

# The Christian Church Family Tree

A Study on the History of the Church by Dr. Harley Ihm

## Lesson 4: Augustine and the Great Popes – AD 395-630

*We have seen the rise of the monastery system and the formation of the divisions that produced the Roman Catholic Church. One of the most influential bishops of this era was Augustine.*

1. **Augustine (AD 395-430)** “God’s providence constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind” (*Augustine, on the barbarian conquest*).
  - a. **Augustine’s Youth** – He was brought up in North Africa as a Christian by his mother. His dad was a pagan. As a teen he found lust was more exciting than faith. He also had a problem with the Bible because he was disgusted by the murderous holy men, the polygamy, animal sacrifice and the idea of God walking on earth as a man.
  - b. **Augustine Joins the Manichees** – at 18 he was searching for something to believe in. He joined the Manichees who were Gnostic believers who believed in Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and their own Mani. Mani claimed that both God and the devil are eternal. This world is just a mixture of heaven and hell. Augustine was living with his girlfriend at this time in his life. He studied philosophy and science and began to realize that the Manichees had no answers to his questions.
  - c. **Augustine Moves to Milan** – He moved to Milan and taught public speaking. His mother shows up, sends his girlfriend of 13 years back to North Africa and kept the son he had with her. She gets Augustine engaged to one of Milan’s most eligible 10 year olds! He reasoned that was good because now he was no longer living in sin. Of course, while waiting for his new bride to become old enough to marry, he got himself another woman.
  - d. **Augustine’s Transformation** – He began listening to the preaching of Ambrose and was inspired to read Scripture for its deeper meanings and to put on Jesus Christ as Lord of your life. He was urged to stop seeking to gratify the desires of the flesh. He told his mother that he no longer needed a wife. He would become celibate and move into a commune. In AD 396 Augustine became the bishop of Hippo in Africa. He began to defend persecution for the sake of the gospel. He argued that the King in Jesus parable compelled his wedding guests to come in. He decided that Jesus had used violence in blinding the apostle Paul to convert him. Augustine pushed the idea that God was in control of every event in life. Question: What does that sound like? Hebrew Karma!!! All life is predetermined, that God is the great puppet master of the universe.
  - e. **Augustine & Pelagius** - Pelagius was an ascetic monk from the Britain. He was fluent in both Greek and Latin, and learned in theology. He was well known in Rome, both for the

harsh asceticism of his public life as well as the power and persuasiveness of his speech. His reputation in Rome earned him praise early in his career even from such pillars of the Church as Augustine, who referred to him as a "saintly man." That is until he denied the doctrine of original sin as developed by Augustine. He was declared a heretic by the Council of Carthage. His interpretation of a doctrine of free will became known as Pelagianism. He taught that we are saved by grace. Most of his later life was spent defending his doctrine of Scripture and grace against theologians teaching the Catholic Faith of the church as the way to salvation. The Catholic theologians said that Catholicism came from the apostles and that Pelagius' idea of faith was unknown to the apostles.

## 2. The Great Popes (AD 430-630)

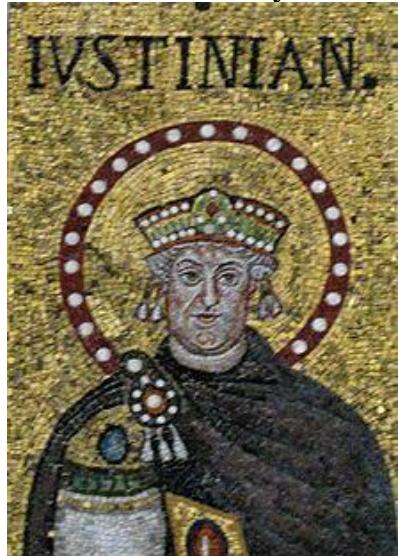
- a. **The Adoration of Mary** – There was a problem. Mary has been set apart as the queen of heaven, although people embracing a devotion to her have not taken off quickly. People have accepted that she lived and died a virgin. However, Jesus' brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Jude are Joseph and Mary's kids and the Holy Spirit was not involved. Hmm. We also see his sisters mentioned in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3. Joseph and Mary obviously had a large family after Jesus was born. Isn't it interesting that Jesus' hometown people, friends of the family, tell us clearly that Mary wasn't always a virgin, but over 400 years later, she is enshrined as the Immaculate Virgin Mary? The bishop of Constantinople saw that Mary was being turned into some kind of goddess rather than an instrument of God's will. The term "Mother of God" did not set well with him. So the fight begins. Alexandrian church accepted the phrase, "Mother of God" and opened the doors toward this higher Mary. The church in Constantinople claimed the Mary was simply the mother of Christ, with no higher place than this humble servant of God.
- b. **The Council of Chalcedon – AD 451**  
The argument was that Jesus could not be both God and man because God cannot be born of man. The new Roman Empress, Pulcheria, called for a council to meet at Chalcedon, which is across the Isthmus from Constantinople, to determine the exact nature of Christ and put an end to the dispute. The council decided that Christ was fully man and fully God, His humanity and divinity were one. This was a slight ripple in the beginning of what you and I would consider orthodox Christianity, simple truth. However, it was not fully embraced for a long time. One of the changes that happened because of this council was the declaration that Constantinople is the most holy church, the New Rome with equal authority to the Old Rome. St. Peter has spoken at Constantinople just as he did in Rome at least that was the idea. As you can imagine, a new tension is born.
- c. **The Conversion of Europe**  
**Patrick** - What can you tell me about St. Patrick? No he didn't drive the snakes out of Ireland. In fact there are virtually no snakes in Ireland. What he did do was stand up to the Druid priests who were the religion of force in his time. They were symbolized by the serpent. It was probably a metaphor that was turned into a great Irish legend taken with green beer.

