

LESSON TWENTY-SIX



Church History

Theological Activity, Schism & Norse Conversion

Radbertus, Ratramnus & the Communion Controversy

- When the two Frankish monks Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus of Corbie clashed with each other over the doctrine of eucharist, it was the first serious theological controversy on this issue to disturb the church.
- The dispute concerned the relationship between the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper and the flesh and blood of Christ's human body.
- In the early church period, as far back as we can go, Christians had always believed that the eucharist bread and wine of the Lord's Supper could and should, in some sense or other, be called the body and blood of Christ.
- In the 4th century, many began to speak of the bread and wine being "converted" into Christ's flesh and blood; but at the same time, they still called the bread and wine "symbols," "figures," and "signs."
- Often the same theologian would employ both ways of speaking – that the bread and wine were "converted," and were "symbols."
- This was not such a contradiction as it may seem; in the thought of the ancient world, a symbol made the thing it symbolized to be present in some way – "presented" it.
- It was quite possible for a Christian thinker to hold that the eucharistic bread and wine were symbols of Christ's body and blood and that Christ's body and blood were truly present in, or with, or by means of, the bread and wine.

- These two lines of thought came in conflict with each other in the 9th century. Radbertus was a monk of Corbie monastery in north-eastern France; he was the head of the monastery's school and in 844 his fellow monks elected him their abbot.
- His most important work was his *Concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord*, was written in 831 and revised in 844.
- In this book, Radbertus argued that the bread and wine of communion were changed completely into the flesh and blood of Christ, so that the bread and wine no longer existed – they only seemed to be bread and wine, but in reality, they were now entirely the flesh and blood of the Savior.
- When communion was celebrated, the very sacrifice of Christ's flesh and blood on the cross of Calvary became miraculously present and effective for the washing away of sins.
- However, Radbertus also maintained that the believer ate Christ's flesh and blood in a spiritual sense, and that unbelievers who partook in communion did not receive the Lord's body and blood.
- Hincmar of Rheims supported Radbertus, but a number of leading Western theologians strongly opposed him, particularly Ratramnus of Corbie and Rabanus Maurus.
- Ratramnus was one of Radbertus's monks at Corbie, but he wrote against his abbot at the request of King Charles the Bald, who often asked for Ratramnus's judgement on church matters.
- Ratramnus's book, entitled *Concerning Christ's Body and Blood*, argued that the bread and wine of communion remained bread and wine in their own physical nature.
- At the same time, they became the flesh and blood of Christ – but for the believer alone, and in a mysterious and spiritual sense, rather than a crudely physical way. In, with and through the bread and wine, the Holy Spirit worked secretly to feed and strengthen the souls of Christians with the risen life of Christ.

John Scotus Erigena

- One of the greatest thinkers of the Carolingian Renaissance was an Irishman named John Scotus Erigena (810-877).
- Educated in a monastic school in Ireland, Erigena went to France in about 843, where King Charles the Bald appointed him head of the royal academy in Paris.
- He took part in the predestination controversy and the communion controversy.
- Erigena's real achievement was his translation of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite from Greek to Latin, together with a commentary on Pseudo- Dionysius by Maximus the Confessor.
- Erigena's great original work was his *Division of Nature*, published in about 862. This presented a strongly Neoplatonic understanding of Christianity.

- Erigena took reason as his supreme guide and said that wherever theology seemed to contradict reason, theological teachings had to be understood in an allegorical sense.
- Erigena wrote the *Division of Nature* in a highly poetic style, with a bold freedom from any real respect for Church tradition and many found it refreshing and attractive.
- Orthodox churchmen, however, considered it heretical, and the Frankish council of Sens condemned it. However, the book continued to inspire unorthodox thinkers and groups for centuries, until in 1225 Pope Honorius III ordered all copies of the *Division of Nature* to be burnt.

