

The History of the Catholic Church

The 6th century: Settling Chalcedon

Events of the 6th Century

525: The monk Dionysius Exiguus invents a calendar based on the estimated birth of Jesus.

527: Justinian becomes emperor

529: St. Benedict founds the monastery of Monte Cassino

532: Nika Riots in Constantinople

541-542: Pandemic of Bubonic Plague hits Constantinople

543/544: Justinian's edict leads to the Three-Chapters controversy

553: Second Council of Constantinople

570: Birth of Muhammad

574: Roman Empire invaded by Slavs

585: Suebian Kingdom conquered by Visigoths in Spain

587: Reccared, King of the Visigoths in Spain, converts to Catholicism

589: Council of Toledo in Spain adds the "filioque" to the Nicene Creed

590: Gregory the Great becomes Pope

595: Pope Gregory sends monks and missionaries to England

Politics

The 6th century is largely a reaction to the 5th century both for the Roman Empire and the Church. After the western part of the Empire fell after the reign of Theodosius, the eastern part of the empire reconstituted itself as the Byzantine Empire. Since the time of the Greeks, the city of Constantinople was called Byzantium and only renamed under Emperor Constantine to Constantinople after himself. The Byzantine empire will continue to function as the eastern part of the Roman empire until it falls to the Ottoman Empire in 1453. As separate from the west, the Byzantine empire will continue to flourish with its own lineage of emperors, culture, language, and unification as one peoples. The church of the Byzantine empire will be controlled by the emperor and the bishops.

Following from the 5th century, the succession of emperors will reinforce the proclamation of the two-natures of Christ defined by the Council of Chalcedon in 461. Tension throughout the empire was building regarding this definition. Many people were confused or concerned about this definition with many people rejecting the Council. In the west the definition was accepted by all without concern including the many texts that helped define it like the *Tome of Leo*. In the east the confusion wrought with the Greek translation of the Latin dogmatic pronouncements

caused confusion and many people rejected the Council especially those in the theological schools in Alexandria. Through these challenges the emperors tried to form unity within the empire until Justinian. Justinian was a scholar and a theologian. Being one of the first emperors to have an education and a significant education, he weighted in on his own thoughts regarding the matter. He married Theodora of Greek decent but Byzantine. Both from semi-humble origins, they would push their influence on the Roman world unlike any emperor for over 200 years. Theodora was a smart and sophisticated woman with a immense power to influence. Later historians would picture Justinian and Theodora in quite negative light. Many picture Justinian as a bookworm who would rather spend time in his library reading and studying than leading the empire. Theodora is depicted as the emperor who took the authority from Justinian while saving his throne. Regardless of the depiction this couple would dominate the world both politically and theologically. Justinian's first act was to reunite the empire and stop the take over by the Visigoths. He spent the military's strength fighting the Visigoths who conquered the western part of the empire in Italy, France, Germany, and England. Although he was successful and briefly reunited the Empire, his military was spent and spread too thin resulting in a takeover of the conquered lands by the Visigoths. Utterly spent and ruined by the subsequent defeat, Justinian held up in his home in Constantinople and begun working theologically. He reasoned that the Council of Chalcedon was wrong regarding the nature of Christ. Instead Jesus had only one nature, a theory called Monophysitism. Justinian and Theodora will become the most influential Monophysites in the Church's history. Justinian wrote one of the most important works of Monophysite theology called the *Three Chapters*. This work would be foundational document at the 2nd Council of Constantinople. Through their influence, they will try to dominate the church both east and west into adopting their policy against the Council of Chalcedon.

In 553, Emperor Justinian presided over the games, or demes, at the Hippodrome. These games were political and theological. During these game the two competing forces were the monophysites, colored blue, and diphysites, colored green. Over the course of the competition, the greens had the advantage and a riot broke out. Justinian was planning to flee the Hippodrome but his wife discouraged him by saying that an emperor should never flee. The violence escalated to the point that the rioters destroyed the Hagia Sophia. Justinian would later rebuild the building before an earthquake destroyed it again. These riots greatly impacted Justinian and caused him to fear the division between the Monophysites and the Diphysites.

