

# **CHURCH HISTORY: FROM PENTECOST TO THE GREAT SCHISM**

## **WEEK 4: CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE; COUNCILS AT EPHESUS AND CHALCEDON**

**REV. ERIC M. AUGENSTEIN**

### **The Third Ecumenical Council: The Council of Ephesus, AD 431**

Location: Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern Turkey)

Origin: Called by Emperor Theodosius

Attendance: About 200 bishops, mostly Eastern, including 2 papal legates

Purpose: Address the nature of Christ and the title *Theotokos* for Mary

St. Cyril of Alexandria vs. Nestorius – Nestorius denied calling Mary, “Mother of God,” but rather the “Mother of Jesus;” Cyril took this to deny the divinity of Christ; Cyril put forth a theology of Jesus being one person with two natures, fully human and fully divine, and thus that Mary could be called the “Mother of God,” or *Theotokos*

### **The Fourth Ecumenical Council: The Council of Chalcedon, AD 451**

Location: Chalcedon (near Constantinople)

Origin: Called by Emperor Marcian

Attendance: About 500 bishops, mostly Eastern, but governed by the papal legates

Purpose: To confirm the faith of the previous Councils against dissidents

Pope St. Leo the Great’s *Tome*: “This is the faith of the Fathers and of the Apostles. This we all believe. Peter has spoken through Leo.”

### **The Fall of The Western Roman Empire**

Continuous barbarian invasions throughout Europe, from the time of Constantine on December 31, 406 – Rhine River froze, allowing Germanic tribes to cross easily

410 – Rome sacked by Visigoths, the first time Rome fell in 800 years

476 – Emperor Romulus Augustulus (14 years old) overthrown by Odoacer

Result of barbarian invasions and fall of Rome: both centralized and local government collapsed, public works destroyed, communication crumbles

The Church is the only stable and strong institution and the only source of unity in Europe

### **The Early Middle Ages (476-800)**

“The Dark Ages?” – illiteracy, no centralized rule, violence

Feudalism – Germanic ideal of liberty (equality of warriors, respect and loyalty) combined with simple Christian faith; the ideal that all people should be characterized by virtue and a deep sense of personal loyalty

Strong Papacy – temporal as well as spiritual rule; only universal connection

New Missionaries – barbarians were either pagan or Arian Christian

Monasticism – centers of faith and learning, home-base for missionaries

Rise of Islam – begin conquests in Europe (Spain) in 711

### **Significant People in the Church: AD 400-800**

#### The New Missionaries

St. Patrick (387-461) – “The Apostle of Ireland” – born in Britain, kidnapped at age 16 and sent to Ireland as a slave, spent time as a shepherd in the Irish hills; had a dream in which he was told to return to England, so he escaped slavery and went to England and then mainland Europe where he studied in monasteries; priest; named a bishop and sent by the Pope to evangelize Ireland; spent 33 years preaching in Ireland; champion of orthodox Christianity, especially teaching on the Trinity (shamrock, Breastplate)

St. Columban (543-615) – born in Ireland, Benedictine monk; became missionary first in Scotland, then in Gaul; established monasteries as centers of missionary activity and faith; lived for extended periods in a cave in solitude seven miles from the monastery; known as a healer and miracle-worker; preached against corruption among the royal Frankish courts; came into conflict with the Franks and travelled throughout Europe, eventually settling in northern Italy; known to have the ability to communicate with animals – when he wanted to use a cave for solitude, he asked a bear living in that cave to leave, and it did; he later tamed a bear and put a plow on it to help the monks plant their fields.

St. Augustine of Canterbury (d. 605) – born in Rome, Benedictine monk; sent by Pope Gregory the Great as a missionary to England (Gregory saw English slaves in a market in Rome, asked who they were: *angles*, he said, no they are *angels*); the people of England had a reputation for violence and terror, causing Augustine to turn back on his trip, but Gregory insisted that he go; evangelized throughout England, at one point bringing a tribal king and 10,000 of his people into the Church; first Archbishop of Canterbury.

St. Boniface (680-754)- “The Apostle to Germany;” born in England; Benedictine monk; ministered among the Franks in modern-day Germany, founding monasteries and dioceses; once encountered a tribe worshipping a Norse deity in the form of a large oak tree, he took an axe and cut down the tree, stood on the trunk, and asked “How stands your mighty god? My God is stronger than he.” As the Pope’s representative, crowned Pepin the Short as King of the Franks. Martyred with other missionaries by a group of pagan barbarians.

Dionysius Exiguus (500-560) – no common method for determining dates and years; in the Roman Empire, used the consuls in office, the year in the reign of the emperor, or the years since the founding of Rome; some used a fixed point, like the beginning of the reign of Diocletian; Pope John I asked Dionysius to put together a table of the dates for Easter for the coming years; in 532, he compiled the table and also thought it would be

beneficial to calculate the year from the birth of Christ; using information about the reign of Augustus, calculated that Christ was born on December 25, in the year 753 from the founding of Rome; began the calendar with the date of Jesus' circumcision, January 1, AD 1; this system was used by St. Bede the Venerable in his history of the English Church and became widespread after being used in documents by Charlemagne; unfortunately, Dionysius' calculations were off; Herod the Great died in 4 BC, so Jesus must have been born before then.

St. Isidore of Seville (560-636) – Archbishop of Seville, Spain; helped to convert the Arian Visigoths; reformed church in Spain, requiring seminaries in every diocese; compiled first encyclopedia, and thus is considered the patron saint of the internet and computer users; Doctor of the Church

St. Bede the Venerable (673-735) – born in England around the time the entire country had been Christianized; Benedictine monk; known as the most learned man of his day; wrote *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the primary source for any information about England prior to the 8<sup>th</sup> century; began widespread use of Dionysius Exiguus' method of dating; Doctor of the Church

In the weeks to come ...

St. Jerome (342-420)

St. Augustine (354-430)

Pope St. Leo the Great (400-461)

St. Benedict (480-543)

Pope St. Gregory the Great (540-604)