Agobard of Lyons

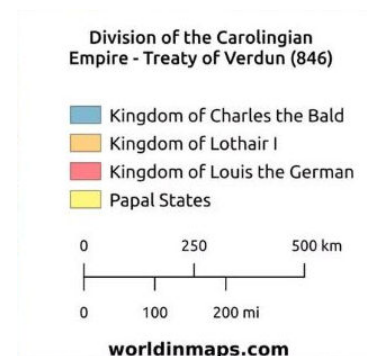
- Another memorable figure of the Carolingian Renaissance was Agobard of Lyons (779-840). Born in Muslim Spain, he emigrated to Lyons in France in 799, was ordained as a priest in 804 and in 816 became Archbishop of Lyons.
- In a colorful and eventful career, Agobard involved himself in the highest levels of imperial; he supported Lothair, son of Emperor Louis the Pious, in a civil war between father and son – the triumphant Louis deposed him from his archbishopric for two years a punishment.
- Agobard was the author of a huge number of books; his collected works contain 22 volumes. He wrote extensively against paganism, heresy and Judaism and composed many religious poems.
- Agobard's writings give us the fullest picture of Western popular culture at the time of the Carolingian Renaissance.
- In particular, they reveal how widespread pagan customs and beliefs were in the "Christian" West.
- Agobard himself fought tirelessly against this legacy of Paganism as a preacher, teacher and author.
- The most notable of his anti-Pagan writings was his *Concerning Hail and Thunder*, in which he criticized the popular belief that evil spirits, rather than God's providence, controlled the wind and rain and that magic spells could induce these spirits to bestow good weather.



- In many ways Agobard took an unusually scientific and rational attitude towards nature and the world; he has been praised as possessing the clearest intellect of the 9th century.

The Collapse of the Empire

- Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious (814-40), continued to govern the Holy Roman Empire according to his father's ideals but without his father's abilities.
- At the end of his reign, Louis disastrously divided the Empire up between his three sons, Louis the German, Charles the Bald and Lothair.
- Louis received the area east of the Rhine river, the "East Frankish kingdom," which became the separate region of Germany; Charles received the "west Frankish kingdom" (France); Lothair received the title of Emperor and a strip of land stretching from the mouth of the Rhine to Lombardy.
- After Lothair's death in 855, his territory was again divided and became little more than a chaos of small states.
- The title of Emperor passed to the German kings. However, when the last Carolingian king of Germany, Louis the Child, died in 911, real power had fallen into the hands of the great German tribal chiefs (dukes) of Saxony, Thuringia, Franconia, Lorraine, Swabia and Bavaria.
- France had disintegrated in a similar way by the death of its last Carolingian king in 987.
- The popes used the disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire to reassert their own supreme authority over church affairs.
- Papalism striking back against imperialism. Yet they found that the disappearance of their greatest rival, a powerful Holy Roman Emperor, also meant the loss of their greatest ally.
- Without an effective emperor to protect them, the popes fell increasingly under the control of the Roman nobility and simply became political pawns in the conflicts of different aristocratic factions.

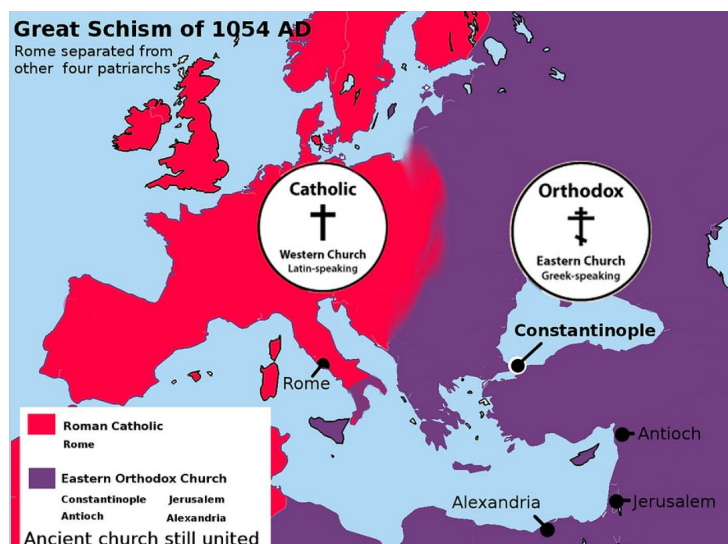


Meanwhile the Western Christian world came under fresh military threat from three sources:

