

The church of Rome in the sixth century

HIST 329 Lecture 9

Rising pretensions of Rome

- Damasus
- Leo the Great
- Disputed by Eastern patriarchs, councils
 - Canons of Constantinople I, 381
 - Constantinople as New Rome second only to Rome
 - “Primacy of honor”: ambiguous phrasing
 - Canons of Chalcedon, 451
 - Status of Constantinople reaffirmed
 - Status of Jerusalem raised to fifth patriarchate
- Background: disintegration of Roman state in West



Map 6.3

The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures: A Concise History, Second Edition

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Invasions: context and consequences

- Central authority weak in West ca. 400
- Barbarian invasions → collapse of state
 - Regular taxation ceases or revenues remain local
 - Armies evaporate: civil war, lack of pay
- Germanic groups carve out kingdoms
 - Religiously diverse: Arian, Catholic, pagan
- More barbarians enter, disruption continues
- Power vacuum filled by local authorities
- Rise of bishops, saints, pilgrimage centers

Justinian's Reconquest

- Emperor 527-565 (w/ uncle Justin from 518)
- Attempts to re-conquer western empire
- Vandal kingdom in N Africa 533
 - Conquered it immediately, but had trouble re-establishing stable rule due to nomad incursions
- Ostrogothic Italy invaded 535
 - Ravenna re-taken as base for E Roman admin
 - 20-year war against determined Ostrogothic resistance
 - Final defeat of Ostrogoths only in 553

Consequences of Justinian's wars

- East Roman rule in S Spain, Central Italy & Sicily, N Africa
 - Areas ruled essentially as colonies of Constantinople
 - Under Heraclius, early 7th C, reorganized as exarchates
- No lasting East Roman political control over the West
 - Visigoths reconquer last bits of Byzantine enclave in Spain by 624
 - Lombards invade Italy 568, conquer much of it by 590
 - Only North Africa remained unitary Eastern possession to 698
- Destruction in Italy
 - Direct effects of decades of war
 - Indirectly, Lombard invasion → permanent political fragmentation



Destruction of Italy

- Italy had become a virtual wasteland by 580
 - Plague raged from 540s on
 - Consequences of 50+ years of war:
 - Flight of the senatorial elite
 - Depopulation of the countryside
 - Decline of agriculture
 - Recurrent famine
- Attempts to raise taxes only made things worse



Italy ca. 700

Depopulation of the city of Rome

- Population of Rome remained steady at ca. 1,000,000 through 3rd C
- 410: had perhaps declined to 500,000
- Early 6th C: population down to 40-60,000
- By 547: about 30,000
- Repeated sieges, sacks
- Loss of *annona*: food supplied from N Africa



Aerial view of ancient Rome, ca. 350 AD (“Il Plastico”)



Cornelis van Poelenburg, *Ruins of Ancient Rome*, 1608, Louvre



Rise of episcopal administration

- Roman bishops were the only major Western bishops to equal patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch and Constantinople
- Roman Church held immense lands, esp. in S Italy and Sicily
- Roman Church also had strong administrative infrastructure, buildings, staff, routines (e.g. organized record-keeping)
- Bishops stepped in to fill power vacuum and administer a city in ruins

Gregory the Great (pope 590-604)



L: Throne of Gregory the Great; R: Gregory dictating, manuscript illumination, ca. 1000

Gregory's Life

- B. at Rome ca. 540
- Wealthy and prominent family
 - Great-great-grandfather: Pope Felix III (483-492)
- Prefect of the City 573
- Monastery on the Caelian Hill ca. 574-580
- Apocrisiarius (papal emissary @ Constantinople) ca. 580
- Returned to Rome ca. 586 to his monastery
- Bishop of Rome 590-604

