



Chapter 11

The Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity in the West, 31 B.C.E.–800 C.E.

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Chapter Chronology

c. 6 B.C.E.–29 C.E.

Life of Jesus of Nazareth

284–305 C.E.

Diocletian Empire divided East and West

313–337 C.E.

Constantine/Christianity tolerated

381 C.E.

Theodosius makes Christianity official religion

late 300s–400s C.E.

Germanic invaders enter western empire

527–565 C.E.

Justinian I/Corpus Iuris

c. 500–800 C.E.

Late Antiquity/Germanic kingdoms

768–814 C.E.

Charlemagne/Carolingian Renaissance



Internal Upheaval and Invading Barbarians

- Rome began to decline after Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE)
- Germanic tribes invaded outer provinces
 - Borders difficult to defend against migrants and invaders
- Instability as military commanders bribed the Praetorian Guard and usurped throne
 - Barracks Emperors
 - 20 emperors in 50 years; only 2 died of natural causes
- Corruption; lack of respect for imperial government
- De-urbanization
- Disrupted long-distance trade

Restructuring the Empire

Diocletian (284-305)

- Last of the Barracks Emperors
- Took drastic steps to save Empire
 - Divided empire into East and West with emperors in each (**Tetrarchy**)
 - Enforced price controls to stop inflation
 - Increased taxes

Constantine the Great (313-337)

- More restrictions on personal freedoms
- Moved government to Byzantium (**Constantinople**) where Greek language and culture were dominant
- Western Empire went into permanent decline and finally collapsed, 476

Christianity (Slide 1 of 2)

- Christianity developed as Roman Empire weakened
- **Jesus of Nazareth** (6 BCE – 29 CE)
 - Taught love and forgiveness
 - Challenged traditional authority; led to his execution
 - Christian movement spread slowly in Judea
- **Saul/Paul of Tarsus**
 - Spread it to Gentiles elsewhere in the Roman Empire

Christianity (Slide 2 of 2)

- Zealot Jews rebelled in **Jewish War**
 - Romans crushed it, dispersed Jews around empire (Second **Diaspora**, 67-71)
 - Result: Jewish exile colonies as breeding grounds for Christianity around Mediterranean
- Appeal of Christianity
 - Universality (all eligible for salvation)
 - Hope and optimism (better life NOW, and in next)
 - Spirit of mutuality (obligation to aid fellow Christians)
 - Appeal to idealism (charity and unselfish devotion)



Christianity's Spread and Official Adoption (Slide 1 of 2)

- Christian groups sprang up in major towns
- Periodic persecutions until 311
- Constantine issued **Edict of Milan** (313) granting freedom of worship to Christians
 - Believed Christian God assisted him on the battlefield
 - Political expediency (5-10% of the Empire Christianized)
 - Baptized on his deathbed

Christianity's Spread and Official Adoption

(Slide 2 of 2)

- Except for Julian (361-63), all Roman emperors were Christian from Constantine onward in 337
- Christianity became official religion of the empire under Emperor Theodosius, 381
- Recognition both helped and hindered the new religion
 - Positive: Enjoyed favored status with secular government behind it
 - Negative: Forever linked with state and forever bore imprint of Roman Empire



Early Church Organization and Doctrine

- Christians followed Roman administrative models
 - Bishops, elected as heads of diocese
 - Priests appointed to each parish
 - Canon law governed church administration, courts
- **Petrine Succession** – Bishop of Rome (**pope**) claimed primacy as direct successor of Peter
- **Council of Nicaea** (325) defined questions of theology and church administration
 - Sponsored by Constantine who enforced its decisions
- Early Fathers of the Church (Augustine, Ambrose) also wrote on doctrine

The Byzantine Empire (Slide 1 of 2)

Byzantine Empire

- Surviving eastern half of Roman Empire
- Emperor – semi-divine, autocratic
- Large, efficient bureaucracy
- **Caesaro-Papism** – monarch acted as both head of state and head of church
- Justinian (527-565)
 - Erected **Hagia Sophia** church
 - Fought, but failed to regain Western Roman Empire
 - Compiled code of Roman laws

