
WITNESS TO THE FAITH

Church History for Young Catholics

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Chapter

1

The Early Church

Abraham

Father of God's Chosen People. God promised that Abraham's descendants would become a great nation, and that all the nations of the Earth would be blessed through him.

Covenant

A special promise that binds people together. By God's covenant with Israel, they became His Chosen People, and He became their God.

Israel

The name of Isaac's son, Abraham's grandson; also the name of the nation that descended from him.

The Jewish People Await the Messiah

Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned and fell from grace, God promised them that He would send a Redeemer. The entire Old Testament of the Bible is the story of the Jewish people, God's Chosen People. It is the story of their search and preparation for the coming of the Redeemer, or **Messiah**—that is, Savior. The Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah and explained the signs by which the Messiah might be identified. During His lifetime, Jesus Christ fulfilled all the prophecies. **He is the Messiah.**

Abraham is the “father of the Hebrew people.” Abraham was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob. After making a **covenant** with Jacob, Our Lord changed Jacob's name to **Israel**. Israel had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel, the Hebrew people. Ultimately, the Hebrews, or Jews, settled in **Palestine**, the region between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Geographically, Palestine is a desirable region because it is a *trading crossroads*. As a result, powerful nations since the dawn of civilization have sought to control it. The Assyrians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans have all fought to rule Palestine.

The Jews, who considered Palestine their homeland, often fought, usually unsuccessfully, to defend this strip of land. The Assyrians and



Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter, Perugino

the Chaldeans eventually took the Jews into captivity. In 538 B.C., Cyrus, the king of Persia released them. He allowed them to return to Palestine and rebuild their Temple, which had been destroyed.

The Jews later fell under the dominion of the Greeks. In 164 B.C., the Greeks tried to impose their pagan religious customs on the Jews. However, the Jews refused to comply with these pagan rituals and instead rebelled. Under the leadership of the Machabee brothers, the Jews won their independence from the Greeks. The Machabees ruled Judea until the Romans conquered it in 39 B.C.

By the first century A.D., Rome was the greatest empire in the world. Rome ruled with a firm hand, but whenever possible a benevolent one. The Romans always believed that their subjects would be less likely to revolt if they had some

164 B.C. – 64 A.D.

164 B.C.

The Greeks dominate Palestine and try to impose their customs, but the Jews resist. In time, led by the Machabee brothers, the Jews win their independence.

39 B.C.

The Romans conquer the Holy Land.

33 A.D.

Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ; the Church is born, and the message of Christianity spreads. Some try to stop it, including a young Pharisee named Saul, but after a vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, he begins preaching the Gospel himself.

42-44 A.D.

Herod Agrippa, to please his Jewish subjects, persecutes the followers of Christ; James is killed, and Peter escapes the same fate only by an angel's intervention. After only two years, however, Agrippa dies as well.

50 A.D.

The first council of the Church meets at Jerusalem to determine whether Gentile converts must conform to Jewish customs. After the Apostles listen and discuss the matter, Peter proclaims the verdict: such observance will not be required.

64 A.D.

Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians begins.



Palestine

The region that became the Israelites' homeland.

Sanhedrin

The Jewish supreme court of justice.

Pharisees

A group of religious authorities who insisted on strict observance of the Mosaic Law, and hated the Romans who occupied the Holy Land.

Sadducees

A group of religious leaders who were less zealous for the Law and tried to compromise with the Romans.

input into their own local government and affairs. Thus, the Romans allowed the Jews to have the **Sanhedrin**, which was the Jewish supreme court of justice. The Sanhedrin was composed of a **high priest**, who was in charge, and seventy members chosen from among the priests and scribes.

In addition to the Sanhedrin, two significant religious factions also played an important role in early first-century Palestine. The first group was the **Pharisees**. The Pharisees were religious zealots. They insisted that the Jews strictly observe the Mosaic Law, even in the smallest details, including ritual washing and the consumption of food. They were also extreme nationalists. They hated the Romans. They felt that only the Jews should rule Judea.

The second religious group was the **Sadducees**. They were the exact opposite of the Pharisees. They tended to not take their religion too seriously. In addition, because they generally represented the wealthier part of Jewish society, they tried to work with the Romans to protect their prosperity. They usually supported the Romans at the expense of Judea. They tried to dampen any nationalist sentiments. They stressed personal concerns over national interests. Among the Jewish community, they had a reputation for being schemers seeking to enhance themselves personally and financially.

Christ's Message

During His public ministry, Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Catholic Church, never traveled beyond the Holy Land. He began His ministry preaching first to the people of His native Galilee. Then, He expanded his message to the people of Judea, and ultimately to the people of Palestine. During His life, Our Lord chose Twelve Apostles to continue to spread His message after His death. Initially, the Apostles continued preaching in Palestine to the Jews. However, when the Jews refused to accept the message of Christianity, the Apostles began evangelizing the Gentiles.

Christ preached a message of penance and forgiveness of sins. He instituted the seven sacraments and explained their necessity for salvation, and He established a Church that would continue to teach, convert, and bring people to salvation until the end of time.

However, Christ's message was not the Messianic message that the Jews were expecting or seeking. Christ made it plain that His Kingdom "was not of this world." The Jews were looking for a worldly leader who would free them from the Romans and restore the greatness that Israel had known under King David. Christ's message of penance, forgiveness, and eternal salvation was not what they wanted to hear. Because His message differed so greatly from what they expected, they rejected it and Him.

