

The History of the Catholic Church

The 8th Century: The Rise of Scholasticism

Events:

Classical Mayan Civilization begins to decline

The account of the life of the Buddha spreads to the west and is translated into Greek

705: Emperor Justinian II is forced to give the title of Caesar of Byzantium to the Bulgarian Emperor Tervel

711: The Bulgarians defeat Justinian II

711: Tariq ibn Ziyad crosses the Straits of Gibraltar and begins conquest of the Iberian Peninsula beginning eight centuries of Muslim rule in Spain

712: Liutprand becomes king of the Lombards in Italy

712: The Metropolitan episcopal see is established by the Church of the East in China

713: Treaty between Abd al-'Aziz and Theodemir is signed in Spain

717-718: Siege of Constantinople. The Bulgarians and Byzantines defeat the Islamic forces

726: Byzantine Emperor Leo III destroys an icon of Christ beginning Iconoclasm

732: Battle of Tours halts the Islamic invasion into France

740: Battle of Akroinion. The Byzantine forces defeat the Arabs.

765: Pepin dies and Charles becomes king at Noyan

772-804: Charlemagne invades northwestern Germany finally crushing the Saxon forces

787: Empress Irene of Athens calls the 2nd Council of Nicaea. The final Ecumenical Council shared by the east and west.

793: The Frisian-Frankish wars come to an end

800: Charlemagne is crowned King of the Empire on Christmas day

Major discoveries and advancements: heavy plow, horse collar, papermaking comes to Europe, iron horseshoes, clocks, triangular harp.

Politics:

The 8th century begins with the same struggles of the 7th century: war across Europe. The eastern part of Europe is wrecked by constant Muslim attacks. The first major conflict in the east is between Bulgarian and the Byzantine Empire. These two nations have been at war with each other for about 400 years with constant defeats and gains on both sides. For a century Bulgaria has its independence, then for a century Byzantium controls Bulgaria, then it switches. In the 8th

century two wars will dominate and end these conflicts. At the beginning of the 8th century, Emperor Justinian II is defeated by Bulgarian forces and forced to concede the title of Caesar to the Bulgarian King. This event will lead to 50 years of political instability in Bulgarian. Even with this instability, the Bulgarians will defeat the Byzantine forces in one final battle in 740 ensuring their independence. In the midst of these two major battles, the Islamic forces will emerge from the south and fight the Byzantine Empire. Already greatly reduced in size and numbers due to the conflicts of the 7th century, the Bulgarians the Byzantines join forces against the Islamic forces and defeat them. Due to powerful and successful Byzantine kings of the 8th century, namely Emperor Leo III, the Byzantine forces end the wars with Islam and begin an era of peace for the Byzantine Empire. After the Arab-Byzantine wars of the first half of the 8th century come to an end with the Battle of Akroinon, the east will final have a few decades of peace.

Although the east enjoys some peace from war, a new battle is emerging on a theological level. The previous century saw the rise in art focusing on accurately depicting people. The same mentality came to religion with a desire to know the face of Jesus. Amidst this new wave of thought was a opposing viewpoint. Many Christians were deeply upset by this new wave in depicting the God who commanded us not to have any graven images or to depict him in any way. Their fervor rose to an unsee pitch as Emperor Leo III smashes an icon of Jesus. His action began a wave called Iconoclasm. The next 50 years became a blood bath for Christians as iconographers try to depict the face of Jesus and iconoclasts try to stop them. The feverous rage of the iconoclasts led to many of them taking icons and smashing them over the heads of the iconographers to kill them. Embroiled in this new dispute, Empress Irene of Athens calls the 2nd Council of Nicaea to settle this dispute. This council is the last ecumenical council recognized by the east and the west.