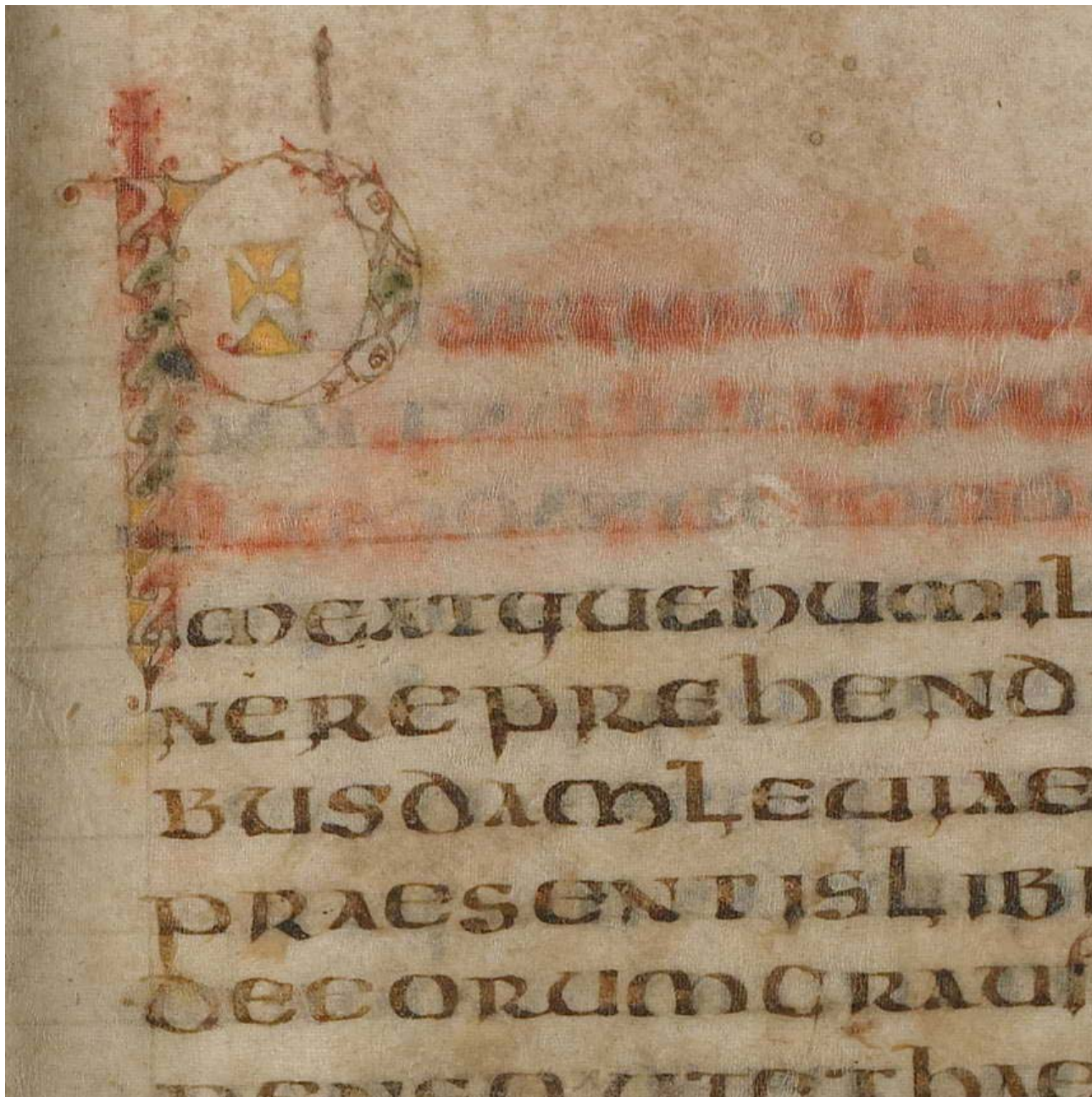
Gregory's Works

- *Moralia in Job*: homilies on Job, Constantinople
- Exegetical works: based on preaching at Rome
 - Gospels
 - Ezekiel
 - Song of Songs
 - 1 Kings
- *Liber regulae pastoralis* (Pastoral Rule): ca. 590
- Dialogues: stories about martyrs, miracles, monks
 - Includes first biography of Benedict of Nursia

The *Pastoral Rule*

- Treatise on the office and character of bishops
- Functions of the bishop
 - Intercessor w/ God: performing the sacraments
 - Governing the Christian community
 - Teaching: formal (preaching) and informal
- Four main topics:

“...after what manner every one should come to supreme rule; and, duly arriving at it, after what manner he should live; and, living well, after what manner he should teach; and, teaching aright, with how great consideration every day he should become aware of his own infirmity...”