While many Jews were simply disappointed in Our Lord's message, the Jewish leaders found it intolerable. The Pharisees hated Jesus because he pointed out their hypocrisy. They insisted that others follow the Jewish Law, while they flaunted it. The Sadducees saw Christ as an agitator and revolutionary who would arouse the wrath of the Romans. Thus, both groups sought Our Lord's condemnation by the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin condemned Christ and turned Him over to the Romans for execution because the Jews lacked the authority to execute anyone.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, initially showed little interest in what he perceived as a local Jewish matter. He began to realize the extent of the problem only when the scribes and Pharisees incited a mob to the edge of violence. As governor, he could not afford a riot: better to sentence one man to death than deal with a rioting city. Thus, this weak man condemned an innocent man to death.

The Growth of the Early Church

Christianity succeeded initially because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Our Lord had promised to rise, and He did. Only God could raise Himself from the dead. St. Paul writes that if Christ had not risen from the dead, then Paul's teaching and the entirety of the Catholic Faith would be in vain (1 Cor. 15:13). The Resurrection is the culmination of Our Lord's life on Earth. It is the greatest of His miracles and the central pillar of Catholicism. This miracle confirmed the Apostles' belief in Him.

Our Lord had also promised that, once He was gone, He would send another Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, to be with them forever (John 14:16-17). At Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, He fundamentally changed them. They had been cowering in the Upper Room, afraid to venture forth. Once they had been imbued with the Holy Spirit, they became fearless champions of Catholicism, ready to lay down their lives—and most of them would die as martyrs.

Led by St. Peter, the Apostles left the Upper Room and went out to face the crowds gathered for the Jewish celebration of Pentecost. Peter spoke to the crowd about Our Lord and His message of penance and forgiveness. People of many nations heard his words in their own language. His words moved them to embrace Catholicism and ask to be baptized. That day, three



The Resurrection

Chapter

7

The Church Continues Converting Europe and Faces Its Greatest Adversary



St. Paulinus of York



St. Felix of Burgundy

Introduction

During the seventh century, the Catholic Church experienced some of its greatest triumphs. The Faith continued to grow in Ireland and Britain. The Gospel came to the German peoples, who embraced it. In France, the descendants of Clovis and Clotilde grew in their love for Christ and His Church. It seemed that all of Europe was turning ever more toward the Catholic Faith. However, in the desert of Arabia, one of the greatest threats that Christianity has ever known was about to sweep forth.

The Church Grows in Britain

At the time of Augustine of Canterbury's death, only Kent and Essex had entered the Church, but missionaries in Britain continued to spread the Faith. Sometime between 625 and 633, Paulinus of York converted King Edwin of Northumbria to Catholicism. Pope Gregory had sent Paulinus to Britain around 604, in answer to St. Augustine's request for more priests after the Baptism of King Ethelbert. In addition to converting King Edwin, Paulinus converted many of the king's subjects. Following the death of Edwin in 633, Paulinus returned to Kent. He was subsequently made bishop of Rochester and archbishop of York. St. Paulinus died in 644.

The conversion of King Sigebert of East Anglia seems primarily due to the efforts of St. Felix of Burgundy. As with much of Britain's early history,



St. Willibrord Preaching to the Frisians, George Sturm

records are scarce and unclear. Apparently, Sigebert was baptized while in France, where he obtained the services of St. Felix, whom Pope Honorius I named bishop of East Anglia. Felix traveled from Burgundy, where he had served as a monk at one of St. Columban's monasteries. He arrived in East Anglia around 630. For the next seventeen years, Felix evangelized the people of East Anglia. By the time he died in 647, he seems to have converted that kingdom.

While most of Britain was becoming Catholic, the ruler of Mercia, King Penda, resolved to remain a pagan. Penda became king around 626. Over the next years, he consolidated his power by defeating some enemies and allying with others. In 633, Penda felt strong enough to challenge Edwin of Northumbria, the strongest king in Britain. In October 633, Penda defeated and killed Edwin at the Battle of Hatfield Chase. Edwin's death forced Paulinus to

622 A.D. – 722 A.D.

622 A.D.

Mohammed and his followers are driven out of Mecca and flee to Medina, a journey known as the "hegira" (flight).

630 A.D.

Mohammed rides into Mecca at the head of an army, beginning Islam's conquest of the Arabic world.

637 A.D.

The Muslims capture Jerusalem.

664 A.D.

The Synod of Whitby resolves the date of Easter among the British and Irish.

690-739 A.D.

St. Willibrord brings the Gospel to Frisia (Germany and the Netherlands).

711-714 A.D.

A Muslim army under Tariq overruns Spain.

722 A.D.

At the Battle of Covadonga, Pelayo and his men successfully resist the Muslims' attempt to wipe out the last tiny piece of Catholic Spain.



King Oswald

flee Northumbria. Penda subsequently defeated the East Angles in battle, killing their king, Egric, as well as former King Sigebert, who had retired to a monastery. Egric had hoped that Sigebert's presence at the battle would boost his troops' morale. For a time, paganism became triumphant, as Penda ravaged the two conquered kingdoms.

Finally, in 654, King Edwin's nephew, Oswald, defeated Penda in battle and reconquered Northumbria. Oswald immediately requested missionaries from St. Columba's abbey of Iona. These monks built a monastery on the island of Lindisfarne, which became the headquarters for their missionary activities.

Meanwhile, Penda's baptized son, Peada, who had married Oswald's daughter, became king of Mercia. When he returned to Mercia, Peada brought along four priests to begin evangelizing his pagan kingdom. One of these men, an Irish priest named Diuma, became the first bishop of Mercia in 655.