As the Arab forces withdraw their attacks against the Byzantine Empire, they consolidate their empire and begin a new era in Islamic history. The original center of the Islamic empire following Muhammad's establishment of the empire a century ago, was Medina. Following the Byzantine wars, the Islamic nation moves the center of the empire to Baghdad. The recentralization of the empire as well as the move of the capital changes the focus of the Islamic people. The next three centuries is marked by cultural, intellectual, and religious development. Some of the greatest scholars and advancements of the middle age will come from this intellectual movement in Baghdad. By the turn of the 9th century, Islamic philosophical works and advances in agriculture and art will reach Europe through Spain including the invention of the number 0 and algebra. The philosopher Maimonides will impact western schools of philosophy for over three centuries.

Turning to the west, a new form of political unrest is happening across western Europe. The 7th century ended with the rise of kings and kingdoms setting the stage for the middle ages. As early as 711, Islamic forces cross the Strait of Gibraltar and enter Spain. Beginning from the south they will begin to conquer Spain from south to north before defeat by the Frankish forces on the border between Spain and France. The invasion by the Arabs as well as the defeat of the Spanish forces will leave a lasting impact on Spain for the rest of history. Many Spanish words are

derived from the Arabic language, the Arabic invention of Algebra and philosophy enters Europe through Spain, art and architecture take on an Arabic style, religious persecutions begin, and a new anti-Arab mentality emerges in Spain which will dominate the Spanish-Arab relationship until the 19th century. We cannot dismiss the most valuable Spanish work ever created, the epic of El Cid, which is based on the conflicts between Spain and the Arabs. The Arab forces continue to conquer the eastern coast of Spain into Toledo before depleting their forces. Overwhelmed by the immense attack, the Arab forces are required to sign the treaty of Tudmir or the Treaty of Orihuela giving the Visigoth king Theodemir rule of Spain. Muslim forces continue to rule Spain until the Arab-Spanish wars of the 14th century.

The wars in Spain show a great deal of religious unrest common throughout Europe. The Christians are immensely leery of the Arabs since they have conquered the Holy Land, most of the Christian lands, and seem focused on controlling the world. Underneath the religious distrust of the Arabs is distrust of the Jews. Although the Jews are small in numbers, the Christians have disdained them for centuries. Back in the 1st century, religious conflict between the Jews and Christians caused the Christians to be exiled from the Temple and Synagogues. Increasing political tension caused by the Romans led to increased disdain for the Jews. Centuries later, beginning in the 5th century, the now Christianized world became hostile to the Jews. As the money lenders of the time, since they were forbidden to own property to take office, the people saw them as extorting or taking advantage of Christians. Growing distrust caused social sentiments like the "Killers of Jesus" or "The Killers of Christians." Christians continued to hold a grudge against the Jews for not accepting Jesus, for killing Jesus, and for not converting to Christianity. This growing desire for the conversion of the Jews led to countries like Spain forcing conversion. The Spanish government would force under penalty of exile Jews to convert to Christianity. Did it work? No. The Jews would publicly state their conversion but then practice their Jewish beliefs.

Western Europe struggles in a way different from the rest of Europe. Whereas the nations in southern and eastern Europe are engaged in battles with Arabic forces, central and western Europe engage in political battles. Britain is the most peaceful land of this century. Now overtaken by Anglo-Saxon forces nearly 100 years ago, they remain under Anglo-Saxon rule for many centuries. Due to the conversion of the Queen by St. Augustine of Canterbury, the Anglo people are not worried about conflicts with Rome, religious squabbles except for the last small strongholds of paganism, nor conflicts with other nations. Instead, Britain begins the conflicts with other nations over religious grounds. The century is marked by missionaries from Britain going all over Europe.