With the debate now raging once again, the west refusing to accept the Monophysite stance, and the east pushing its authority on the west to abolish the two-natures of Christ, Justinian calls a Council in Constantinople named the 2nd Council of Constantinople. Delegates from around the empire would come including the Pope. The Council would restate the condemnation of Monophysitism from the Council of Chalcedon, approve the *Tome of Leo*, condemn the Three Chapters by Justinian, and attempt to bring peace again.

Peace did not come. The west was divided regarding the council. Although the west never fell into Monophysitism, the Council was more than dogmatic. Justinian was able to force an ailing pope into relinquishing some of his power and forced his will on the west through the Council. This caused great duress amongst the west with bishops being deposed and political chaos in the

church. After the death of Pope Vigilius, Justinian tried to put his own pope in the seat. He failed. This attempt to seat his own designate on the seat of Rome caused massive tension between the west and the east. The west saw this as the east imposing itself on the west in violation of the separation of the patriarchates in matters of governance. In the east the theological decisions of the Council led to widescale persecution of many peoples. Bishops who refused to accept the pronouncements or refused to attend the council created a strong wall of opposition to it. These bishops were either supported by their people for a time or deposed with new orthodox bishops reinstated. The hoped for reconciliation seemed lost.

The 6th century ends with several important events which will set the tone for the next three centuries. The first major event is the birth of Muhammad in 570. Muhammad will start unifying the Middle East and the wandering nomadic tribes who had been at constant war for many centuries. These unified forces will become Islam. In the west, the Visigoths will return following Justinian's failed invasions. They will reconquer the lands of Germany, France, and settle in Spain. The theological influence of the Visigoths on Spain will change the course of church history forever. The Visigoths accepted Arian Christianity and attempted to convert the Spaniards to this form of Christianity.

The Church

The Church has been in a mess since the middle of the 5th century. The effects of Chalcedon on the church of both the east and the west cannot be ignored. Starting in the 5th century are the disputes regarding the two-nature of Christ. Although the Council of Chalcedon dogmatically declared that Jesus has two-natures, the church largely didn't receive it well. The west followed the accepted *Tome of Leo* approved by the Council. The east, however, didn't accept these teachings due to linguistic and theological confusion. Adding to their confusion was a growing disdain for the west.

After the death of Leo, Zeno became the Pope and he tried to work toward reconciliation and the promotion of the Council. Patriarch Acacia of Constantinople drafted for Zeno a reconciliation document to help heal the schism forming between east and west. The document, the Henotikon, compiled the basic agreements and points of tension between pro and anti Monophysite theology. The document was not widely received for its confusing language regarding the Council of Chalcedon and therefore failed to lead to reunification. Zeno was encouraged to sign the document as dogmatic but chose against it.

In 483, Pope Felix sent a delegation of bishops to Constantinople to discuss the natures of Christ controversy. They were sent with letters indicating the Pope's desires and theological stance. On their way, the bishops were imprisoned, interrogated, and the letters confiscated. Upon arrival in Constantinople, Acacia greatly influenced these bishops leading to their change in opinion and support of his theology. Upon arrival in Rome, Pope Felix excommunicated the delegation for failing to present his wishes and instead ratifying theological statements contrary to the Council of Chalcedon.

Tensions would only rise from here as Justinian was named Emperor. Not only was Justinian a strong Monophysite but also a strong supporter of a unified empire and the east. Through the

wars to bring peace to the west, he continued to influence the western church which had become independent after the great division following Theodosius. Although initially successful in his battles, he was not successful in unifying the empire nor denouncing the authority of Rome.

All of these tensions coalesced in Justinian calling the 2nd Council of Constantinople in 553. Justinian's goal was to condemn Chalcedon and force the Church to accept Monophysite theology. He failed. Instead the Church ratified the two-natures of Christ. Justinian's *Three Chapters* promoting the single-nature in Christ were condemned along with several heretics. Justinian, in his last effort to succeed in this council, imposed legal restrictions on the west and tried to exert his power over the Pope and the territories of the west. This greatly angered the west.

In the aftermath of the 2nd Council of Constantinople, the west and east were continually dividing on all grounds. Tensions from the Council mixed with the change in political climates of many centuries only fueled these divides. The west remained as it had always been: united within itself. The east continued to serve emperor as both the head of the church and unifier of the church politically and theologically.