The Synod of Whitby

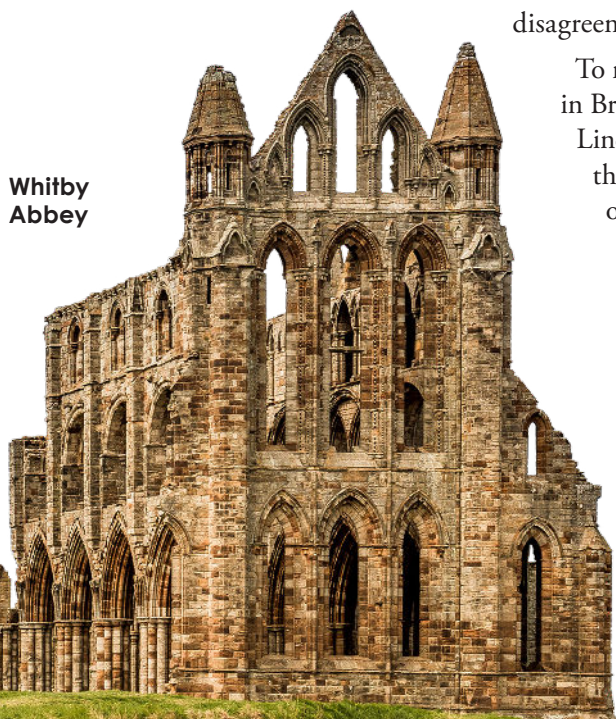
By the middle of the seventh century, the situation in Britain had quieted to the point where Church leaders could discuss theological matters. Prior to this time, the Church had simply sought to evangelize and exist in the face of the barbarians and pagans like Penda. The issue that caused the consternation involved the question of the date of Easter.

Unlike other holy days, such as Christmas, Easter does not fall on a fixed date every year. A dispute erupted between the Irish, who followed the tradition established by St. Patrick and St. Columba, and those Catholics with a Roman background, who followed the tradition of Augustine of Canterbury. The Romans celebrated Easter a week later than the Irish did. Of course, disorder, disagreements, and disharmony resulted.

To resolve the Easter issue, in 664 Church leaders in Britain convened a synod at Whitby. Monks from Lindisfarne represented the Irish position. They argued that their Easter practices were based on the traditions of St. Columba. The Romans, based in Canterbury, argued that Rome, the center of the universal Church, must control such questions. They agreed with the Irish that St. Columba was a good and holy saint, but they felt that in this instance he had made a mistake, which they now needed to correct. When the two sides failed to reach an agreement, King Oswald, the leading British king, decided the issue by declaring that at least Northumbria would follow the tradition of the popes.

The Hierarchy in Britain

In 665, when Pope Vitalian (657-672) learned of the way that King Oswald had dealt



Whitby Abbey

with the Easter controversy, he was very pleased. He encouraged Oswald to continue working to bring Catholicism to all parts of Britain. To assist Oswald, in 668 Vitalian sent a group of Benedictine monks to Britain, led by St. Theodore of Tarsus, a 66-year-old Greek monk whom Vitalian had named archbishop of Canterbury.

When Archbishop Theodore arrived in Britain the following year, he completely reorganized the English hierarchy. He created several new sees and appointed excellent leaders to them. For example, he installed Wilfrid, a monk from Lindisfarne, as the archbishop of York—the second most important ecclesiastical position in England. Wilfrid had been the principle proponent of the “Roman” position on Easter at the Whitby Synod.

During Theodore’s twenty-two years as archbishop (668-690), he dedicated himself to educating his flock. He quickly established a monastery school at Canterbury, which taught literature, astronomy, mathematics, Latin, and Greek. St. Aldhelm, the future bishop of Malmesbury in Wessex, was educated at Canterbury. Among the Benedictine monks who accompanied St. Theodore from Rome was Benedict Biscop. In 685, Benedict founded the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow. Benedictine monk St. Bede (673-735), who is considered the “Father of English History” because of his famous *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, spent almost his entire life at Jarrow, first as a student and then as its most famous teacher and author. It is from these English monastic schools that the leaders of the Carolingian renaissance of the late eighth century would come. With the help of scholars like Alcuin of York, Charlemagne would usher in a new era of learning, causing even secular historians to agree that the “Dark Ages” had indeed ended.



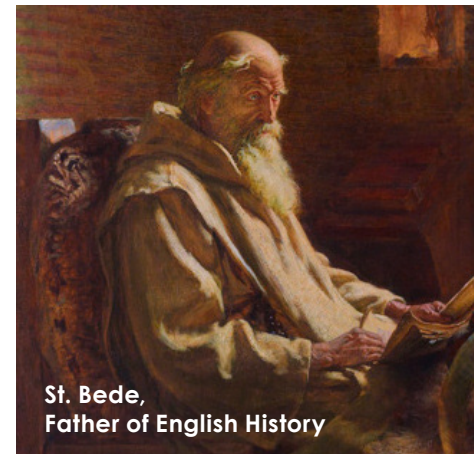
**St. Theodore
of Tarsus**

The Church in German Lands

The Irish Monks

Probably because Ireland is a small island, the Irish had an almost insatiable desire to explore what lay beyond their shores. This desire, coupled with their missionary zeal, drove them to nearly every corner of the known world—and some unknown corners. For example, St. Brendan of Clonfert (484-577), one of the “Twelve Apostles of Ireland,” is known as “The Navigator,” because of a remarkable voyage he made which may have reached Iceland, or even, some claim, North America.

Although the exact location of Brendan’s voyage remains a mystery, others of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland traveled to the European continent, where they built monasteries and evangelized the barbarian tribes. Recall that St. Columban had established the monastery of Luxeuil in France. Luxeuil became the center for the reconversion of Europe.