The mission to Europe by the Anglos is one of accident. Although Rome wanted missionaries to all lands and encouraged many missions, the land of the Frisians was considered hostile, heathen lands. When Winfred was exiled from Britain and went to Rome, he decided to sail to the land of the Germans. When the route was closed to him, he set sail for the Rhein. Now in Frisian land, he was largely unsuccessful in his missionary efforts and they soon reverted back to paganism. Other missionaries, seeing the example of Winfred, believed he started the mission and continued his work at the beginning of the 8th century. A few decades later in 695, Rome sent

Willibrord to Frisia on mission. His efforts were immensely successful. Through the efforts of Willibrord, the Frisian people converted quickly including King Pepin. King Pepin then sent a letter to Rome requesting the establishment of an ecclesiastical diocese in his province. The Pope was so impressed by the conversion of Pepin that he crowned him king. Pepin gave his full support and submission to the Pope. Through the lineage of Pepin, the next several kings would not only be loyal to Rome but some of the greatest advancers of Christianity to this date. Pepin is succeeded by Pepin II, who is succeeded by Charles, then Pepin III, followed by Charlemagne. Charlemagne is crowned by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day as the Holy Roman Emperor beginning the Holy Roman Emperor and Christendom.

Stepping back in history, the reign of Charlemagne was not as simple as crowning an emperor. Under Charles, later called Charles the Great and then Charlemagne, he spent 30 years conquering and solidifying the empire for Christianity. After assuming the role of king in 772, he would spend the rest of his years working for the good of Christianity by fighting battles for the pope, using his influence on the Frisians, then the French, then the Germans. By the end of the 8th century, Charlemagne has control of most of western Europe. Truly loyal to the Pope, Charlemagne is crowned Holy Roman Emperor, Francis II, beginning a new era in Christianity. From this point until the 1806 when the last Holy Roman Emperor abdicated the throne and released papal lands to the French. This era between 800 and 1806 is known as Christendom: the age when Europe is predominately Christian and the Pope rules the land with his emperor.

The Pope authorized one of most famous missionaries of 8th century with the task of evangelizing the Germans: Boniface. Boniface's mission would be immensely successful. He was made archbishop of the Germanic area in 732. As late as 739 he was already in the Germanic lands without any additional support and no bishops to install. By 741 he had eight suffragan bishops and created five additional diocese including Passau, Regensburg, Salzburg, Freising, and Bavaria. Pope Gregory III warned Boniface not to linger in Germany and sent him into the lands of the Frisians with another mission Boniface now being elder in years. The mission failed and he was jumped and killed by those he came to confirm.

Church

Like the last two centuries, the church for the next century will focus on missionary efforts. The century is dominated by English missionaries moving into French and Germanic lands working to covert the peoples, especially the kings. Historians have an adage: whatever the king believes, the people believe. The first missionary efforts beginning in the late 7th century were a failure and the people reverted back to paganism. The efforts of the early to mid-8th century were immensely successful with new dioceses and bishops created within years.

Amongst the missionary efforts for now two centuries were a series of new issues the church had not faced. The first was the creation of bishops. St. Augustine of Canterbury faced this issue in the 6th century when he was sent by Pope Gregory I to England. Once there he realized that the church required three bishops to be present in order to ordain a new bishop. He was the only bishop in the whole country. Although bishops from Gaul could be sent to ordain new bishops, this seemed like an extreme measure considering the circumstances. Pope Gregory allowed three

priests to be present at the ordination of a bishop until enough bishops were established to be able to follow the prescripts of the Council of Nicaea. Another issue was the adaptation of the liturgy to meet the needs of the people. The liturgy was in Latin and most people did not speak Latin. Pope Gregory told Augustine that he could adapt those parts of the liturgy which could be adapted without changing its meaning. The exact meaning of these words are unclear. The liturgy was adapted to the languages of the peoples they were evangelizing only to be returned to Latin across Europe by the 12th century. The adaptations that Augustine made are also unclear. For the most part it seems the liturgy remained the same. Nevertheless the church had to wrestle with issues involved with missionary efforts. Can the church change? What parts can change to meet the people whom we are evangelizing?