But the world is changing. The last half of the 6th century is marked by the return of the Visigoths and a new emphasis on missionary efforts throughout the empire. The Visigoths return after the 2nd Council of Constantinople and began to reconquer the lands that Justinian tried to reannex to the empire. They were successful but in the midst of conquering these lands also converted to Christianity. In a way the west was unifying under one religion. With the exception of Spain, peace returned to the west and the political chaos the east tried to inflict on the west slowly ebbed away. In Spain, however, a new challenge was emerging. The Visigoths, newly converted to Christianity, had adopted an Arian version of Christianity. The basic belief is that if the Son and Spirit both proceeded from the Father, then both are identical meaning that the Son is not divine or the Son and Spirit are the same. The Council of Toledo was called in 589 to discuss this issue. The church in Spain reacted quickly to this heresy by stating that the Son proceeds from the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This change is known as the filioque.

The new addition or clarification to the Nicene Creed was sent to the Pope for approval. Since this accurately reflected the theology of the church and the pronouncements of the Councils, it was approved by the Pope. From this point not only will the church in Spain add the words "and the Son" to the Nicene Creed but the Pope will require it across all the western churches. When the eastern churches heard of this addition to the Creed, they were furious. Only an ecumenical council can change the statements made at a previous council. This change to the Nicene Creed vastly increased the already high tensions between the east and west. Now the east charged the Pope with schism in ratifying his own theology independent of the rest of the church and making himself higher than the other patriarchs. The 6th century ends with tensions growing between the east and the west, missionaries going to all parts of the empire, and a defeated emperor returning to Constantinople where his power will remain until 1453.

The last major event of the 6th century is the election of Gregory as Pope. Gregory was originally a lawyer for the city of Rome and the 3rd highest ranking official. He left that life and became a Benedictine Monk where he would spend his days writing and teaching. His theological skills were legendary. After several years in the monastery, he was elected Pope. As pope he saw his role as one of service to the church adding to the list of titles for the Pope, Servant of the servants of God. Through massive legal and structural reforms, he standardized the Mass, instituted structural reform of the clergy, and solidified Church structure. Like Pope Leo the Great, he would march out against the Visigoths and sign a treaty with them saving the city of Rome.

The Councils:

The 2nd Council of Constantinople (553)

The 2nd Council of Constantinople was convened in Constantinople on May 5th 553 by Emperor Justinian who did not preside or attend the Council. The goal was to discuss the matter of the two-natures of Christ declared by the Council of Chalcedon in 461 but brought under massive dispute over the last 100 years. Pope Vigilius, although invited twice to the Council, refused to come on account of illness but sent letters and delegates to the Council. The opening session focused on the two-natures of Christ, the words of Emperor Justinian called the Three Chapters, and the subsequent response by Pope Vigilius. The Council condemned the idea that Jesus has only one nature and everything associated with it including the idea that the Word was born from Mary. Since the Pope didn't attend the Council but sent his opinion by letter, Justinian acted to condemn the Pope as schismatic. By May 8th the Council had already decided on the condemnation of Monophysitism and condemned the *Three Chapters* by Justinian. Once the letter from Pope Vigilius came bearing the same proclamation, the Council was angered by the fact that the Pope reacted so slowly and the Council had already made its decision. Thus tension rose between the eastern bishops and the Pope. The lack of the Pope's presence coupled with the delay in his response was the moment Justinian was waiting for. He used this event to advocate his opinion that the Pope no longer cared about councils and was building his own church. Thus he declared the Pope schismatic and the Council the leading authority in the church above the Pope's authority. The following sessions proceeded to allow the church to condemn heretics posthumously, condemned the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret. Then the Council declared that Jesus had two births: one from the Father before time and the other from Mary. Lastly the Council ratified many anathemas against heretics and theologians like Nestorius, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinaris, and Origin.

Spirituality

The 6th century experienced no major innovations or changes to spirituality. As the monastic movements grew, more monasteries continued to be built. As the century comes to a close, the monastery will become the center point of Christian towns, schools, and theology. Many of the monks in monasteries spent considerable time reflecting on the nature of God, theology, and the life of the Christian. Thus they became the center of orthodoxy. Many people would assent to the teaching and advice of the monks over their bishops which will lead to great disputes in upcoming centuries.