**St. Bede,
Father of English History**



St. Rupert Baptizes the Bavarian Duke Theodo II, Francis de Neve



Saint Kilian

The Rhine River provides one of the main waterways through northern Europe. Because it was always easier and faster for people of this period to travel by water than by land, people settled along rivers. Several barbarian tribes had made their homes along the Rhine River or its tributaries and in its nearby forests. Among these tribes were the Bavarians, the Alemanni, and the Thuringians.

One of the first missionaries to the Bavarians was St. Emmeram, who established the Church of Ratisbon (present-day Regensburg) and preached to their leader, Duke Theodo II (625-714). St. Emmeram's work was cut short by his martyrdom in 652. The man most responsible for the Bavarians' conversion was St. Rupert of Worms, the founder of the city of Salzburg, Austria. Rupert preached to the Bavarians and baptized Duke Theodo sometime in the early part of the eighth century. In May 716, Pope Gregory II (715-731) sent Bishop Martinian to create a Church hierarchy in Bavaria. Additional missionaries followed. With Duke Theodo's assistance and protection, Saint Erhard of Regensburg founded a number of monasteries. During a pilgrimage to Rome, Frankish monk St. Corbinian met Gregory II. Gregory made him a bishop and sent him to evangelize Bavaria. In 724, Corbinian arrived in Bavaria. He built a Benedictine monastery and school in Freising. He died in 730 and is buried in Freising Cathedral. Many of the towns in Bavaria, still a strongly Catholic area of Germany, developed from and around the monasteries and churches that Irish monks had started with the help of Duke Theodo.

The Germanic tribes known as the Alemanni lived in the area around the Upper Rhine River. Clovis had conquered them in 496 and made their land part of his kingdom. However, he had not ruled them very strictly, so they remained somewhat independent and pagan. Late in his life, St. Columban left Luxeuil to preach to various barbarian tribes, including the Alemanni. Columban and several companions sailed up the Rhine and established a monastery at Bregenz. When Columban continued to Italy to evangelize the Lombards, he left St. Gall behind to continue the work among the Alemanni. For more than thirty years, Gall evangelized the Alemanni. He also trained other monks, who went forth spreading the Faith. A strikingly beautiful monastery, named in his honor, was built on the spot where he had lived as a hermit. Today the Abbey of Saint Gall possesses one of the finest libraries in the world, with books dating from the ninth century. For his work in converting the Alemanni, St. Gall is rightly called "The Apostle of Switzerland."

Around 686, Pope Conon (686-687) consecrated Irish monk St. Kilian as bishop to a Germanic pagan tribe, the Thuringians, who lived in central Germany. Kilian converted Duke Gosbert of Franconia and founded the Church of Wurzburg. According to tradition, Kilian had told Gosbert that his marriage to his brother's widow, Geilana, was invalid. One day in 689, while Gosbert was away, Geilana, who had not converted, had Kilian and two of his companions murdered. Despite this setback, the Catholic Faith thrived in Franconia, and future popes sent more missionaries to the Germans.



Chapter

27

The Fate of France (1600-1700)



Map of France

Huguenots

A group of French Calvinists; religious wars broke out in France between them and the Catholics.

The Seventeenth Century: A Time of Choosing

In a real sense, the first half of the seventeenth century was the last chance for most European nations to choose their national religion. After 1648, no nation would change its majority religion, or even come close to doing so. It was a time of choosing.

Although in most cases, the choice of national religion would be made by national leaders, and nearly always on the battlefield, the Church continued to work to convert and evangelize individuals. As in every century, great saints affected the world.

In the seventeenth century, the Church, and the Jesuits especially, made a special effort to support great art. The artistic era known as the Baroque Age was the most magnificent period of art in world history. It developed as a direct result of the Catholic Reformation. Even Protestants recognized the magnificence of Baroque art. They too chose to create Baroque paintings.

Christendom in Crisis

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, there were great European powers. Germany was a patchwork quilt of quarreling Catholic and Protestant principalities. Spain, under Isabel and Ferdinand, Charles V, and King Philip II, had become an impregnable fortress of Catholicism



Stained-Glass Window
of St. Vincent de Paul

where Protestantism could gain no foothold, however small. With the defeat of the Spanish Armada, England was lost to the Faith, at least for the foreseeable future. France, the *eldest daughter of the Church*, hovered on the brink. She was the greatest prize in the eyes of John Calvin. If she fell, Christendom would be irretrievably lost.

Calvinism Spreads to France

In 1559, Catherine de Medici (1519-1589), the widow of King Henry II, became the ruler of France after the accidental death of her husband. Because her son, Charles IX, was too young to reign, Catherine became regent. Catherine sought to make peace with the Calvinist revolutionaries, known as the **Huguenots**. However, it is the nature of the revolutionary never to make peace. Thus, Calvinism continued to spread throughout France, and many members

1572 A.D. – 1673 A.D.

1572 A.D.

Over two thousand Huguenots are killed in Paris in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

1590 A.D.

Henry of Navarre, a Calvinist prince who has inherited the throne of France, besieges a French Catholic army inside Paris, but a Spanish army forces him to retreat.

1593 A.D.

France has peace again when Henry is reconciled to the Church and crowned king. St. Francis de Sales is ordained and assigned to Geneva.

1598 A.D.

The Edict of Nantes guarantees religious liberty to the Huguenots.

1618 A.D.

The Thirty Years' War begins with disagreements about who should become the next Holy Roman Emperor.