Pastoral Rule of
Gregory the Great

Manuscript ca. 600
from the municipal
library of Troyes

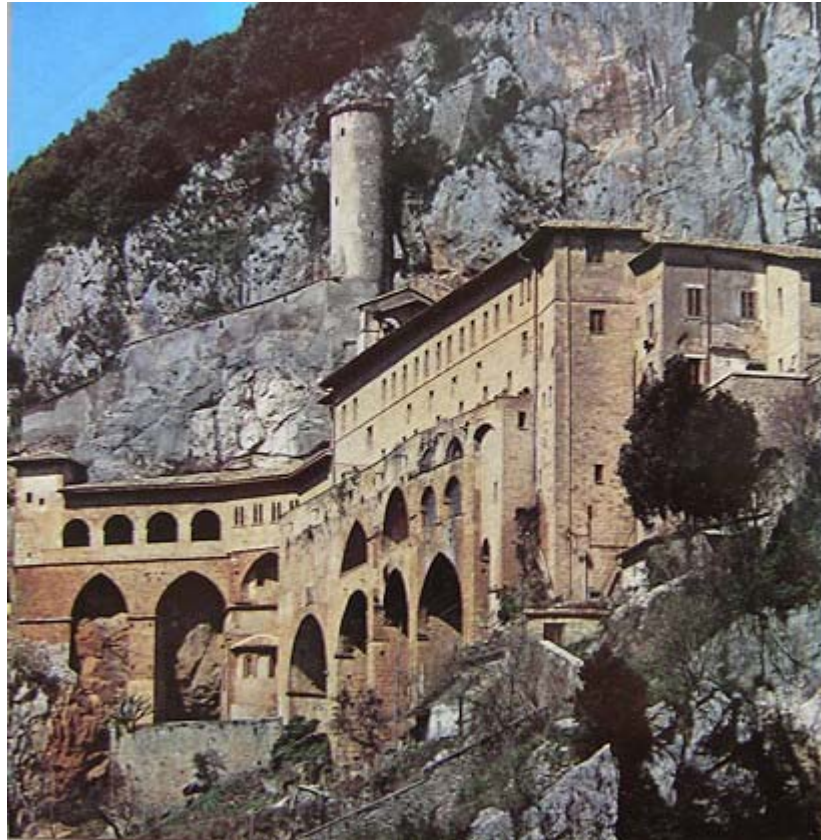


Gregory's contribution

- ❑ Maintained prestige of Roman episcopacy against Western bishops, Eastern emperors, patriarchs
- ❑ Stabilized political and social order in Rome
- ❑ Administered episcopal patrimony to provide new sources of support for Roman population
- ❑ Provided new model for Christian charity as organizing principle for society

Benedict of Nursia

- Born ca. 480, died ca. 547
- Abandons life of a Roman noble ca. 500
- Retreats to monastic life at Subiaco, then to a hermit's existence nearby for 3 years
- Returns to rule a nearby monastery which however tries to poison him
- Goes on to found 12 monasteries incl. Monte Cassino in the region
- Spends the rest of his life at a 13th monastery nearby



Monastery of Subiaco, on the site of Benedict's cave



Monte Cassino after US bombardment, 1944

Benedict's *Rule*

- Background: earlier monastic rules
 - Eastern: Pachomius, Basil of Caesarea
 - Western: Augustine, *Regula Magistri* (Rule of the Master)
- Sources and influences
 - Cassian (drawing directly on Egyptian models)
 - Rule of the Master
- Distinctive features
 - Balance between asceticism, community, order
 - Practical emphasis, understanding of what works
 - Incorporation of labor w/in coenobitic structure
 - Orderly disposition of time during monastic day



Contents of the *Rule*

- Only 73 short chapters
- Over half deal w/ proper conduct for monks and dealing with improper behavior
- One-fourth deal w/ daily routine of monks, including schedule for prayer
- One-tenth deal w/ administration of monastery
- Final one-tenth deal w/ duties of the abbot



The Benedictine model

- Abbot rules supreme as spiritual father and monastic administrator
- Monastery as family: father (abbot) and brothers (monks)
- Rigid division of day and night into times for different activities: prayer, work, study, eating, etc.
- Regular schedule of prayers and services at set times evolves into medieval Liturgy of the Hours
- Canonical round of 8 prayers at set times of day and night: Matins,

The canonical hours

- Matins (during the night)
- Lauds (Dawn Prayer)
- Prime (Early Morning Prayer: First Hour = 6 a.m.)
- Terce (Mid-Morning Prayer: Third Hour = 9 a.m.)
- Sext (Midday Prayer: Sixth Hour = 12 noon)
- None (Mid-Afternoon Prayer: Ninth Hour = 3 p.m.)
- Vespers (Evening Prayer: “at lighting of lamps”)
- Compline (Night Prayer: before retiring)

Influence of Benedict's rule

- Immediate influence weak, highly local
- Taken up by Gregory the Great
 - *Life* of Benedict in Dialogues book 2
- Becomes highly influential under early Carolingians
 - Charlemagne
 - Louis the Pious: Benedict of Aniane, Council of Aachen
- Only in later Middle Ages does a Benedictine “order” emerge—and never as monastic “franchise,” just group of affiliated monasteries
- Liturgy of the hours develops into a complex ritual of sung prayer taking up most of the monks' time