The eighth century is marked as the rise of scholasticism. With paper coming to Europe from China, the intellectual movement of the Islamic nations concurring with European intellectualism, and the monasteries becoming center points of learning and study, Europe was on the cusp of an intellectual revolution. The last remnants of goat skin for paper is found in this century as book making and documents move to paper, a much cheaper, lighter, and easier material to use. The rise of paper and the mass production of books by monks allowed texts like the Bible to circulate more easily around Europe. The true pinnacle of this movement is still two centuries away but the beginnings are in the 8th century. Since monasteries are stable communities with lots of space, monasteries housed the books for the people. Monks became the educated elite having both the resources and the time to dedicate to learning and housing the resources for learning. Famous people like Bede the Venerable who wrote a history of English people and a history of western Europe and John of Damascus who brought eastern thought to the western world are examples of the intellectuals of this age. The ground work of the monks of the 8th century will pave the way for the great intellectual renaissance of the 10th and 11th centuries.

In the west the power of the Pope continued to grow. As more nations converted to Christianity and adopted the Christian banner, the Pope had increasing control over the people of Europe. Since religion was very important to the people, the kings and rulers were careful not to challenge the Pope directly for fear the people would revolt against them. For the most part, the rulers adopted the Christian beliefs and submitted to papal authority further advancing the cause of Christianity. Some of the greatest rulers of the age are King Pepin I and Charlemagne.

The Popes of the 8th century had a different conflict to resolve. Italy fell to Theodoric in the sixth century and his people continue to control Italy. Even though the Pope has control of the Italian people, it didn't work out that way. A small group of people from the Suebian peoples in Germany migrated in hopes of finding new land. By the 8th century they settled in northern Italy and began opposing the pope. Liutprand took over as the leader of the Lombards and tried to ally with various forces throughout Europe to establish his power. In 774 Charlemagne fought against the Lombards and conquered their land annexing it into the papal states. These papal states would remain under papal control until 1870 following the Italian civil war. Following the defeat of the Lombards, they moved south into Sicily and continued to keep the south as their stronghold until the 11th century. This area would be known as Normandy.

Off in the east a new issue was emerging leading to the final ecumenical council. Following from the 7th century, people were in a craze desiring accurate depictions of themselves which led to the desire for an accurate depiction of Jesus. Icons were not a new invention but started over two centuries ago with the desire to depict holy things and draw people into the mystery of God. The action of Emperor Leo III smashing an icon of Jesus begun a new battle. Some people were vehemently opposed to the use of icons claiming that it broke the 1st commandment: thou shall not make any graven images. This battle became fierce. One of the fiercest of the Christian era to this point in history. Iconographers continued to write icons and promote their use as good and holy images. Iconoclasts, in contrasts, thought these images were blasphemous and needed to be destroyed. Only they took this issue a step further. Instead of merely destroying the images, the iconoclasts took it upon themselves to kill the iconographers with their own icons thus ended the possibility of producing more icons.

Embroided in a bloody conflict, Empress Irene of Athens called the 2 Council of Nicaea in 787 to settle this dispute. Oddly the west was not affected by this dispute. The council was called and the issues were brought forward. The opponents of icons stated the breach of the 1st commandment and the blasphemous nature of depicting holy things. The proponents of icons argued that Jesus had a human face and was seen by people including the apostles. Therefore, as being human and having human a face, we can depict his image without blasphemy nor violation of the 1st commandment. The Council declared that images do not depict the nature nor the person but instead elevate the mind and the spirit to think and ponder holy things. Therefore images and icon are authentic to the church as objects of devotion and prayer not adoration and worship.

Councils

The 2nd Council of Nicaea (787)

The issue with images is an old issue in the church, Many have argued for centuries about the validity of images of Jesus and the depiction of holy things. The controversy exploded in the 8th century. In the west the Popes were always loyal to sacred images and deposed many people who were contrary to this position. Some priests took it upon themselves to tear down sacred images and simplify the churches. The popes deposed this type of priest. In 731 Pope Gregory III convened a synod in Rome to discuss this matter. The synod declared the importance of sacred images in the support of the faith of the peoples.