1624 A.D.

St. Vincent de Paul and a few companions found the first house of the Congregation of the Missions, known today as the Vincentians.

1630 A.D.

The Edict of Restitution seems to have ended the war, but fighting breaks out again with the attacks of Gustavus Adolphus. Galileo publishes his *Dialogue on the Two Great World Systems*.

1648 A.D.

The Peace of Westphalia finally ends the Thirty Years' War.

1673 A.D.

Our Lord begins appearing to St. Margaret Mary.



Admiral Gaspard
de Coligny

Admiral

Gaspard de Coligny

Leader of the Huguenots,
who was killed by
Catherine de Medici and
her son, King Charles IX,
in the St. Bartholomew's
Day Massacre.

St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre

A preemptive attack by
the French monarchy
against the Huguenot
leaders, which got out
of control and led to a
mob killing thousands of
Calvinist civilians.

of the nobility embraced Calvinism. In 1561, the Calvinists held a service in Paris, which more than 6,000 people attended. On March 1, 1562, the first of six religious wars broke out in France.

In 1572, Catherine decided that the only solution to the ongoing religious warfare was for her daughter Marguerite to marry Henry of Navarre, a Calvinist prince. On August 18, they married, despite Pope Gregory XIII's refusal to grant a dispensation for the wedding. Great crowds flocked to Paris for the ceremony—among them, about two thousand Calvinists. The Calvinist leader in France was **Admiral Gaspard de Coligny**, whom Catherine both feared and hated. On the morning of August 22, she attempted, but failed, to have him assassinated.

There were still thousands of Calvinists remaining in Paris from the wedding, and the situation was becoming increasingly dangerous for everyone. Catherine and her son, King Charles IX, believed that the Calvinists planned to kill them in retaliation for the attempt on Coligny's life. In a preemptive strike, they decided to kill Coligny and about thirty Calvinist leaders. It was August 23, the eve of St. Bartholomew's Day. Although their plan had been to kill only the Calvinist leaders, the violence soon spread. The Catholic mob, hearing that there was a plan to kill the king and thinking that the king had ordered them to attack, killed every Calvinist they could, including women and children. During the **St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre**, the mob killed more than two thousand people.

After the massacre, Catherine sent word to all the rulers of Europe, including Pope Gregory XIII, telling them that the massacre had been necessary because of a plot that had been discovered against the life of the king. Having no other information, Pope Gregory believed her. He had a solemn hymn of gratitude sung in Rome, not for the death of the Calvinists, but for the safe delivery of the royal family. Nevertheless, the massacre horrified him. Only later would he learn the truth.

William Shakespeare once wrote: "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." King Charles IX died of tuberculosis less than two years later. His brother, Henry III, succeeded him to the throne.

Pope Sixtus V

The pontificate of Pope Gregory XIII had been turbulent, even controversial. He had reformed the calendar and had been the great benefactor of Jesuit education in Europe. Yet the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre had occurred during his pontificate (although he personally had nothing to do with it). The conclave to choose his successor knew that the next pope would need the soul of a warrior, for the future of the Church would be decided on the field of battle. Thus, they chose a pope who would fight for the Church. He decided to be called Sixtus V (1585-1590).

Realizing what was at stake in England, Pope Sixtus V fully supported Philip II during his Spanish Armada campaign. In fact,

he even offered Philip a million ducats of gold if the Armada could launch before the end of 1587. Although at times Philip and Sixtus had a tempestuous relationship, both men were dedicated to the defense of the Catholic Faith, especially in France and England.

On the morning of August 1, 1589, an insane monk mortally wounded French King Henry III. Henry had reigned for fifteen years, but had no children. As the king lay dying, he called his brother-in-law Henry of Navarre, the Calvinist prince, to his bedside. He begged Henry of Navarre to become Catholic, and he recognized him as his successor. The following day, Henry III died, and Henry of Navarre proclaimed himself King Henry IV. However, he did not become Catholic.

In fact, for the next several months, Henry IV won a number of victories over French Catholic armies who opposed him. Nevertheless, the key to France was Paris, its capital, and he was unable to capture it. By the end of April 1590, Henry was besieging Paris for a third time. Inside its walls, its starving defenders, encouraged by their priests, refused to surrender. If Paris fell, so would France.

In 1590, Spain possessed the finest soldiers in the world. Had they landed in England, they might have conquered it in a few weeks. England had defeated the Spanish because they could not access England except by sea, but they did not need their Armada to reach France. In September, a Spanish army relieved the siege of Paris and forced Henry's army to retreat. Catholicism in France had triumphed for the time being. However, Pope Sixtus V had not lived to see it, having died after a brief illness that August.

Pope Gregory XIV

The conclave to elect Sixtus V's successor recognized that Philip II had





Chapter

33

The Church Faces Modernism and World War I (1878-1919)

Pope Leo XIII

Reigned from 1878 to 1903. Wrote several important encyclicals; condemned communism, socialism, and other evils; and took various measures to improve life for Catholics around the world.

Introduction

As the Church passed through the last decades of the nineteenth century and entered the first years of the twentieth century, it faced great threats. Pope Pius IX had warned against rationalism, materialism, and atheism. These terrible philosophical errors became even greater dangers in the years after his death. As has happened all too often in history, the pope's warning was ignored by many.

Yet, as rationalism, materialism, atheism, and other great heresies afflicted the world, the Holy Spirit blessed the Church with some fine popes. Between 1878 and 1922, only three men reigned. They guided the Church during times of peace and during one of history's most terrible wars. Surprisingly, despite the holy lives that these popes led, only one has been canonized thus far.

