



SESSION 20: CAROLINGIAN EMPIRE OF THE WEST – CONTENT

In the last session we focused on iconoclasm in the East; in this session we need to back up and look at developments in the West and specifically Charles the Great (Charlemagne). I believe the most important thing to take away from this session is a picture of the Church-State relationships in the East and West, and their differences.

1. Recall that the Franks were a nation of growing influence. They were headed by the Merovingian dynasty of kings. Within their nobility they had created the influential position of "Mayor of the Palace". One of these was Charles Martel ("the Hammer", 714-41), whose ancestors were from present-day Belgium. Under the Merovingians, Martel began a consolidation of the West, especially by defeating the Muslims in Southern Spain in 732-3. They had invaded Spain from North Africa, and Martel's victory assured the future of Europe.
2. Martel had two sons – Carloman, who became a monk in 747, and Pepin III, named after his grandfather, Pepin II. Around 753 Pepin III deposed the Merovingian king and was anointed Emperor of the Franks with Holy oil. So began the Carolingian dynasty.
3. Lombards had occupied Southern Italy and were threatening Rome in 754-6. Pope Stephen appealed to Pepin III, who marched to Rome and the Lombards retreated. Then Pope Stephen crowned him, establishing the "State of the Church" which would become Vatican City.
4. In 755 the Roman papal secretariat produced the letter, "Donation of Constantine". In it, Constantine had thanked Pope Sylvester for curing him of leprosy and had acknowledged that the Pope of Rome was head of the universal Church. The letter was determined a forgery and confirmed so in the 1800's. Around 760 Pope Hadrian I of Rome terminated acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the Eastern Emperor. These acts reflect a growing Western disdain of the Eastern Empire, as well as the Western belief that the primate of the Roman church was the primate of the universal Church.
5. Pepin III died in 768, leaving his empire to sons Carloman and Charles. Carloman died in 771, leaving Charles as King of the Franks. Charles dealt with two Western popes during his reign – Hadrian I (772-795) and Leo III (795-816). These popes wanted to secure independence of the Western church from invaders. Charles wanted Roman legitimacy.
6. In 774 Charles defeated the Lombards and established himself as King of the Franks and Lombards. In 778 he defeated the Spanish Moors (Muslims), freeing all of Spain of Islam.

7. For decades Roman popes had been elected from Roman aristocracy, as had Hadrian I. In 795 Leo III was elected pope; he was a commoner, not of aristocracy. The Roman aristocratic class resented the election of Leo, and in 799 he was seized by a mob, deposed and imprisoned. He escaped and went to Charles for help.
8. Charles supported Pope Leo by taking his army to Rome, and on Christmas day of 800 Leo crowned him Emperor of the Romans. Leo then bowed down before his Emperor (Charlemagne) in obeisance, the first and only time a pope has done so. Leo's position as Pope was thus established. In contrast to this, the coronation of Eastern emperors of the time started with their profession of faith, followed by an oath to maintain the Faith. Then the Emperor would bow before the Patriarch, who would place a crown on his head, saying, "In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost". Those present would respond, "Holy! Holy! Holy! Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!" Thus the imperial power of the Eastern Emperor was subject to the Truth preserved by the Church.
9. Charlemagne unified the Western Empire further, promoting Latin language and Roman culture. He did away with the conciliar church and made the Rule of Benedict the standard for monasticism. He established that monasteries and cathedrals provide the education of children of all classes. In acquiring new regions and peoples (e.g. Saxons in Germany) he enforced the death penalty for those refusing baptism, or destroying churches, or plotting against Christians, or violating his rules for tithing and fasting. He sent representatives in pairs – one clergy and one layman – throughout the Empire to see that his rules were enforced. He instituted the use of the Apostles' Creed [see Readings]. He acknowledged 20 children by 5 wives and 6 concubines; only one son was legitimate.
10. By the late 700's metropolitans in the West were called archbishops. They wielded authority in government and the administration of justice, and they were under the control of the Emperor and his representatives. The Western Empire was at its height, including Italy North of Naples, Corsica, Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Bohemia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia. It did not include the British Isles.
11. In the late 700's the Eastern Emperor Basil I published a code, the Epanogogue, defining the relationship between Church (in the East) and State until the end of the Byzantine Empire [see Readings]. In 808 the *Constitutio Romana* required that all peoples (in the West) swear an oath of allegiance to their Emperor and be bound in obedience to their Pope.
12. Charlemagne died in 814, leaving the Roman Empire to his legitimate son, who then split the Empire among his three sons at the Treaty of Verdun in 843. France and Germany moved toward independence. Danes attacked England. Vikings attacked France and the Netherlands. Manors or fiefs began to be handed down to sons of a new nobility; they became the sources of order, justice and protection as the Empire disintegrated. Bishoprics and monasteries fell under increasing control of fiefs.