The church continued to send missionaries throughout the world attempting to convert the people. With wide-scale missionary efforts came great success. Many of the pagan lands like those of the Visigoths came to faith and converted the entire nations. Even lands conquered by the Empire and reconquered by other people, and they accepted the faith.

As the century concluded, the monk Gregory is elected Pope. Pope Gregory will institute massive reforms across the church. The first and most vital reform is the standardization of the Mass. He dictates that all churches must use the same Eucharistic Prayer and the same structure for the Mass. He moved the Our Father and the Sign of Peace from the beginning of Mass to before Communion. Additionally he instituted the use of Gregorian Chant, which will be the standard form of music until the invention of the organ. With the Gregorian reforms came another new emphasis: relics. Pope Gregory is credited with establishing the different classifications of relics.

Key Figures

St. Gregory the Great: Born in 540 in an aristocratic household, he would study law and rhetoric and the local schools in Rome before taking a position in public office. As a legal expert he was named Prefect of the city of Rome, the 3rd highest official in Rome. After a plague struck Rome, the two highest leading officials bolted from the city leaving Gregory in charge. He cared for the people and helped to end the ravages of the plague. Exhausted by this and wanting a simpler life, he left his political career and became a monk. He claims his happiest days were as a monk where he would read, write, and give lectures on spiritual topics. After several years in the monastery, he was named one of the seven deacons of Rome. Now he was back in political office. After only a few years as deacon, he was named Pope in 590. He said these were the worst days of his life because of the idle chatter he had to endure. Through his ministry as Pope he excelled in leading the people of God and bringing stability and structure to the Church until his death in 604.

Art and Music

The age of icons has dawned. An icon is not a painting although they use paint to make them. Instead icons are written and classified more as a story than art. The goal of an icon is to depict heavenly realities so as to make them present to us. The perspective of an icon is always outward to the viewer to draw the story out to the person. Icons tell a story about heavenly things. Those who write icon pray with every brush stroke and use specific set designs that are ancient. The two examples below are some of the classic icons of the 6th century.



Under the influence of St. Gregory the Great, the style of music underwent massive reform. The new style of music is called Gregorian Chant, named after Pope Gregory. It uses a simple line of music to lead prayer. Gregorian Chant has no meter but flows with the structure of language.

In the name of the Lord here begins the Exposition on the Songs of Songs, restored from the beginning of the notary's transcription, by Lord Gregory, Pope of the City of Rome¹

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PART 1: PROLOGUE (1-10)

HUMAN IGNORANCE AND THE NEED FOR ALLEGORY

1. After its banishment from the joys of Paradise, the human race came to the pilgrimage of this present life with a heart blind to spiritual understanding. If the divine voice had said to this blind heart, "Follow God!" or, "Love God!" (as was said to it in the Law), once this was uttered, the numbing cold of its obtuseness² would have prevented it from grasping what it heard. Accordingly, divine speech is communicated to the cold and numb soul by means of enigmas and in a hidden manner instills in her the love she does not know by means of what she knows.

2. Allegory provides the soul set far below God with a kind of crane whereby she may be lifted to God.³ If enigmas are placed between God and the soul, when the soul recognizes something of her own in the language of the enigmas, through the meaning of this language she understands something that is not her own and by means of earthly language hopes for eternal things.⁴ For by not recoiling from what she knows, the soul comes to understand what she does not know. Allegories are produced by clothing divine thoughts in what we know. When we recognize the exterior language, we attain interior understanding.

1. This *incipit* is the most genuine and is found in mss. α^{134} , β^{14} , ω^2 .

2. Here I read *insensibilitatis* instead of *infidelitatis*.

3. Here I read *intra positae* instead of *positae*.

4. Here I read *sperantur aeterna* instead of *separatur a terra*. The alternate reading is translated: "is separated from earthly things."

3. In this book here, in which the Song of Songs is written, the language of what appears to be physical love is employed that the soul may be revived from her numbing cold by means of her usual manner of speech, so that she may grow warm again and so be spurred on to the love that is above by the language of the love here below. Now in this book there is mention of kisses, there is mention of breasts, there is mention of cheeks, there is mention of thighs. We should not ridicule the sacred narrative for using such language. Rather, let us ponder how great God's mercy is. For when he mentions the parts of the body and thereby summons us to love, note how wonderfully and mercifully he works within us. He has gone so far as to embrace the language of our vulgar love in order to enkindle our heart with a yearning for that sacred love. Yet God lifts us by understanding to the place from where he lowers himself by speaking. For we learn from dialogues of the love here below with what intensity we should burn in the love of Divinity.