The Election of Pope Leo XIII

As often happens after a long pontificate, the Sacred College elected an elderly man whom they expected to have a rather short pontificate. Such was the case in 1878, when the Sacred College elected the long-time archbishop of Perugia, Vincenzo Pecci. Born in March 1810, Archbishop Pecci was almost exactly 68 years old when, as **Pope Leo XIII** (1878-1903), he began one of the longest pontificates



The Apotheosis of St. Pius X,
Biagio Biagetti

in history on February 20, 1878. He would reign until he was 93 years old.

In choosing Leo XIII, the College of Cardinals had elected an extraordinary man. Leo was not only a remarkable theologian, philosopher, and intellectual but also a brilliant diplomat and economist. He was also a prophet, as we will see.

Leo the Diplomat

As Popes Pius VI and VII had demonstrated, one of the main functions of the Holy Father is ensuring that the people can receive the sacraments. In 1878, as Leo XIII ascended to the Chair of St. Peter, nations throughout the world were threatening the free access of Catholics to the sacraments. Leo immediately acted to remedy the situation.

In Germany, he worked with the Catholic political party to help abolish the

1871 A.D. – 1920 A.D.

1871 A.D.

France loses the Franco-Prussian War and forms a new government, the Third Republic.

1891 A.D.

Pope Leo XIII issues *Rerum Novarum*.

1905 A.D.

Pope Pius X issues a decree urging frequent reception of Holy Communion. In France, the Third Republic repeals Napoleon's Concordat, denying government support to any Church activity and confiscating Church property.

1907 A.D.

Pope Pius X issues two encyclicals condemning modernism.

1910 A.D.

Pope Pius X lowers the age for receiving First Holy Communion.

1914-1918 A.D.

World War I ravages Europe. Pope Benedict XV pleads for peace and tries to assist the victims.

1919 A.D.

The Treaty of Versailles is signed, establishing the terms of peace between the Allies and Germany after World War I. Germany is treated harshly, prompting Pope Benedict XV to later warn that "the seeds of former enmities remain." The situation in France begins to improve, as Catholics in Parliament restore some rights to the Church.

1920 A.D.

Pope Benedict XV canonizes Joan of Arc.



Pope Leo XIII

May Laws and counteract the Kulturkampf. Leo's diplomacy and support helped German Catholics to rid themselves of these terrible laws. Later, Leo formed a strong relationship with Germany's king, Kaiser Wilhelm II.

In 1870, after France's humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, France formed a new government, the Third Republic. This new government was largely anti-Catholic and enacted several anti-clerical laws. In 1884, Leo XIII issued an encyclical addressed to the people of France. While he recognized the State's right to rule, he condemned any philosophy that desired to "eradicate the foundations of Christian truth," because these errors would cause the "certain ruin of the State." He believed that the teachings of the Church were "very effective for the maintenance of order and the salvation of the republic." He concluded by urging the bishops and the clergy to defend the freedom of the Church, and asked the laity to work for the common good.

The deteriorating relations with Italy caused by the *Roman Question* (the dispute regarding the temporal authority of the pope in Rome and the rest of the Papal States) must have saddened Leo. Nevertheless, he remained firm and continued following the policies of Pope Pius IX. Most notably, he continued Pius IX's prohibition against Italian Catholics voting in elections. Although a ban on voting seems appalling to Americans, the Italian government had forcibly seized the Papal States and continued to enact anti-Catholic legislation. From Leo's perspective, participating in elections would legitimize these unjust acts. Nevertheless, Leo still attempted to negotiate with the Italian government to resolve the differences between the Church and the State, although to no avail.

In Great Britain, Leo restored the Scottish hierarchy, which had been vacant since 1603, but Scottish Catholics remained a tiny minority. John Knox and his followers had dealt the Church in Scotland a near-death blow. Even today, Scotland is predominantly Protestant.

Leo XIII also addressed issues in the Americas. In 1886, he named Archbishop James Gibbons the second cardinal in the United States. Two years later, he wrote an encyclical to the bishops of Brazil, congratulating them on the abolition of slavery in Brazil. In 1897, he sent an apostolic letter to all the bishops of Latin America, explaining their rights and responsibilities.

Leo the Scholar

Throughout his life, Pope Leo XIII had always valued education. He had received an excellent Jesuit education and earned doctorates in theology and canon law. In 1879, Leo published *Aeterni Patris* (Encyclical on the Restoration of Christian Philosophy). In the face of rampant secularism in colleges and universities, he called for a return to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Leo also declared St. Thomas Aquinas the patron saint of colleges and universities. Moreover, Leo took direct action. He appointed professors who accepted the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas to Church-controlled colleges in Rome.

In order to advance knowledge and research, Leo opened the Vatican Archives to scholars in 1883. Leo explained that he chose to do this because the Church had nothing to fear from the truths of history. Among the noted scholars to study in the Vatican Archives was Ludwig von Pastor, who wrote one of the greatest histories of the papacy—upon which this history is based—and used the Archives extensively for his research. Leo also refounded the Vatican Observatory, which Pope Gregory XIII, creator of the Gregorian calendar, had originally founded.

Pope Leo and the Rosary

Leo XIII had such a great devotion to Our Blessed Lady and the Rosary that he is often called the “Rosary Pope.” The declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the veneration of the Miraculous Medal had renewed devotions to the Blessed Mother. Pope Leo XIII inflamed these fires by issuing eleven encyclicals promoting the Rosary! In September 1883, he issued his first, *Supremi Apostolatus Officio* (Encyclical on Devotion of the Rosary), in which he encourages Catholics to pray the Rosary because it is such an effective spiritual weapon. In addition, Leo declared October to be the month of Mary as “Our Lady of the Rosary.”