1. Muslims went on the offensive from North Africa, using sea power to attack Sicily, Sardinia and the Italian coast. The Spanish Muslim kingdom of Cordova also reached its greatest height of power and influence in the 10th century.
2. In 899, a new wave of migrating Asianj tribes, the Pagan Magyars, brought war and devastation into Germany, northern Italy, and southern France. The Magyars settled in Eastern Europe and eventually became the nation of Hungary.
3. Above all, the Pagan Norsemen – “men of the north,” also called Normans and Vikings – began their vast expansion from Scandinavia in 840. The Norseman worshiped the ancient gods of Germany (Thor, Odin, Freya etc.) A great seafaring people, their ships and warriors brought bloodshed and destruction to Britain, Ireland, France, northern Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and northern Italy. The 9th and 10th centuries were the “Dark Ages” of political anarchy and constant warfare in Christian Europe. To many Western Christians, it seemed that the end of the world was at hand; it was seriously expected to happen in the year 1000.¹
 - Charlemagne’s empire fell to pieces politically after his death. However, the Carolingian Renaissance, which Charlemagne nurtured, had given to Western Europe a unity of Christian culture so strong it survived the political chaos and formed the basis for a more stable European society that emerged in the 11th century.

The Great East-West Schism

- The Eastern and Western wings of the one universal church had been drifting apart ever since the fall of the Roman Empire in the West in 410. East and West spoke different languages (Greek in the East and Latin in the West).
- They lived in different cultural and political worlds. Over the centuries, a great many differences, disagreements and misunderstandings had grown up between Eastern and Western Christendom.
- During the Middle Ages, Rome’s claims became ever more exalted. The popes began claiming a place of special honor among bishops; they ended by claiming absolute authority over the entire Church.



- The East denied the papacy's claims, rejected the idea that the church has a visible earthly head, and held that the five ancient patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria should together offer leadership to Christians.
- **Differences in religious practice.** These varied in their seriousness. The West did not allow priests to marry; the East allowed them to marry prior to ordination and almost all Eastern priests were married men (although bishops had to be celibate).
- The West used unleavened bread in communion; the East used leavened bread.
- In baptism, the East continued the early church practice of immersing people three times in the name of the Trinity; the West had come to tolerate a variety of practices – threefold immersion, single immersion and affusion, although affusion increasingly became the Western norm.
- **Theological differences.** These were increasingly serious. The East, for example, did not teach the Western doctrine of purgatory, which was becoming ever more central in Western spirituality.
- The West held that some aspects of sin's penalty could be removed on earth by penance or by an indulgence. If a believer died without paying all the punishment he owed, he had to pay off his outstanding debt by suffering in the fire of purgatory.
- However, according to Western theory, the pope had the power to release souls from purgatory, because God had given the papacy control over the "treasury of merits" of the saints.
- By contrast the East denied the existence of purgatory, rejected the idea that the righteous were punished after death and did not believe in the "treasury of merits" or in indulgences.
- However, Easterners did accept that true believers, whose Christian lives had fallen seriously short of God's standards, would not be immediately admitted into heaven.
- They would have to wait in a condition of shadow and sorrow until God had mercy on them. No punishment, no torment and no purifying fire was involved.
- All the church on earth could do was pray humbly for these souls, especially at holy communion; but neither the pope nor anyone else on earth had any spiritual power over them – this was the prerogative of Christ alone.
- **The language barrier contributed to the theological divide.** Greek was ideally suited for expressing Christian truth with the concepts, concerns and precision of philosophy.
- Byzantine theologians therefore tended to approach the doctrine of the church and salvation in basically ontological terms, as a transforming spiritual union between the natures of God and humanity in the person of Christ the God-man (ontological comes from the Greek word for being).
- By contrast, Latin had an inbuilt atmosphere of law; inherited from the deep-rooted traditions of the Western Roman Empire. Western theologians therefore tended to see the church and salvation more in legal terms – the church as an administrative organization, salvation as the remission of penalty.

