

## **Lecture 19- The Early Middle Ages: The Second Five Hundred Years**

*A curtain of darkness seemed to have settled upon a world which had once been so shining and varied. But there were many points of light in that darkness. There was first of all the Christian Church which, behind all its political caprices and theological pedantries, did preserve a continuous tradition of civilisation and the spiritual life. Throughout those centuries it produced saints and missionaries whose names we still honour. It produced poets whose hymns we still sing, and in many a monastery tucked away in the forests there were scholars who studied more than the church fathers.*

*John Buchan*

*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

*John 1: 5*

### **Assigned Reading**

*The Story of Christianity*—chapters 26 & 28

### **Key Terms**

Decline and fall of Rome, Muhammad

### **Objectives**

- Outline the basic flow of history in the early middle ages

### **Class Prayer**

*“O Thou who hast taught us that we are most truly free when we lose our wills in Thine, help us to gain that liberty by continual surrender unto Thee, that we may walk in the way which Thou hast prepared for us, and in doing Thy will may find our life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

*From the Gelasian Sacramentary (Pope Gelasius died in 496)*

## **The Early Middle Ages: The Second Five Hundred Years**

### I. Division of the Roman Empire: The Decline and Fall of Rome

- A. Huns
- B. Feudalism

### II. The Place of Christianity

- A. Great popes of the Roman Catholic church
  1. Leo the Great - 5th Century
  2. Gregory the Great - 6th Century
- B. Great centers of Christianity
  - 1.
  - 2.
- C. Great spread of Christianity
  1. To England, Ireland and Scotland
  2. To Russia
- D. Great political leader - Charlemagne

### III. Threat from the South

- A. Muhammad’s “flight” from Mecca to Medina (622)
- B. Vigorous expansion for a hundred years (from India to Spain)
- C. Islam defeated in the West at Tours (732); the Moors in Spain
- D. Continued threat to Constantinople and Eastern Europe

#### IV. Growth and Collapse of Christianity in the Orient

##### A. The church in the near East was divided into three parts

1. A separate Nestorian church centered in Persia.
2. Monophysite Jacobites, mostly in Syria.
3. The Chalcedonian Orthodox (called Melkites because of their allegiance to the emperor [Melek] in Constantinople).

##### B. China

1. Nestorians in China had disappeared
2. When the T'ang Dynasty ended in 907, the Church in China also disappeared.  
“...the decisive factor was neither religious persecution, nor theological compromise, nor even its foreignness, but rather the fall of an imperial house on which the church has too long relied for its patronage and protection. Dependence on government is a dangerous and uncertain foundation for Christian survival” (Moffett, *History of Christianity in Asia*. 313)

##### C. The Indian Church remained a tiny minority community “in a vast non-Christian sea.

“By the year 800 there were more Christians east of Damascus than there were west of that city.” (John M. L. Young, *By Foot to China: Mission of the Church of the East, to 1400*, p. 2)

#### V. Survival in Africa

##### A. North Africa was lost to Islam.

##### B. Egypt became a country of dual religious cultures: Muslim and Coptic.

##### C. Nubian Christianity continued to grow (“The Praise of the Cross”).

##### D. Ethiopian Christianity emerged from the Middle Ages as the most vital of all expressions of African Christianity.

#### For Further Study

Saint Caesarius was Bishop of Arles in Gaul near the beginning of this second five hundred-year period. Read the excerpt from his sermon “On a Feast of Holy Martyrs.” What is its theme? Why is it important for the period in which Caesarius lived? What does it tell us about the church’s (or at least Caesarius’s) view of salvation?