



SESSION 17: 6TH CENTURY, JUSTINIAN, 5TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL & GREGORY THE GREAT – CONTENT

In this session we look at some of the events in the 6th century, and especially at Emperor Justinian, the 5th Ecumenical Council and Pope Gregory the Great of Rome.

1. Recall in the last session we learned that the Frankish kingdom (Gaul, or France) was the first Germanic tribe to convert to Christianity, and that they would develop into a divine monarchy that would challenge the Byzantine (Eastern) Empire. Throughout the 500's the Franks developed economic centers in rural manors that provided food, clothing and supplies for the populace and for their army (that is, the development of medieval serfdom). Churches developed in these manors, becoming isolated from the Roman papacy. Churches began acquiring land, and the Frankish kings set aside clerical elections and began appointing their own bishops.
2. Recall also that the other Germanic tribes converted to Christianity, They were primarily Arian Christians, as they had been evangelized by Arian missionaries. Although they would become Nicene, their time as Arians gave rise to conflicts.
3. Developments within the Church in the 500's: Vocal, monophonic (one melody) singing became standard, as instrumental music was seen as inconsistent with the idea that the Church offers to God not material sacrifices, but living sacrifices – the human voice. Christianity focused on art with Christian topics, as pagan art receded. Mosaic Christian art appeared, deriving from the ancient Roman technique. In the West some churches placed the altar table between the apse and the congregation.
4. In 525 the Council of Carthage established the right of monasteries to elect their own abbots and to ordain monastics. Also around 525 Saint John Climacus was born. Also called John of the Ladder, he lived until 606. At 16 he became a monk at a monastery on Mount Sinai that would later be rebuilt as St. Catherine's. He lived as a hermit for 20 years and ultimately wrote The Ladder of Divine Ascent, consisting of 30 chapters, each representing the rung of a ladder leading to Christ. Although a guide for monastic life, it quickly became one of the most beloved Christian books, and is one of the most widely-read among Orthodox Christians today. His feast day in the East and West is March 30; in the Orthodox Church he is also celebrated on the 4th Sunday of Lent.
5. Justinian the Great ruled the Empire from 527 until 565. He was adopted by his uncle Emperor Justin I, who oversaw his education and appointed him as his chief advisor. Justinian, known as “the Emperor who never sleeps”, together with his wife and advisor Theodora, were committed to unifying the Empire (see Readings), and to reunifying the Orthodox and Monophysites. In the latter

they failed. He surrounded himself with men and women of extraordinary talent based upon merit, not aristocratic origin, and considered it his divine duty to restore the Roman Empire to its ancient boundaries. His religious policy reflected his conviction that the unity of the Empire presupposed unity of faith, and that faith could only be Nicene Orthodoxy. One of his appointees was general Belisarius, who conquered several Germanic tribes and retook Rome. Justinian was very hands-on; he regulated everything in religion and law.

6. In 529 the Council of Orange affirmed Augustine's doctrine of original sin, saying the descendants of Adam need God's grace to even obtain the beginning of faith, that fallen man is not capable of any good work deserving of salvation. But any affirmation of predestination was omitted. Their action established the lasting importance of Augustine in the West.
7. In 532 the Monophysite leaders wrote to Justinian, "Thus shall peace prevail in your reign by the power of the high hand of God the Almighty, to whom we pray on your behalf that without toil or struggle in arms He will set your enemies as a footstool beneath your feet." They hoped to garner his support of Monophysitism.
8. Back in 483 the Vandal King Huneric had ordered a debate in Carthage between Arian and Orthodox bishops, with himself (Arian) and the Arian bishop presiding. The Orthodox were declared the losers and the Church was outlawed. Persecutions and executions of Orthodox became common. But in 534 Justinian sent general Belisarius and an army to destroy the Vandal kingdom. The Church was restored and Arianism and Donatism were banned.
9. In 536 Justinian published a code of new laws for the Empire, reflecting his vision of a universal Christian Roman order. Those laws are the basis of many nations' legal systems today.
10. In 537 Justinian completed rebuilding the cathedral Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which had burned earlier. It was a magnificent church. When completed, Justinian said, "Oh Solomon, I have surpassed thee."
11. In 542 Justinian commissioned John of Ephesus to convert all remaining pagans in Western Asia Minor, by force if necessary. Heretics were deprived of government jobs and civil rights.
12. From 531 until 543 Origenistic Christology reappeared, primarily as the ideas of Theodore of Mopsuestia: The humanity of Christ – his pre-existing soul – was as distinct from the Logos as the human soul is from humans. There is no distinct union in Christ different than that of all souls. The goal of prayer and of monastic life is to lead every human soul to union with God, making it equal to Christ. Justinian opposed this Origenism and published ten anathemas known as "The Three Chapters" (Its correct translation is "The Three Heads".), against its leaders, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa. It was also a statement against Nestorianism. Pope Vigilius thought the issue should be brought before an Ecumenical Council. Justinian then published a 'Confession of Faith' proclaiming the authority of the 4 Ecumenical Councils, and including the Three Chapters.
13. Around 550 Justinian prohibited the elevation of married bishops and restricted the episcopate to unmarried or widowed.