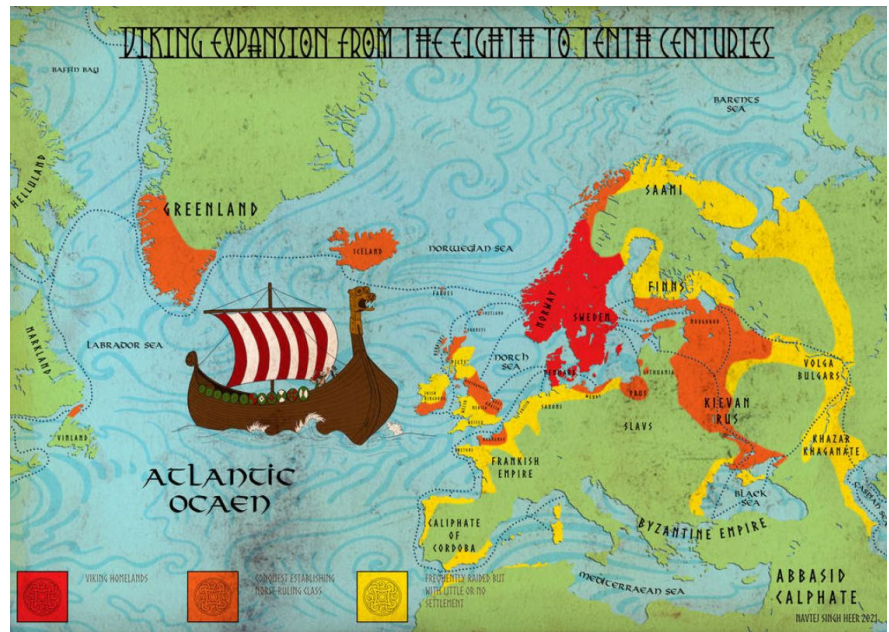
- Furthermore, in Western thinking, dominated by Augustine's theology, the doctrine of original sin was central.
- For Western theologians, all human beings were born with the guilt and corruption of Adam's sin resting upon them. Salvation was therefore understood as being fundamentally a deliverance from the debt of guilt and stain of depravity. Death was the consequence of sin; the atoning work of Christ dealt with sin and thereby conquered death.
- Such views were not unknown in the East, but Easterners generally approached the whole question of salvation from a different standpoint.
- In Eastern thought, the fundamental problem was perceived as death rather than sin. Easterners agreed that the human race had fallen in Adam, but they saw mortality and death, rather than original sin, as the inheritance which Adam transmitted to his offspring.
- Eastern theology looked upon death as an all-pervading cosmic force, which alienated both the body and soul of human beings from their true destiny.
- Original sin for Easterners usually meant the grip that death had on human nature through Adam's sin; they rejected the idea of Adam's guilt being imputed to his descendants.
- Salvation, accordingly, meant liberation from the objective power of death. Sin was the consequence of death, the atoning work of Christ conquered death and thereby dealt with sin.
- Given these differing outlooks, it is not surprising that Western piety came to be centered increasingly on the cross of Christ, whereas Eastern piety tended to focus more on His resurrection.
- **The most crucial doctrinal difference between East and West was over the doctrine of the Trinity and the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed.**
- The East held that in the inner life of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, whereas the West maintained that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son as a single source.
- The East also objected to the way that the West had inserted the filioque clause into the Nicene Creed, thus altering the first and greatest of the church's ecumenical Creeds.
- The papacy itself had resisted this insertion of the filioque into the Creed for centuries, even though it was committed to the doctrine of the filioque, but in the early 11th century, Rome finally officially inserted the clause into the Creed.
- The East began with the person of God the Father and saw Him as the personal source of the divine essence, and thus the personal bond of unity in the Trinity; the West by contrast, began with the divine essence itself and saw it as the source of the three divine persons and their common bond of unity.
- Political and military events sparked off the final breach between East and West. The Byzantine Emperor, Constantine IX (1042-1055), had made an alliance with the Holy

Roman Emperor, Henry III (1039-1056) and Pope Leo IX (1049-1054) against the Normans, who were threatening both Byzantine and papal land in southern Italy.

