

Historical Theology

The Papacy & the Introduction & Development of Extra-Biblical Doctrines

Don White

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Turmoil with the Roman Empire

August 24, 410 Visigoths sack Rome then left Rome 13 days later.

Augustine wrote, "City of God".

451-53 Attila the Hun

455 Vandals overtake Rome

476 End of the Western Roman Empire

"The Catholic Church was the one great Roman institution which survived the collapse of the Empire in the West. If it was to exploit these circumstances, it needed strong and wise leadership; and this was abundantly provided by one of the greatest of Rome's bishops, pope Gregory I – known to history as Gregory the Great." (Needham, 330)

Gregory the Great (born 540; pope 590-604).

"Gregory belonged to an old aristocratic family. He was in turn, a civil servant, a monk, a papal ambassador in Constantinople, and then abbot of a Benedictine monastery in Rome, before being elected pope in 590."

Gregory's main areas of challenge and achievement were:

Political Leadership.

"During Gregory's fourteen years as spiritual leader of the Western Church, we see the papacy beginning to become the great political as well as spiritual power which would dominate Western Europe for 1,000 years." (Ibid. 331)

"When the Arian Lombards invaded Italy, they took control of the north and south, thus surrounding Rome in central Italy, where a large strip of land belonged to the papacy. The papacy was by this time one of the greatest landowners in the Mediterranean...which it had acquired from wealthy Catholics, who wished to honor God and the apostle Peter by enlarging the domain of Peter's successors, the bishops of Rome." (Ibid)

Faced with the Lombard threat, and with no prospect of help from the Byzantine Empire, which had now become almost powerless in the West, Italian Catholics turned to the pope for political leadership. Without consulting the Byzantine emperor Maurice (582-602), who still had a governor resident in Ravenna (northern Italy), Gregory made treaties of his own with the Lombard invaders, and was thus instrumental in bringing peace to Italy. No previous pope had ever dared to behave with such political independence. Gregory also urged the Byzantine Empire to make peace both with the Lombards and the Franks. He established an important relationship between the papacy and the Frankish monarchy: later popes would come to rely on the Franks instead of the Byzantine

emperors for political and military support.” (Ibid. 331-32)

“Gregory also used his papal lands to give food and shelter to many who had been made destitute by the Lombards. In all these ways, Gregory helped to make the papacy into a powerful social and political institution, governing the western-central region of Italy as an independent state.” (Ibid.)

Church Leadership.

“Gregory made every effort to use his authority as patriarch of the West to promote Church life and strengthen the papacy’s position.

“He oversaw Visigothic Spain’s conversion from Arianism to Catholicism.

“He tried to stop the Frankish monarchy from taking control of bishoprics and selling them for money (the Frankish kings frustrated Gregory in this, but the popes renewed these reforming efforts with greater success in the 8th century).

“He fought hard against Manichaeism in Italy and Donatism in North-West Africa, persuading the civil authorities to punish all non-Catholics (except the Jews, whom Gregory protected).

“He had a famous and fierce controversy with patriarch John the Faster of Constantinople (582-95). The Byzantine emperor Maurice had officially bestowed on John the title “ecumenical” or “universal” patriarch – the spiritual leader of all Christians. Gregory protested passionately that none of the five patriarchs (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) could claim such an arrogant title, although Rome had a paramount place of honor among them as “first among equals”, by virtue of its spiritual descent

from Peter, prince of the apostles. To the constant embarrassment of later popes, Gregory declared: “Whoever calls himself universal priest, or desires that title, is by his pride the forerunner of Antichrist.”

Amazingly, despite Gregory’s strong words, his next-but-one-successor, pope Boniface III (607), was quite happy to claim the title of “ecumenical bishop”. Gregory preferred to call himself “the servant of the servants of God”. (Later popes have retained this title too, but not usually in the humble spirit of Gregory.” (Ibid.332-33)

Theology.

“Gregory was a devout disciple of Augustine of Hippo in his theology, but he blended Augustine’s theology with other elements drawn from popular religious beliefs and practices of his own day.

“He taught that all human beings are born sinful, and that Christ alone by His sovereign grace can rescue sinners from their bondage to sin. This salvation comes through baptism, in which the Holy Spirit causes the sinner (including the new-born baby) to be spiritually reborn. However the Christian must make up for sins committed after baptism through works of love. Gregory also taught that, for believers, holy communion had the power to wash away post-baptismal sin, and that if at death a Christian had any sins left which had not been dealt with, he must pay for them by suffering in purgatory, a place of purifying fire midway between heaven and hell. Theologians had considered belief in purgatory to be an opinion rather than a definite Christian doctrine in the West (although not in the East, which has never accepted the idea). Based on this belief in purgatory, Gregory introduced the practice of celebrating special communion services for the dead; such services, Gregory thought were effective for remitting sins of

departed souls and thus hastening their passage from purgatory to heaven. By Gregory's time, people in the West were calling holy communion "the mass", from the closing words of the Latin communion liturgy – *ite, missa est* ("go, the congregation is dismissed") – which the bishop or presbyter spoke at the end of communion. The word "mass" had first been used as a description of communion in the 5th century; by the 6th, it was the standard term for it throughout the Western Church." (Ibid. 333)

"Gregory believed that in the mass or communion Christ was sacrificed anew (and there is a legend that the crucified appeared to him while celebrating the mass). This notion of the mass as sacrifice eventually became standard doctrine of the Western church—until it was rejected by Protestants in the sixteenth century. (Gonzalez, 288)

Church Worship.