Patrick's minister was in the mid to late 400's. He was actually a Briton who was kidnapped by Irish pagans and made a slave. While in slavery, he rediscovered his childhood faith in Jesus. He escaped after 6 years. He became a bishop and had a dream that those who had captured him were calling out for him to come and walk with them

again. Patrick went to Ireland as a missionary in answer to that dream. He began to convert tribal kings, built monasteries, led sons and daughters of Irish kings to become monks and virgins for Christ, nuns. At that time, the most powerful tribe in Europe was the Franks. Their king, Clovis married a princess from Burgundy named, Clotilda. She converted all her tribe from Arianism, the bishop who didn't believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, to Catholicism. She converts her husband, who was losing a battle, and begins to pray for Jesus' help. The battle turns around and when it is over on Christmas Day, AD499, he and 3,000 soldiers were baptized and went on to conquer all of Gaul, the ancient Roman Empire that included France and most of Western Europe.

**Benedict** – Next to Augustine, the most important figure in medieval Christianity was an Italian named Benedict. He became a monk at the age of 20. After seeing the immorality in Rome, the holy city, he withdrew from the world. He declared his war against the flesh by throwing himself naked into thorn bushes. In AD 529, Benedict founded his own monastery. He divided the day into 7 hours of worship and then split the rest of the time between working and Bible study. The monks were required to be obedient, celibate, and owe nothing. They were forbidden to talk too much or to laugh. It was easy to clone this model with the hard and fast rules so the Benedictine monasteries began to spread rapidly across Europe. As strange as it seems, their dedication to Scripture and learning was critical to saving Christianity from a dark and evil time in history. Even the really bad guys didn't want to kill monks and burn them out.

#### d. Justinian and the Byzantine Empire – AD 527-565

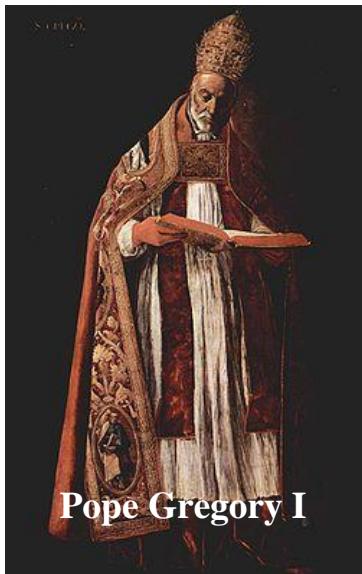


Justinian followed Justin as the Roman Emperor of the East. He wanted to reunite the empire. To do that he would have to conquer the Barbarians, his own people and somehow regain the allegiance of Rome. He was successful in war, driving the Vandals from Africa and the Goths from Italy. He still didn't find much support from Rome and the Western Christians. He redefined the Roman Empire as an earthly manifestation of the kingdom of heaven with the emperor, of course, being God's living icon. He blended church and state into a single organism. The Roman emperor's task was not just law and order, but to defend theology and religious practice by calling councils and enforcing their decisions.

This was the beginning of the real power of the Byzantine Empire or Eastern Roman Empire with its headquarters in Constantinople. Unfortunately, to defend the faith he brutally victimized Jews, pagans and heretics. He closed down the Athenian Academy established by Plato, forbid Jews to build synagogues, read Hebrew Scripture or testify against a Christian. Procopius, a civil servant wrote, "No one but God, I believe, could count those Justinian murdered."

**e. Gregory the Great – Pope from AD 590-604**

After all the crooked and vicious leaders of the church, came a new figure that brought hope. Gregory was a rich, young ruler in Rome who had a massive inheritance. He used it to build 7 monasteries and then gave the rest away to the poor and became a monk. He was being pressured to become pope in 590 so he fled the city. He was caught and brought back and forced to become the first monk to ever become the Pope. Italy was overrun by disease and poverty from all the endless wars. The local church rulers and bishops had been stealing all the great wealth of the church. Gregory reformed the system so that all money to the church came to him. He then gave it to farming projects and other relief. He raised an army to defend Rome from the Lombards and made peace treaties. His politics saved Rome and won him the respect of the German tribes.



At this time, Ethelbert became the king of Kent, in England. Ethelbert married Frankish princess, Bertha, who was a Christian. (Franks were Western Germanic Tribe). Gregory sent a prior named Augustine, who is somewhat like a dean of a monastery, to England where he was able to convert the King of Kent and baptized him along with 10,000 of his subjects on Easter of AD 601. Gregory then established a position in Canterbury and started restoring churches that had been seized 150 years before in the wars.

He wrote cracked down on clergy using their positions to profit. He wrote a book, *Pastoral Care*, which was a manual for how to be a minister throughout the middle ages. He was connected to the development of church music. The Gregorian chant is named after him. He promoted the development of Benedictine Monk system.

Unfortunately, he wrote stories of the saints claiming absurd miracles that became a firm teaching of the church of that era. Legends of supernatural power were comforting to the volatile times people lived in where death was around every corner. He began to press the idea of purgatory, the suffering and penance that all believers must endure. The believer must keep paying God with prayers and acts of repentance now in this life to shorten the time spent suffering in purgatory before we could be clean enough to enter God's presence in heaven. Obviously this opened the door for some of the later self-mutilation ideas for holiness.

He was incredibly humble. When the bishop of Alexandria called him the Worldwide Pope, he was upset. He wrote to the bishop, "I know who I am, and I know who you are – in position my brother, in character my father...I beg your sweet holiness to call me this no more, since honours which you wrongly bestow on me are stolen from others." The title Gregory chose for himself was "servant of the servants of the Lord."

**f. Next Month: The Nightmare for Faith Begins! AD 630-1000**