- As a result of this alliance, Constantine IX demanded that the patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius (1043-1058), acknowledge the superior authority of Rome over Constantinople. Michael refused; he was determined to uphold the ecclesiastical freedom and independence of Constantinople.
- As the quarrel worsened, in 1052 Michael closed down the Latin-speaking churches of Constantinople.
- Then in 1053 he and Leo of Ochrida, the scholarly bishop of Bulgaria, addressed a letter to the pope and all Western Catholics in which they detailed the errors of the Western religious practices.
- Pope Leo IX replied through Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, sending Michael a letter setting out all the exalted claims of the papacy in the most uncompromising terms.
- The victory of the Normans over Leo IX's army at the battle of Civitate (south-eastern Italy), in which Leo was taken prisoner, brought a temporary halt to the East-West quarrel.
- The Norman threat to Byzantine land in Italy was now greater than ever, compelling Michael to make peaceful overtures to Leo. Pope Leo sent ambassadors to Constantinople, led by Cardinal Humbert. However, the meeting between Michael and Humbert was an utter disaster.
- The patriarch and the cardinal were two of the most high-spirited, stubborn, aggressive men who have ever lived in the history of humanity.
- When news reached Michael in Constantinople that Pope Leo had died, he refused any longer to acknowledge Humbert's right to negotiation.
- Eventually Humbert lost all patience with Michael. Together with the other papal legates, on July 16th 1054 Humbert marched into Hagia Sophia, and laid on the holy table a document excommunicating Michael and all who dared to follow him in his blasphemous criticisms of the most holy faith of the Roman Church.
- Michael responded by anathematizing Humbert and the other papal ambassadors.
- The West received Humbert's action with approval. Its effect was to break Eastern and Western Christianity apart into two separate churches (referred to, from this point onwards, as the Western Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church).
- Since both sides believed that there could be only one true Church, this East-West split meant that neither side regarded the other as true Christians any longer. The Holy Spirit dwelt only in the true church.
- It took some time for the consequences of 1054 to become clear in the practical relations between all Easterners and Westerners at the local level. It was the Crusades, and the outrages committed by the Western Crusaders against Eastern Christians, which made the great schism into a burning grass-roots reality.

Conversion of the Norsemen in England

- The war and devastation which the pagan Norsemen of Scandinavia brought upon Western Europe in the 9th and 10th centuries almost destroyed Christian civilization. To their victims, it seemed impossible that these savage killers could ever embrace the Christian faith. But the impossible happened.
- It began in England. The Norsemen of Denmark (the Danes) conquered and colonized much of the north-eastern half of the country and then pushed south to try to take over the rest of England.
- England at that time was divided into a number of separate Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, which fell one by one to the Danish invaders.
- However, the English people of the southern kingdom of Wessex fought back under their young Christian king, Alfred the Great (born 840, reigned 871-899).
- Alfred finally crushed the Danish army in 878 at the battle of Edington (south-western England), and forced the Danes to accept a peaceful division of the land.
- One of Alfred's terms of peace was that the Danish king, Guthrum and his court, should be baptized. Alfred hoped this would discourage the pagan Danes from persecuting the Christian English in the Danish ruled parts of England.
- So, the Danes England submitted to the Christian faith, and under Alfred's grandson, king Athelstan (925-939), they became part of a politically and spiritually united Christian England.
- From his own lifetime to the present day, many people have admired King Alfred for the noble quality of his mind and spirit.
- His mighty contribution to the development of English Christian culture also earned him the title of the "Charlemagne of England."
- Alfred saw it as his God-given destiny to create a flourishing Christian civilization in his kingdom of Wessex. Acting as a "sacred king," he consecrated his royal power to the supreme mission of organizing church affairs, raising moral and academic standards among the clergy, and promoting the religious knowledge of the English people.



- He gave away half his income to the building and maintenance of churches and schools. He personally translated into English a number of the great Latin works of theology.
- In carrying out this task, Alfred relied on the advice of an international team of scholars whom he gathered from Britain, Ireland and France; his favorite and constant companion was a learned Welsh priest-monk, Asser.
- In his private life Alfred was a devout, humble, prayerful Christian. He knew the liturgy and many of the Psalms by heart, and swore an oath to divide his time equally between the political affairs of his kingdom and spiritual affairs of his faith.
- A mysterious life-long illness, which often left him in agony for lengthy periods, softened his naturally war-like spirit into something more generous and gentler.
- King Alfred was the real founder of the English nation. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England had never come together politically before the Norse invasions; Alfred united half the island around his own kingdom of Wessex, paving the way for the complete unification of England under his grandson Athelstan.
- Alfred also founded the English navy, created a new and stronger English army, built fortified towns and cities which could withstand Danish attacks, and initiated the official recording of English history through the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*.

Conversion of the Norsemen in France

- In France the Norseman (or Normans as the French called them) also accepted Christianity.
- After the Normans had conquered the northern French coast, the French king, Charles the Simple (898-923), made a peace treaty in 911 with the Norman leader, Rollo.
- The treaty made Rollo's land into the French duchy of Normandy, owing allegiance in theory to France's king. Part of the treaty involved Rollo and the Normans embracing the Christian faith.
- In the mid-11th century, a band of French Norman warriors brought southern Italy under their control, snatching it from the Byzantine Empire and then conquered Sicily too, seizing it from the Muslims.
- These events transformed the Normans into the militant champions of the Western Catholic Church against Islam and Eastern Orthodoxy. In 1066 they invaded and conquered England and Duke William of Normandy became King William I of England (William the Conqueror, 1066-1087).

