

Roman Catholic Church History

What are the major events in Roman Catholic Church history?

To summarize Roman Catholic church history, we can begin with the establishment of Christianity as the state religion by Emperor Constantine around 313. At this time, the church began to make headway among the aristocracy. At this time, there was bitter controversy as well as the production of great theological treatises.

In the Early Middle Ages, after the invasion of Germanic peoples into the territories of the Roman Empire, there was a period of chaos. Barbarian kingdoms took the place of the Empire. Much ancient culture disappeared, and the Church preserved some of it.

In 800, the Pope crowned Charlemagne "emperor" in order to resurrect the ancient Western Roman Empire. This caused Christianity to move from the Mediterranean area to the area located from the kingdom of the Franks to Rome.

In the High Point of the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church experienced a reformation through the ranks of monasticism. This was the time of the Crusades, beginning in 1095 and lasting for several centuries. As a response to the rise of the "bourgeoisie" or the city people with money who were involved in commerce, cities grew, and new monastic orders arose. The most important were the Franciscans and Dominicans. They supported themselves through begging. They brought about a new awakening in missionary work and penetrated the universities where they were the leaders of "scholastic" theology. Important figures were Bonaventure (Franciscan) and Thomas Aquinas (Dominican).

Great cathedrals arose at this time and the papacy reached the height of its power and prestige, most notably in the papacy of Innocent III (1198-1216).

In the Late Middle Ages, the decline of the papacy was rapid. The seat of the papacy moved from Rome to Avignon on the French border (1309-1377). The "Great Western Schism" occurred at this time with two and sometimes three popes claiming the papacy (1378-1423). The movement that brought the Church back to one pope was the movement where councils met and made decisions. During this time, the popes began to pay more attention to building beautiful palaces and making war on Italian potentates than on the spiritual life. Scholastic theology became more and more specialized and of more interest to the theologians themselves than related to the daily life of the average Christian.

From 1453 to 1600, two important events took place in history that greatly affected the Roman Catholic Church. They were the "discovery" and conquest of the Americas and the Protestant Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church underwent a renewal called, the "Counter-Reformation."

The First Vatican Council was held in 1870. It was here that the pope was formally declared infallible. Pope Pius IX reacted to modernism -- democracy, freedom of conscience -- by condemning it. During this time, the Christian faith became truly universal through wide geographic expansion. Beginning with the papacy of John XXIII in 1958, there was an opening up to the modern world. The Second Vatican Council opened in 1962 brought further reform to the Church.

(Info from: <http://www.allaboutreligion.org/roman-catholic-church-history-faq.htm>)

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