The east had the exact opposite reaction. Emperor Leo III began his campaign against images by breaking an icon of Jesus in front of everyone. He would not be the strongest advocate of Iconoclasm. His son, who succeeded him as emperor, Constantine V, was not only the strongest iconoclastic emperor in history but looked at very negatively by historians. People of the times knew him as a “the man who soiled the baptismal font” and as “horse-lover” and homosexual. He would start an iconoclastic revolution. Embroided in this battle, the emperor called a synod in Constantinople in 754 to address this issue. The synod declared that Jesus as both human and divine could not be accurately depicted in images without causing heresy or blasphemy.

Therefore the use of images was absolutely forbidden. The decree was read before the people in Constantinople following the synod.

The issue became a massive fight across Europe causing Empress Irene of Athens to call the 2nd Council of Nicaea in 787. The 280-350 bishops who were present for the Council declared that the use of images is a good and holy spiritual practice since it allows the person to ponder spiritual things. Images are not adored nor worshiped for those actions belong to God alone. The depiction of Jesus shows his human nature and since his full nature cannot be depicted, it draws people into the mystery of Jesus. The Council also declared many other administrative decrees such as prohibition against simony and misery by clerics and bishops, the restating of the proper ecclesiastical boundaries, and the importance of the holiness of clerics.

The reaction to 2nd Nicaea was mixed. Pope Hadrian agreed to the Council and was immediately informed of their decision through his delegates. The Latin translation of the Greek text was immensely poor. So poor that it was easily understood as supporting the opposition position of 2nd Nicaea. When this translation reached King Charles, he was opposed to the Council. He wrote a letter condemning the Council and showing his support of images. Pope Hadrian, however, didn't sign the letter indicating the ratification of the Council for seven years waiting for a proper translation. Due to the alliance between Charles and Pope Hadrian, Pope Hadrian was reluctant to support a poor translation that would anger the king. Although both east and west agreed on the basic theology, language got in the way of full acceptance of the Council.

Key Figures:

St. Bede the Venerable: few people are honored in their lifetime as much as in their death. Bede is one of those. Born in 672 and sent at the age of seven to live in the monastery of St. Paul in Jarrow he came under the tutelage of the abbot of the monastery. A man of incredible intellect and a passion for learning, he quickly rose to become one of the greatest intellectuals of the age. Ordained a deacon at 19 and priest at 30, he would spend the rest of his life copying books and writing. He wrote over 45 works in his lifetime including a history of the English people. He died in 735.

St. Boniface: An 8th century English missionary to Germany. He lived his life in England, he was sent to Germany to evangelize the German people. After gaining immense success in less than 10 years, he remained Archbishop of Mainz until he was sent on another mission. In 754 he resigned his post at Mainz and moved northward to Frisia. After telling the converts to assemble for confirmation, the heathens jumped him and his 52 companions and killed them all.

Art and Music:

With the controversies of the 8th century over the use of art and icons, this section will focus on the rise of manuscripts and the illumination of manuscripts. Monks in the monasteries were receiving texts from around Europe. Some of these texts were highly valuable for their intellectual content others for their religious significance. The monks who worked as copyists would not just copy the words of a manuscript but turn them into a work of art. Sometimes they

would embellish the lettering with color or art and sometimes they would add pictures to the texts to indicate meaning or help the reader understand the text.