"Gregory contributed richly to the development of Western worship. He opposed the superstitious veneration of images or icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints, but approved of using them to adorn churches as teaching aids for those who could not read. Gregory's influence in this area helped to promote some division of opinion between East and West during the great iconoclast controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries.

"He introduced some changes in the liturgy for holy communion, including a new collection of hymns to be sung alternating by presbyter and congregation or choir. "Gregorian chant" is also named after Gregory. Scholars think that he wrote a series of chants for the use of each of the festivals of the Christian year, and that what we now call Gregorian chant arose out of this. (Needham, 334)

Gregory' Writings.

"Some 838 of his letters have survived. They are addressed to bishops, missionaries and secular rulers in all parts of Europe, and tell us a lot about Gregory and the times he lived in." (Ibid.)

"Gregory wrote a long commentary on Job, using Origen's threefold method of interpretation – literal, moral and spiritual. The all-important "spiritual" interpretation was highly allegorical in nature. This emphasis on the allegorical meaning of the text became the normal way of expounding the Bible among Western theologians in the Middle Ages. Gregory also wrote homilies on Ezekiel and the Gospels." (Ibid. 335)

"The *Pastoral Care* is a book in which Gregory set forth his ideals of the Christian ministry. He said that a pastor must set a personal example by the way he lives, be a servant not a ruler, meditate daily on the Word of God, love truth more than popularity, and give a high place to preaching (Gregory himself was a great preacher). The *Pastoral Care* became the standard textbook on the ministry throughout the Middle Ages in the West, and is generally reckoned to be a classic work on the subject." (Ibid.)

"By the end of the sixth century all of the seven acts that the Roman Catholic Church regards as sacraments were in use and had an exalted position in worship. Sacerdotalism, the belief that the substance of the ordinance is efficacious through the priestly celebrant, steadily gained ground. This led to an increasing emphasis on the separation of the clergy and the laity." (Cairns, 153)

"The veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, developed rapidly by 590 and led to the adoption of the doctrine of her

immaculate conception in 1854 and her miraculous assumption to heaven in 1950. The False interpretation of Scripture and the mass of miracles associated with Mary in the apocryphal gospels created great reverence for her. The Nestorian and other Christological controversies of the fourth century resulted in the acceptance of her as the “Mother of God” and entitled her to special honors in the liturgy.” (Ibid.)

“Clement, Jerome, and Tertullian had ascribed perpetual virginity to Mary. Augustine believed that the mother of the sinless Christ had never committed actual sin....What at first was merely acknowledgement of her exalted position as Christ’s mother soon became belief in her intercessory powers because it was thought that the Son would be glad to listen to the requests of His mother.” (Ibid.)

Extra-biblical doctrine

Papacy - Apostolic Succession?

“Pope” means “father”

The term “vicar” comes from the Latin word *vicarious*, which means “instead of.” In the Catholic Church, the vicar is the representative of a higher ranking official, with all of the same authority and power that that official has. Calling the pope the “Vicar of Christ” implies that he has the same power and authority that Christ had over the church. Passages used to support their doctrine are John 21:16-17 and Matthew 16:18-19.

Matthew 16:21-23

John

Acts 15:13-21

Galatians 2:7-10, 11-14

1 Timothy 2:3-4

Purgatory

Based upon 2 Maccabees 12:39-45; Matthew 12:31 (See also Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10) 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

Denies the sufficiency of Christ’s Atonement

1 John 1:8-2:2; Hebrews 7:23-25; 9:9-14, 27-28; Romans 3:21-26

Mass as a sacrifice

Sacrificing of Christ anew.

Hebrews 10:10 (See also verses against purgatory).

The Immaculate Conception, Assumption & Perpetual Virginity of Mary

Mary was a sinner

Romans 3:23; Luke 1:46-47 Matthew 1:24-25; 13:53-56;

Mary had other children

Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 2:12; 7:3-5; Acts 1:14

Celibacy of the clergy

1 Timothy 3:1ff

Resources:

Cairns, Earle E. Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church. Zondervan, 1996.

Gonzalez, Justo L. The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1, the Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation. HarperCollins, 2010.

Needham, Nick. 2000 Years of Christ’s Power, Vol. 1, The Age of the Early Church Fathers 1st to 6th Century. Christian Focus Publications, 2016.