4. Let us consider this book carefully lest we linger over exterior meanings when we hear the words of exterior love. Otherwise the very crane employed to lift us will instead burden us and thus not lift us. In these bodily words, in these exterior words, let us seek whatever is interior. And when we discuss the body, let us become as if separated from the body. Let us attend this sacred wedding of the Bride and Bridegroom with an understanding of the most interior kind of charity, which is to say with a wedding gown. Such attire is necessary⁵ since if we are not dressed in a wedding gown, that is, if we do not have a worthy understanding of charity, then we will be cast out of this wedding banquet into the exterior darkness, which is to say into the blindness of ignorance.⁶ By means of this passionate dialogue let us cross over to the virtue of impassibility.

For just as Sacred Scripture consists of words and its meaning, so too a picture consists of colors and its subject matter. And he is

5. Here I read *nuptiali*. *Neccesse est, ne, si* instead of *nuptiali, necesse est, ne, si*.

6. See Matt 22:1-14.

Sacrifice yourself along with the Eucharist

St. Gregory the Great tells us that it's not enough just to be there when the sacrifice is made: we should be sacrificing ourselves, too, imitating the sacrifice on the altar.

We should offer to God the daily sacrifice of tears, and the daily sacrifice of his body and blood. For this sacrifice, which in mystery renews to us the death of the Son of God, especially saves our souls from everlasting damnation. Christ is now risen from death, and does not die anymore, nor shall death prevail any further against him: yet living in himself immortally, and without all corruption, he is again sacrificed for us in this mystery of the holy oblation—for there his body is received, there his flesh is distributed for the salvation of the people; there his blood is not now shed by the hands of infidels, but poured into the mouths of the faithful. So let us meditate on what kind of sacrifice this is, ordained for us, which to our absolution always represents the Passion of the only Son of God.

But it is essential that, when we do these things, we should also, by contrition of heart, sacrifice ourselves unto almighty God. When we celebrate the mystery of our Lord's passion, we ought to imitate what we do then: for it will truly be a sacrifice for us to God if we offer ourselves also to him in sacrifice. We must also be careful, after we have given some time to prayer, to keep our mind fixed on God as much as we can by his grace) so that no vain thoughts make us to fall into distraction, and no foolish mirth enters into our heart. Otherwise the soul, by reason of such transitory thoughts, might lose all it gained by former contrition.

—St. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 4.58-59

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Do I make a real effort to sacrifice my "vain thoughts" before I approach the Eucharist?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, stoop to my weakness, and pity me according to your mercy; be pleased that my sacrifices may be acceptable to you.

MIKE AQUILINA

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Live a life worthy of your baptism

Can people tell that you're a Christian? St. John Chrysostom says we live lives that always remind people of what we believe—not to show because our example should be leading others to Christ.

I see many living after their baptism more carelessly than the unbaptized with nothing special to distinguish them in their way of life. Thus neither in the market nor in the church can you tell quickly who is a believer and who is not a believer, unless you are present at the time of the sacrament, and see the one put out and the others staying inside.

But they ought to be distinguished not only by their place, but by their way of life. Worldly dignities are shown by the outward signs conferred; ours ought to be discernible by the soul. In other words, the believer ought to be obvious only by the gift, but also by the new life. The believer ought to be the light and salt of the world,

But when you don't give light even to yourself or bind up your own talents in what's left by which we can know you? Because you went into the holy waters, this becomes a source of punishment for you. For greatness of honor is an incentive of vengeance to those who do not choose to live worthy of the honor.

The believer ought to shine forth not only by what he has received from God, but also by what he has contributed himself. He should be distinguished by everything—by his walk, by his look, by his clothes, by his voice. And I say this because we should make a fine display, but because we should always be thinking of the benefit of those who see us.

—St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 on Matthew*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Do I look like a Christian in the supermarket, or even in church?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, Creator of the universe, lead me to perfection, and make me perfectly worthy of the grace you have given me in my baptism.

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