14. In May and June of 553 the 5th Ecumenical Council was held in Constantinople. The Patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria and Constantinople were present, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem sent a delegate. Although in Constantinople, Pope Vigilius of Rome refused to attend, saying there was not enough representation of Western bishops. Actions at the Council included:
- Vigilius was deposed. (He agreed with the Council 6 months later.)
 - “The Three Chapters” were rejected.
 - Authority of the first 4 Ecumenical Councils was confirmed.
 - Cyril’s theology was affirmed.
 - Twelve anathemas against Nestorius were adopted (In hope that this would bring the Monophysites back into communion, which it did not.)
 - The two natures of Christ defined at Chalcedon are clearly understood as two attributes in a single person.

The decisions of this Council were accepted throughout the Chalcedonian East. Justinian began exiling many non-Chalcedonian bishops. The Monophysites rejected the Council and schism became permanent. Ecclesiastical unity persisted, each side hoping for the conversion of the other. Monophysites began splitting into different groups; a schism developed between Syrian and Egyptian Monophysites. Monophysitism lost control of Egypt, and Chalcedonian patriarchs resided in Alexandria until its capture by Muslim Arabs in 646.

15. On August 15 of 554 Justinian restored Roman rule in Italy, entrusting bishops with supervising civil, educational and financial systems. Long and continuing struggles with Germanic tribes required that the Roman church supply food to a much-reduced population and to the army. (Plague had reduced the population of the Empire by one third.)
16. In 557 Justinian completed the rebuilding of a monastery on Mount Sinai where God had spoken to Moses in a burning bush. It was named Saint Catherine’s.
17. In 563 a mission was established in Iona (Northern Scotland) by Patrick. Hadrian’s wall and Great Britain were abandoned to the Angles and Saxons.
18. In 568 the Lombards invaded and took Italy.
19. The Visigothic King Hermenegild had wanted to restore pagan gothic religion. He had persecuted Christians and executed his son Leovigild for converting to Christianity. When he died his son Recared, a Nicene Christian, inserted the word ‘filioque’ into the Creed at the Council of Toledo in 589, to emphasize the divinity of Christ against Arian Visigoths. This would eventually be adopted by the Frankish kingdom and then be used by Chalmagne in his challenge of Byzantium
20. Pope Gregory the Great was born to upper class Christians in Rome around 540. In 573 he resigned as governor of Rome to turn his family home into a monastery. In 579 he was ordained a deacon and was an ambassador to Constantinople for 7 years. He returned to the monastery and reluctantly accepted the papacy in 590. He was the first monk to become Bishop of Rome. He strengthened the moral fiber of clergy and local churches and emphasized help of the sick and poor. He used church lands to raise crops and feed the indigent in Rome. He personally cooked food for the poor and refused to eat unless 12 indigents shared the meal with him. Gregory did not ascribe to exaggerated titles used by the Byzantines and said “anyone aspiring to be a universal bishop is playing the role

of the antichrist” [see Readings]. Gregory saw himself as a successor to Peter as the source of episcopal power, but did not consider that such power was communicated to other bishops from Rome only. Byzantine and Roman relationships drew close under Gregory. He re-energized missionary work in Northern Europe and among Angles and Saxons. He was the first Pope to use “Servant of the servants of God” as a papal title. The Orthodox Church credits him with compiling the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts.

21. In 597 King Oswy of England placed the country under Roman obedience, thus aligning England with catholicism.