Pope Leo XIII also supported Marian shrines, especially Lourdes, and encouraged pilgrimages to them. To support the Miraculous Medal, he declared the Feast of the Miraculous Medal in 1894. He likewise encouraged Catholics to wear the scapular.

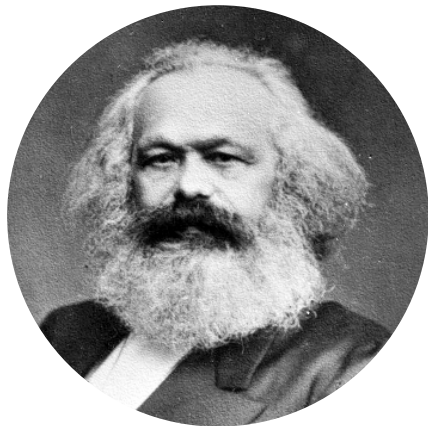
Finally, more than any previous pope, Leo XIII spoke plainly of Our Lady as the “mediatrix of all graces.” In *Dei Matris* (Encyclical on the Rosary, 1892), Leo notes that Mary “dispenses grace with a generous hand from that treasure with which from the beginning she was divinely endowed in fullest abundance that she might be worthy to be the Mother of God.” In *Fidentum Piumque Animum* (Encyclical on the Rosary, 1896), Leo wrote that because Mary is truly Our Lord’s Mother, she is “a worthy and acceptable ‘Mediatrice to the Mediator.’” Two years later, in another Rosary encyclical, Leo wrote, “From her, as from an abundant spring, are derived the streams of heavenly graces.” The theme of Mary as mediatrix would be embraced by all future popes, especially Pope St. John Paul II, who had a very special devotion to the Blessed Mother.

The Blessed Mother Presents the Rosary to St. Dominic with Pope Leo XIII



Karl Marx

German political philosopher who wrote the *Communist Manifesto*. From his writings came the twin evils of communism and socialism.



Karl Marx

Rerum Novarum

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII which addresses the rights and duties of workers and employers; rejects communism and socialism, and defends the right to own private property.

Rerum Novarum

In 1848, German philosopher **Karl Marx** had written the *Communist Manifesto*. According to Marx, no one should own private property, capitalism was evil, and workers could use violence to obtain “justice.” From his writings came the twin evils of socialism and communism. Over the next fifty years, these evils caused unspeakable suffering. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII answered Karl Marx in one of the most important encyclicals in Church history.

Issued on May 15, 1891, *Rerum Novarum* (Encyclical on Capital and Labor) addresses the rights and duties of workers and employers. Leo begins by assessing the evils of communism and socialism, and declares that they are not the solution. He defends the right to own private property. He writes that while capitalism itself is not evil, it cannot be unrestrained. Workers have rights, such as the right to organize and the right to be paid a “living wage,” but they do not have the right to use violence to obtain their goals. Leo urges workers and owners to work together for the mutual benefit of both. In an age of child labor, he asserts that workers must never be assigned tasks that are unsuited to their age or sex. He also insists that owners provide workers time off to attend to their spiritual needs. Finally, as several other popes have done, Leo stresses that the family is the fundamental element of society and must be protected.

Rerum Novarum is such a critical encyclical that in 1931, on the fortieth anniversary of its promulgation, Pope Pius XI issued *Quadragesimo Anno* (Encyclical on Reconstruction of the Social Order). Pius XI echoed most of Leo’s points but went further regarding socialism. He declared that “no one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist.” In 1991, Pope St. John Paul II issued *Centesimus Annus* (Encyclical on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*). Like his predecessors, John Paul II condemned socialism. He affirmed the right to own private property, the importance of human dignity, and the need for owners to pay their workers a living wage.

Pope Leo XIII and his successors provided a framework for a just social economic system based on Christian principles. Unfortunately, too few have listened.

Leo the Prophet

At important times throughout history, usually in moments of crisis, Our Lord has granted the pope a vision. The revelation of the outcome of the Battle of Lepanto to Pius V is perhaps the most famous. Our Lord also granted Leo XIII a prophetic vision.

On October 13, 1884, as Pope Leo XIII finished saying Mass, he collapsed to the floor. His attendants feared that the 74-year-old pontiff had suffered a heart attack or stroke, but the truth was far worse. For several minutes, Leo lay motionless. When he revived, he exclaimed: “Oh, what a terrible picture I was permitted to see!”

He later explained that Our Lord had granted him a vision of the twentieth century, during which the power of Satan would reach its utmost. In response to this terrible prophecy, Leo composed the Prayer to St. Michael, and he asked that it be recited at every Mass. Until about 1970, it was. Recently, many priests have renewed this tradition by leading the faithful in this prayer after Mass: “St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the Power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.”

Leo and the Missions

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the major European powers (including France, Germany, and Italy) became involved in what was known as the Great Race. This was a race to acquire colonies in Africa and Asia. The Europeans needed colonies for raw materials that were scarce in Europe. Colonies could also provide food for Europe. Additionally, overseas colonies granted European nations a degree of prestige. Unfortunately, despite being Christians, the Europeans treated the natives of the colonies very badly. Leo XIII took several steps to aid these indigenous peoples.

First, Leo wrote a number of encyclicals defending indigenous peoples. In 1890, he wrote *Catholicae Ecclesiae* (Encyclical on Slavery in the Missions), which specifically condemns the African slave trade. He noted that “the Church from the beginning sought to completely eliminate slavery, whose wretched yoke has oppressed many people.”





The Signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, 28th June 1919, William Orpen



**British Newspaper
Announcing the Signing of
the Peace Treaty in 1919**

families locate missing prisoners and soldiers. He helped in the exchange of tens of thousands of POWs, especially those suffering serious illnesses. He condemned the blocking of supplies to the starving people of Central Europe. In May 1915, Benedict denounced the Muslim Ottoman Empire's genocidal attack on Armenian Christians in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey).

Benedict had a special concern for the children victimized by the war. In 1916, he appealed to the people of the United States on behalf of the starving children of Belgium. In November 1919, he wrote an encyclical in which he appealed to the entire Church to help the starving children in Central Europe.

Benedict the Diplomat

During the pontificate of Pius X, relations with many European countries, such as France, Germany, and Italy, had declined. Pope Benedict XV's peace efforts, as well as his charitable work, created more positive relationships with many nations. As a result, during and immediately after the war, the interactions between these nations and the Vatican improved.

In 1919, Catholics won enough seats in the French Parliament to restore certain rights to the Church and the people. The following year, Pope Benedict canonized St. Joan of Arc, the most beloved of French saints.

In Germany, following the death of Otto von Bismarck, the Catholic political party increased its influence. Catholics demanded that the laws suppressing the Jesuits be abolished. Finally, in 1917, the German government rescinded those terrible anti-Jesuit laws.

The relationship between the Vatican and the government of Italy had been cold for some time. Leo XIII had allowed Italian Catholics to

vote in local elections but not national elections. Benedict XV extended Leo's policy to allow Catholics to vote in national elections. This improved the relations between Church and State, while also creating a pro-Church political party. Soon this party began to win seats in the Italian Parliament, replacing anti-Catholic politicians with good Catholics.

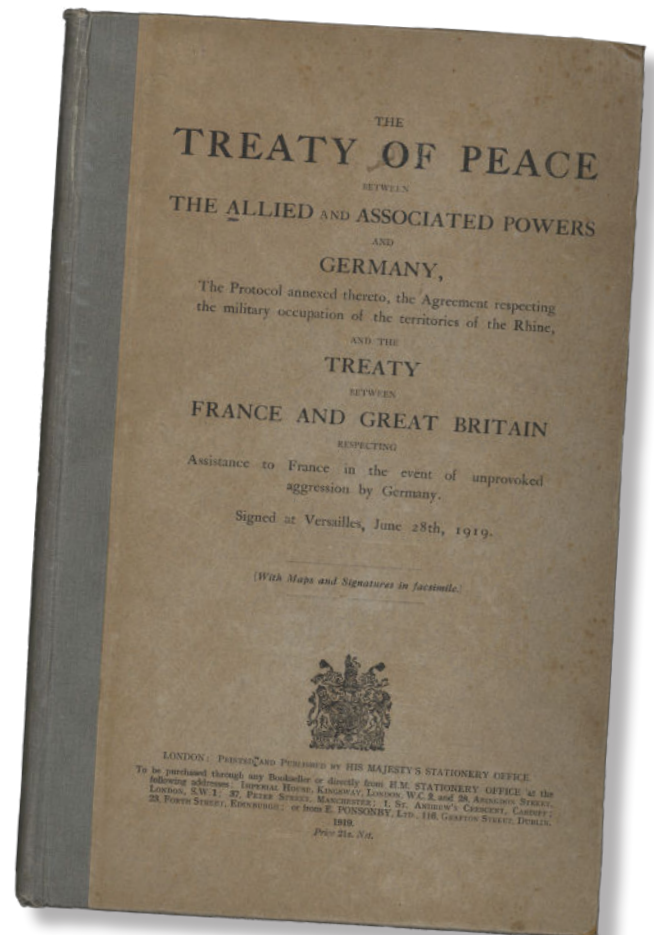
The Treaty of Versailles

Although no one had worked harder for peace than Pope Benedict XV, the leaders of the world declined to invite him to the post-war peace conference at Versailles. Benedict deeply desired to participate. However, the Italian government, still angry with the pope over the Roman Question, had orchestrated a secret agreement that banned the pope from participating. In June 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed, establishing the terms of peace between the Allies and Germany after World War I. Germany was treated harshly.

Pope Benedict XV realized almost immediately that the Treaty of Versailles contained serious flaws. In May 1920, he issued his encyclical *Pacem, Dei Munus Pulcherrimum* (Encyclical on Peace and Christian Reconciliation). He wrote that, although treaties had been signed, "the germs of former enmities remain." He also said that "there can be no stable peace or lasting treaties ... unless there be a return of mutual charity to appease hate and banish enmity."

The Prophecy Fulfilled

Pope Benedict XV was correct. The Treaty of Versailles, which treated Germany so unfairly, had planted the seeds of hate that would help spawn the rise of Nazism in Germany. In Russia, another great evil was about to spread its malevolence across the world. The prophecy of Pope Leo XIII was about to be fulfilled.



Cover of the Treaty of Versailles in English

Oral Exercises

1. What was the subject of *Rerum Novarum*?
2. What did Pope Leo XIII write about private property?
3. Which pope wrote the Prayer to St. Michael?
4. What was the motto of Pope Pius X?
5. What two decrees regarding Holy Communion earned Pius X the title "Pope of the Holy Eucharist"?
6. What heresy did Pope Pius X call the "synthesis of all heresies"?
7. Which pope dedicated his pontificate to ending World War I?
8. Name at least three things the Church did during World War I to alleviate the suffering of soldiers and civilians.