Denmark

- In 972, King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark and his entire army accepted Christian baptism.
- There was a pagan reaction under king Sweyn (986-1014), but Sweyn's son Canute (1019-1035) was a strong Christian, and Denmark became a fully Christian kingdom in Canute's reign.

- Canute was king of England as well as Denmark and made good use of English monks and priests in evangelizing his Danish kingdom.

Norway

- King Olaf Tryggvason (995-1000) made Christianity Norway's national faith. Olaf was a typical Norse warrior, who spent five years as king of Norway using rough Norse methods to persuade his aristocracy to accept the new faith- be baptized or die.
- There was a pagan reaction after Olaf's death but King Olaf Haraldsson (1015-1028) effectively made Norway a Christian kingdom.

Sweden

- Sweden officially became Christian under King Olaf Skotkonung (944-1024). Christianity prospered, however, only in the south-west of Sweden. Elsewhere people continued to practice paganism.
- It was only in the reign of King Sverker (1130-1055) that the Christian faith really put down roots throughout the country.
- The success of this campaign was shown when the city of Uppsala, previously a stronghold of paganism yielded to Christianity and became the new center of the Swedish church.

Iceland

- From the 870s the Norseman settled this northern island just below the Arctic Circle, where they developed one of the most cultured and democratic societies in the Western World.
- Iceland received the Christian faith through missionaries sent by King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway.
- The response of the Icelanders to the preaching of the Norwegian evangelists was to divide into Christian and pagan; a religious civil war seemed to be on the horizon.
- However, the democratic traditions of Icelandic culture prevailed and the nation agreed to submit the great religious question to one of their wisest men.
- After a long period of meditation, the sage finally reported back that the new faith in Christ was better than the old paganism. This decision was accepted by all and the Icelandic parliament made Christianity the national religion in the year 1000.

Finland

- The beginnings of the Church in Finland are obscure. Sweden and Russia played a part in introducing Christianity, both in its Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox forms.
- Missionaries were at work in the 1100s and in 1220 an English missionary called Thomas, bishop of Rantemakia, officially organized a Finnish Catholic Church.

- At the same time that the Swedish monarchy established its sovereignty over Finland, Western Catholicism triumphed over Eastern Orthodoxy as the official Finnish faith in 1249.



The Magyars

- These were an Asiatic people who migrated into central Europe under their warrior-leader Arpad (896-907).
- In a series of campaigns between 899 and 955, they brought far greater bloodshed and destruction into Germany and the surrounding areas than the Norsemen ever did.

- They were decisively crushed though by the German Emperor Otto at the battle of Augsburg in 955.
- The Magyars settled down to create the kingdom of Hungary. Their leader, Geza (972-997) accepted Christian baptism, established a strong monarchy and used royal power to advance the church and Christian faith throughout his dominion, a process completed by his successor, King Stephen I (997-1038).

The Bohemians

- The Bohemians (or Czechs) were a Slavic people, strongly influenced by Western Christianity from the 850s onwards.
- The Christian faith first became a powerful force among them under King Wenceslas, but he was murdered by his pagan brother, Boleslav in 929.
- Boleslav's son, however, King Boleslav II (967-999) was a committed Christian who successfully promoted the interests of the Church throughout Bohemia.

The Poles

- The Poles were another Slavic people who from the 7th century had occupied north-eastern Europe, between Germany and Russia.
- In 966, the Polish ruler, Duke Mieszko I (960-992), was baptized into the Christian faith by Western missionaries; the main Christian influence on him seems to have been his Bohemian wife, Dobrawa, the sister of King Boleslav II of Bohemia.
- Mieszko entered into close diplomatic relations with the German Emperor Otto III (983-1002), and placed Poland under the special protection of the pope.

The Croats

- The Croats were also Slavs, neighbors of the Serbs. United by race and language, the two groups were divided by religion.
- The Serbs embraced Eastern Christianity, while the Croats turned West towards the papacy.
- The decisive moment for the Croats came in the reign of King Demetrius Zvonimir (1074-1089), who liberated his people from the Byzantine Empire; Pope Gregory VII crowned Demetrius king of Croatia in 1076.

¹ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume 2, The Middle Ages, Needham Nick, page 79