The Byzantine Empire (Slide 2 of 2)

- Empire lost territories during 7th and 8th c.
 - Conflicts with Avars, Persians, Arabs, and Slavs
 - Invention of Greek Fire, an effective weapon like napalm
- Byzantine missionaries took Christianity to eastern Europe and Russia
- Christianity was permanently divided into eastern Orthodox and western Catholic Christianity, 1054
- **Corpus juris** – 6th c. distillation of Roman law and practice compiled at Justinian's command
 - Later became basis of law in Western Europe



Germanic Invaders

- Huns (440s) pushed Germanic peoples into western provinces of the Roman Empire
- War chiefs formed new kingdoms
 - Franks (France, 5th c.)
 - Saxons (N. Germany and Holland)
 - Angles and Saxons (to England, 5th c.)
 - Vandals (From N. Africa to Rome, 455)
 - West Goths (Visigoths, Gaul then Spain)
 - East Goths (Ostrogoths to Italy, after the Huns, then driven out by the Lombards)
- Western half of empire in ruins by 500s



Germanic Customs and Society

- Medieval European society a blend of Roman and Germanic culture
- Germanic culture
 - Highly personalized concept of government – loyalty to leader
 - Only gradually adopted settled lifestyle
- Conversion to Christianity
 - Germans originally worshiped sky deities (Wotan, Thor)
 - Many Germanic peoples converted to Christianity, 450-700
 - Missionaries appealed first to rulers
 - Took decades or even centuries to trickle down to common people



The Foundations of the Medieval Manor

- New self-sufficient, self-governing **manors** (estates) appeared as order broke down in the Roman Empire after 3rd century
- Local owners of manors took over basic government during invasions
 - Provided defense and justice
 - Exacted services from local villagers in exchange for protection
 - Evaded central government's taxes and controls
- Roads unsafe
- Cities and towns, trade and commerce declined

The Dark Age (c. 500-800) (Slide 1 of 2)

- Few documents written or kept
- Clergy were only group semi-literate
 - Some were good and dedicated; most entered church for personal advancement
 - Bribery and corruption rampant
 - Rome, too distant, did not interfere
- As king's vassals, bishops and abbots had secular and military duties, often more pressing than religious duties

The Dark Age (c. 500-800) (Slide 2 of 2)

- Christian church – only imperial Roman institution to survive German invasions
- Church provided many services
 - Kept records
 - Operated charitable and medical facilities
 - Maintained only schools in early medieval Europe
 - Preserved principles of Roman law

Charlemagne

- King of the Franks (768-800 CE)
- Controlled largest area since western empire fell
- Tried to revive Roman order
- Combatted non-Christian neighbors
- Cultivated ties with pope
- Pope Leo III crowned him Emperor, Christmas Day, 800
 - First Holy Roman Emperor



Carolingian Renaissance

- Charlemagne set up an administrative system to maintain the Empire
 - Revived Roman office of **comes** (count) to oversee provinces
 - Sent **missi dominici** (inspectors) to report on effectiveness of officials
 - Oversaw activities of church and training of churchmen
 - Promoted learning, libraries, copying manuscripts
 - Established palace school under direction of Alcuin
 - Reforms did not last
- Disintegration of Carolingian Empire
 - Succeeded by son Louis who divided empire among his 3 sons
 - War between brothers until Treaty of Verdun (843)
 - King of Germany became the Holy Roman Emperor



Invasions and Feudalism

- New invasions
 - Vikings, or Norsemen (from 790)
 - Magyars (late 800s)
 - Muslims (from late 600s, early 700s)
- Development of Feudalism
 - Government authority more fragmented
 - Local strongmen and their mercenaries (knights) controlled increasingly large areas
 - Invasions stimulated appearance of professional military and feudal military system