Apologia of John of Damascus against those who decry holy images

PART I

WITH the ever-present conviction of my own unworthiness, I ought to have kept silence and confessed my shortcomings before God, but all things are good at the right time. I see the Church which God founded on the Apostles and Prophets, its corner-stone being Christ His Son, tossed on an angry sea, beaten by rushing waves, shaken and troubled by the assaults of evil spirits. I see rents in the seamless robe of Christ, which impious men have sought to part asunder, and His body cut into pieces, that is, the word of God and the ancient tradition of the Church. Therefore I have judged it unreasonable to keep silence and to hold my tongue, bearing in mind the Scripture warning:—"If thou withdrawest thyself, my soul shall not delight in thee," (Heb. 10.38) and "If thou seest the sword coming and dost not warn thy brother, I shall require his blood at thy hand." (cf. Ez. 33.8) Fear, then, compelled me to speak; the truth was stronger than the majesty of kings. "I bore testimony to Thee before kings," I heard the royal David saying, "and I was not ashamed." (Ps. 119.46) No, I was the more incited to speak. The King's command is all powerful over his subjects. For few men have hitherto been found who, whilst recognising the power of the earthly king to come from above, have resisted his unlawful demands.

In the first place, grasping as a kind of pillar, or foundation, the teaching of the Church, which is our salvation, I have opened out its meaning, giving, as it were, the reins to a well caparisoned charger.² For I look upon it as a great calamity that the Church, adorned with her great privileges and the holiest examples of saints in the past, should go back to the first rudiments, and fear where there is no fear. It is disastrous to suppose that the Church does not know God as He is, that she³ degenerates into idolatry, for if she declines from perfection in a single iota, it is as an enduring mark on a comely face, destroying by its unsightliness the beauty of the whole. A small thing is not small when it leads to something great, nor indeed is it a thing of no matter to give up the ancient tradition of the Church held by our forefathers, whose conduct we should observe, and whose faith we should imitate.

In the first place, then, before speaking to you, I beseech Almighty God, to whom all things lie open, who knows my small capacity and my genuine intention, to bless the words of my mouth, and to enable me to bridle my mind and direct it to Him, to walk in His presence straightly, not declining to a plausible right hand, nor knowing the left. Then I ask all God's people, the chosen ones of His royal priesthood, with the holy shepherd of Christ's orthodox flock, who represents in his own person Christ's priesthood, to receive my treatise with kindness. They must not dwell on my unworthiness, nor seek for eloquence, for I am only too conscious of my shortcomings. They must consider the thoughts themselves. The kingdom of heaven is not in word but in deed. Conquest⁴ is not my object. I raise a hand which is fighting for the truth—a willing hand under the divine guidance. Relying, then, upon substantial truth as my auxiliary, I will enter on my subject matter.

I have taken heed to the words of Truth Himself: "The Lord thy God is one." (Deut. 6.4) And "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt serve Him only, and thou shalt not have strange gods." (Deut. 6.13) Again, "Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of

anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath" (Ex. 20.4); and "Let them be all confounded that 1 Θεοπατωρ, not easily rendered in English. 2 Και τουτον ωσπερ ιππον ευχαλινον, της αφετηριας παρωπησα. 2 Apologia of St John of Damascus Against Those who Decry John of Damascus Holy Images adore graven things." (Ps. 97.7) Again, "The gods that have not made heaven and earth, let them perish." (Jer. 10.11) In this way God spoke of old to the patriarchs through the prophets, and lastly, through His only-begotten Son, on whose account He made the ages. He says, "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou didst send." (Jn 17.3) I believe in one God, the source of all things, without beginning, uncreated, immortal, everlasting, incomprehensible, bodiless, invisible, uncircumscribed,³ without form. I believe in one ⁵ supersubstantial being, one divine Godhead in three entities, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and I adore Him alone with the worship of latreia. I adore one God, one Godhead but three Persons, God the Father, God the Son made flesh, and God the Holy Ghost, one God. I do not adore creation more than the Creator, but I adore the creature created as I am, adopting creation freely and spontaneously that He might elevate our nature and make us partakers of His divine nature. Together with my Lord and King I worship Him clothed in the flesh, not as if it were a garment or He constituted a fourth person of the Trinity—God forbid. That flesh is divine, and endures after its assumption. Human nature was not lost in the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so flesh became the Word remaining flesh, becoming, rather, one with the Word through union (καθ υποστασιν). Therefore I venture to draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes through flesh and blood. I do not draw an image of the 6 immortal Godhead. I paint the visible flesh of God, for it is impossible to represent a spirit (ψυχη), how much more God who gives breath to the spirit.

