

With the help of Boniface, the pope formed an alliance with the kings of the Franks in Gaul (now France), beginning with King Pepin (or Pippin). In AD 754 Pope Stephen II anointed Pepin king and honored him with the title Patrician of the Romans, a title originally reserved for the Roman emperors. This created a bond of loyalty between the pope and the Frankish kings, which reached its summit with the coronation of Charles (the Great, also called Charlemagne), son of Pepin, in Rome in AD 800.

The relationship between the popes and Charles, who ruled from AD 768 to 814, developed over many years. The unfortunate effect of this alliance was that it alienated the Eastern Christian Church, which maintained loyalty to the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople, whom they saw as the true Roman emperor.

Charles the Great did not help the relationship between the Western and Eastern Churches when he disagreed with the decision of the Second Council of Nicaea in the East (AD 787), fought to capture territory claimed by the Byzantine emperor and wanted to compel the Eastern Church to add a new phrase, *filioque*, to the Nicene Creed. The Creed originally stated that the Holy Spirit proceeds *from the Father* (see John 15:26); the Western version that Charles advocated (based on the theology of Saint Augustine) says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* (*filioque*). This situation illustrates the problem of the close alliance between the Church and the state. Charles the Great was a great defender and promoter of the Christian faith and the Catholic Church; however, he also wanted to control the Church and make theological decisions.

At one point Charles wrote the pope and told him that it was the pope's job to pray for the Church but his job, as emperor, to rule it. In theory there was a division between worldly (temporal) and spiritual authority in this alliance between Church and state; in practice, however, a strong emperor or king would always take control of some spiritual affairs, and a strong pope would take control of worldly or political affairs. Sometimes kings and other secular rulers even claimed the right to select and install priests and bishops without consulting the pope or other bishops. This practice, called lay investiture, became one of the most disputed issues between the popes and secular rulers in the Middle Ages. Part of the price of the security of having a Christian king or emperor was his involvement, or interference, in Church or spiritual affairs.

Charles the Great's method of evangelizing people to Christianity was to conquer a territory and then give the conquered people a choice to be baptized either "with water or with blood." This was a harsh age when the mass of people were illiterate and simply followed the religion of their ruler. Catholicism became more of a cultural religion, in which people were baptized *en masse* with the hope that they could be instructed in the Christian faith later. The Church feared a relapse into paganism.

The hope for preserving civilization and instructing the ignorant in their faith lay with the monasteries. Even Charles the Great attempted to revive learning by gathering a community of scholars in his own palace—led by the learned English monk Alcuin (his secretary)—and by dictating that every bishop should establish a school at his cathedral church. This made some impact, but after Charles died and the Carolingian Empire was

divided, the light of learning waned. Except for the monasteries, Europe sank into a time of intellectual and spiritual darkness.

The Eastern Christians battling the forces of Islam also experienced a theological crisis in the eighth century. In AD 730 Byzantine Emperor Leo III published a decree forbidding Christians to venerate icons, beautiful painted images of Christ or the saints (iconoclasm). Although this had become an important part of the spiritual life and devotion of Eastern Christians, Leo III felt that this "worship of images" was forbidden by the Bible and so ordered the destruction of all icons.

Pope Gregory III and many Eastern Christians protested this, but it was not until the Empress Irene called the Second Council of Nicaea (the Seventh Ecumenical Council) in AD 787 that the veneration of icons was approved once again. That council distinguished between the *veneration* given to icons because they are images of God or holy persons and *adoration*, which is due to God alone. The Roman Catholic Church has always agreed with this, having consistently made use of pictures, mosaics, stained-glass windows, statues and paintings on walls of churches to teach and remind people of the truths of their faith. Pope Gregory the Great taught that pictures are the books of laypeople, since most people of that time were illiterate.¹

THE NINTH CENTURY

The beginning of the ninth century appeared promising for the Western Catholic Church. Charles the Great imposed the Christian faith on his captive subjects in northern and central Europe, and gradually the people embraced Christianity and rejected the worst abuses of their pagan past. The popes grew

more influential too, and after Charles's death, his son, Louis the Pious, announced that the authority of his office was dependent upon the pope. Louis's son, Lothar, was crowned in Rome in AD 823, and after that all the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire were crowned in Rome. Pope Nicholas I (AD 858-867), the strongest pope of the century, taught that the emperor's duty was to protect the Roman Catholic Church but not to govern it.

Unfortunately, the power of the emperor was weakened by internal difficulties and by invasions of the Vikings from the north and Hungarians and Muslim Saracens from the east and south. The unity and peace of the great empire forged by Charles the Great began to fall apart, and Europe was plunged into an age of feudalism—splitting of the continent into small divisions struggling for survival and battling each other.

Accompanying the decline of the Western Empire was a decline of the Western Church. After Nicholas I there were no popes who could effectively lead the Church in this situation. There was even a brief schism, or breaking of relationship, between the popes and the patriarchs of Constantinople between AD 858 and 879. The division arose over some territorial ambitions of Pope Nicholas I and resulted in the allegation by Patriarch Photius that the Roman Catholic Church was unorthodox for using *filioque* in the Creed, upholding the doctrine of purgatory and other alleged errors.

Fortunately, Photius retracted his charges; he and the new pope were reconciled, and there was relative peace between the Eastern and Western Churches in the tenth century. However, the basic issues were never resolved, and the tragic schism between East and West beginning in 1054 was the sad consequence of this,