “The manor was the basic economic unit that made the feudal system possible” (193).
 - (vii) The knight would protect both lord and serf. In return, he was granted land and the living of that land.
 - (viii) The knight might give forty days of military service each year and provide food for the lord, in exchange for land.
 - (ix) The churchman was obligated to pray for his lord in return for food and a place to live.
 - (x) Again, feudalism was important because of the stability it gave after the breakup of the Carolingian Empire and during the time of the invasions by the Vikings, Slavs and Magyars in the ninth and tenth centuries.
2. The influence of the feudalism on the church.
 - a. The church held a great deal of land in the Middle Ages.
 - b. Gifts of land by pious or repentant men seeking to atone for their sins remained in the hands of the church from generation to generation.
 - c. They couldn’t help but be influenced by feudalism.
 - (i) The land was held by abbots and bishops.
 - (ii) Since they couldn’t give military service to their feudal lords, they had to give land to vassal knights who could.
 - (iii) The possession of land tended to secularize the church, turning their attention to matters of this world, rather than the world to come.
 - (iv) It tended to divide the loyalty of the abbot or bishop: should his primary allegiance be to his temporal lord – to whom he owed feudal dues – or to the pope – to whom he owed his spiritual authority?
 - (v) It tended to weaken the church through nobles seeking land and prestige for their sons through church appointments.
 - (vi) It also led to the investiture controversy - “the dispute as to whether the feudal lord or the pope should grant an ecclesiastical vassal the symbols of his authority” (194) – which further embittered relationships between the church and state in the 11th and 12th centuries.
 - (vii) “The ring, staff, and pallium were the symbols of spiritual authority; and the

sword and scepter were the symbols of feudal authority. At times both the feudal lord and the pope claimed the right to give all these symbols” (194).

- (viii) This tended to make the clergy focus more on the control of land and local feudal quarrels than on spirituality and the affairs of the church.
- (ix) There were also positive contributions from this affiliation: The Peace of God and the Truce of God, both of which were meant to lessen feudal warfare.
- (x) “The Peace of God was an agreement to ban private quarrels, to attack no unarmed persons, to permit no robbery or violence, and to pillage no sacred place.”
- (xi) “The Truce of God by 1031 bound the feudal class not to fight from sunset on Wednesday to sunrise on Monday of each week and not to fight on the day of church festivals. This left less than one hundred days in the year open to feudal fighting. It also provided that churches, cemeteries, monasteries, and convents should be sanctuaries where refugees could find a safe asylum in time of trouble. Women, peasants, and clergy were not to be harmed. These agreements did much to lessen the brutalities of feudal warfare in the Middle Ages” (194).

D. The Viking, Slav and Magyar invasions.

1. The Vikings, or Northmen, came from what is now Sweden, Denmark and Norway.
 - a. They were a problem in Western Europe from the late 8th to the 10th century.
 - b. “Any town or monastery along the coast or on the shores of a navigable river could expect a visit from these bold sea rovers” (194).
 - c. Many finally settled in England, after fighting with their kinsmen, the Anglo-Saxons, who had come there earlier.
 - d. “In the process the fine Christian culture that had been built up in Ireland and England during the Dark Ages was destroyed or set back” (195).
 - e. Others settled in Normandy. From there they later came to conquer England under William the Conqueror in 1066.
 - f. Others traveled across Eastern Europe and laid the foundations of the Russian state.
 - g. Still others settled in Sicily and Southern Italy, for a time threatening the temporal power of the pope.
2. “The Slavs and Magyars settled in south-central Europe” (195).

III. The importance of the Carolingian Empire.

- A. The French and German states came from its ruins.
 1. “The German emperors of the 10th century took over from the west Frankish state the tradition of empire, and the empire founded by Otto I was known as the Holy Roman Empire” (195).
 2. But the Germans, instead of helping the pope, fought for supremacy until its rulers were defeated by Innocent III.
- B. It also raised the question as to who was the representative of God on earth – the church or state.
 1. Had God delegated sovereignty to the pope or emperor? Who derived their power from whom?
 2. This issue created a great deal of bitterness between the church and state for many centuries during the Middle Ages.
 3. The pope’s claim to temporal authority dated from the grant of lands in Italy by Pepin, Charlemagne’s ancestor.

C. It enriched the culture of the Middle Ages.

IV. 10th century revival of the Roman Empire.

A. Though Charlemagne's empire disappeared, the ideal of a universal political empire remained.

1. It was not realized by the Franks, but in the eastern section of his empire which had gone to Louis the German in 843.
2. Unification of the German nation was difficult.
 - a. Their rivers in the north ran north, and in the south ran east.
 - b. Northern Germany was mainly plains, and southern mountains.
 - c. The people in each area had different interests.
 - d. Tribal divisions and later feudal states brought decentralization of authority.
 - e. In spite of this, Germany became the center of Imperial power.

B. The rise of imperial power in Germany.

1. The threat of the Northmen and the Slavic Magyars brought the tribal dukes of Germany to name a ruler.
 - a. They chose Henry the Fowler, the duke of Saxony in 919.
 - b. He drove back the Northmen and defeated the Slavic invaders.
2. Henry was succeeded by his son Otto (912-73) in 936.
 - a. "Otto made the dukes his vassals and took over the supervision of the affairs of the church by naming bishops and abbots of his choosing to take care of the ecclesiastical interests in Germany" (197).
 - b. "If he had been willing to confine his efforts to Germany, he might have built up a powerful centralized monarchy similar to that which later English, French, and Spanish kings were to create. But he became interested in affairs across the Alps, and for centuries problems of the church and state in Italy became a drain on German resources" (197).
 - c. He went to Italy to defend the pope against a powerful ruler, and the pope – John XII – crowned him as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 962, giving Otto the political footing to claim jurisdiction over the people of Europe.
 - d. This political empire lasted until Napoleon brought about its dissolution in 1806.
3. The next two centuries.
 - a. The Roman see had weak leaders. The German emperors often crossed the Alps to help them and extend their own interests in Italy.
 - b. Otto III in 996 entered Rome, put down a faction of Roman nobles, then forced the election of his own cousin Bruno as Pope Gregory V.
 - c. "This constant interference by the German rulers in the affairs of the papacy in Italy led to a struggle between the emperor and the pope until Innocent III humiliated and defeated the emperor and ended German interference in Italy" (197).