Now adversaries say: God's commands to Moses the law-giver were, "Thou shalt adore shalt worship him the Lord thy God, and thou alone, and thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath."

They err truly, not knowing the Scriptures, for the letter kills whilst the spirit quickens—not finding in the letter the hidden meaning. I could say to these people, with justice, He who taught you this would teach you the following. Listen to the law-giver's interpretation in Deuteronomy: "And the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire. You heard the voice of His words, but you saw not any form at all." (Deut. 4.12) And shortly afterwards: "Keep your souls carefully. You saw not any similitude in the day that the Lord God spoke to you in Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest perhaps being deceived you might make you a graven similitude, or image of male and female, the similitude of any beasts that are upon the earth, or of birds that fly under heaven." (Deut. 4.15–17) ⁷ And again, "Lest, perhaps, lifting up thy eyes to heaven, thou see the sun and the moon, and all the stars of heaven, and being deceived by error thou adore and serve them." (Deut. 4.19)

Reflection on the Magnificat by St. Bede the Venerable

A reflection on the Magnificat by St Bede the Venerable (c.672-735) According to the Book of Common Prayer the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth was celebrated on 2nd July, the traditional date in late medieval Europe. In most modern western calendars (including Common Worship), it has been moved to 31st May. Common Worship, however, also provides an option for the July celebration. Hence the choice of a reading from one of Bede's sermons about Mary's song, the Magnificat, which occurs in Luke's account of the Visitation (Luke 1.46-55). The Church still proclaims the Magnificat at Evening Prayer every day, a tradition that Bede tells us was already an ancient custom in his own day.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour. With these words Mary first acknowledges the special gifts she has been given. Then she recalls God's universal favours, bestowed unceasingly on the human race.

When a man devotes all his thoughts to the praise and service of the Lord, he proclaims God's greatness. His observance of God's commands, moreover, shows that he has God's power and greatness always at heart. His spirit rejoices in God his saviour and delights in the mere recollection of his creator who gives him hope for eternal salvation.

These words are often for all God's creations, but especially for the Mother of God. She alone was chosen, and she burned with spiritual love for the son she so joyously conceived. Above all other saints, she alone could truly rejoice in Jesus, her saviour, for she knew that he who was the source of eternal salvation would be born in time in her body, in one person both her own son and her Lord.

For the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Mary attributes nothing to her own merits. She refers all her greatness to the gift of the one whose essence is power and whose nature is greatness, for he fills with greatness and strength the small and the weak who believe in him.

She did well to add: and holy is his name, to warn those who heard, and indeed all who would receive his words, that they must believe and call upon his name. For they too could share in everlasting holiness and true salvation according to the words of the prophet: and it will come to pass, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is the name she spoke of earlier: and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

Therefore it is an excellent and fruitful custom of holy Church that we should sing Mary's hymn at the time of evening prayer. By meditating upon the incarnation, our devotion is kindled, and by remembering the example of God's Mother, we are encouraged to lead a life of virtue. Such virtues are best achieved in the evening. We are weary after the day's work and worn out by our distractions. The time for rest is near, and our minds are ready for contemplation.”

Europe c. 770

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| 1 | Byzantine Empire |
| 2 | Balkan Slavs (pagan) |
| 3 | Danube Bulgarians (pagan) |
| 4 | Avar Khaganate (pagan) |
| 5 | Bavarians |
| 6 | Kingdom of Lombardy |
| 7 | Papal State |
| 8 | Lombard Duchies in S. Italy |
| 9 | Abbasid Caliphate |
| 10 | Christian Principalities in N. Spain |
| 11 | Basques |
| 12 | Frankish Kingdom |
| 13 | Saxons |
| 14 | Frisians |
| 15 | Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms |
| 16 | Britons |
| 17 | Umayyad Spain |



