

STUDY PACK 27

CHARLEMAGNE AND THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

“Charlemagne, a typical German of the day, was a large and tall man, vigorous of mind and body, and a powerful warrior. He considered the pope to be his subject and treated him as such. He was ready for his own reasons to bring autonomous churches like the Bavarian Church under the papal power, since it simply served to unify his own realm. For the same reason, he forced Christianity on the last pagan German nation, Saxony...”

~~ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *World History Notes*, p.137 ~~

I. RISE OF THE FRANKS AND ISLAMIC INVASIONS

Two dynamics combined to change Europe forever: the rise of Islam in the East (which led to the Islamic conquest of Iberia and invasions of Europe) and the rise of the Franks as the first real Imperial power in the West since Rome, along with their halting the tide of Islamic expansion under the rule of Charles Martel. The rise of Islam also began the long, slow slide into extinction of the Eastern Roman Empire, which though it would endure for another seven hundred years, and even achieve renewed glory in the tenth century. Islam’s coming had the unexpected result of shifting _____.

In the West, the first beginning of a new order arose with the Carolingians, who began as Mayors of the Palace for the Frankish Kings. At their onset, these were merely Romanized Germanic barbarians, civilized to some degree by Christianity and a gradual evolution into a central government controlled by the Carolingian nobility, which actually ruled the Franks. This system developed under Charles Martel.

He was also a skilled administrator and ruler, organizing what would become the _____ - a system of fiefdoms, loyal to barons, counts, dukes and ultimately the King. His close coordination of church with state also began the medieval pattern for such government. He created the first western _____ since the fall of Rome. In essence, he changed western Europe from a horde of barbarians fighting with one another, to an _____. He also halted Islamic expansion into Europe. His crucial defeats of Muslim invading armies at Tours, Arles, and River Berre, stopped the Islamic tide while the Caliphate was still united. He set the stage for his son, Pippin the Short, to assume the Frankish Throne in what was already the basic Carolingian Empire, and his grandson to assume the title of the first Western Roman Emperor since Rome’s fall, three centuries before.

II. THE CONCEPT OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Charles Martel’s grandson Charlemagne, dreamed of _____ in coordination with the Roman Catholic Church. In this dream, he was not alone. Many other medieval kings shared the same dream. Charles V (of the Reformation era) also dreamed of restoring the Roman Empire. So did the Byzantine emperors, the Russian Czars (which means Caesar), Napoleon, the German Kaiser (_____) and Mussolini. This dream _____. One day, _____ will revive the Roman Empire, see the book of Revelation.

III. CHARLES THE GREAT

The grandson of Charles Martel, Charles the Great (Charlemagne) ruled France for 44 years (742-814 A.D.). For the most part, Charlemagne lived very simply, dressing in the same type of clothing worn by the common people. He was not well-educated, but he recognized the need for education. He was especially interested in educating the members of the clergy and the young people of his kingdom in religious training.

One school established by Charlemagne was the palace school which was for the training of his sons and those of some great nobles. Charlemagne sometimes attended this school himself. In this school, Charlemagne brought some of the great scholars of this period together, including Venerable Bede who wrote on grammar, music, history, religion, and time. He introduced to western Europe the A.D. and B.C. system of dating.

Charlemagne made many laws for the benefit of the Frankish people. He established _____ throughout his kingdom and sent special representatives to all parts of his vast kingdom to report to him whether _____.

The battles of Charlemagne against foes of his church and of his country were many. He conquered many lands and often gave them to the pope. In 800 A.D., Charlemagne visited Rome and while kneeling to pray, was proclaimed _____ and crowned by the pope. The year after he was crowned, Charlemagne tried to unite his new empire and the eastern Byzantine Empire which was ruled by Empress Irene at that time. Charlemagne sent messengers to Constantinople to ask Irene if she would marry him. Before any decision was made, Irene was driven from the throne and her successor was not interested in the union of the empires.

Notker the Stammerer, a monk of the time wrote: "He who ordains the fate of kingdoms and the march of the centuries, the all-powerful Disposer of events, having destroyed one extraordinary image, that of the Romans, which had, it was true, feet of iron, or even feet of clay, then raised up, among the Franks, the golden head of a second image, equally remarkable, in the person of the illustrious Charlemagne."

IV. CAROLINGIAN STABILITY

Charlemagne was determined to bring stability to Europe by five methods.

First, _____ - his!

Second, to promote a universal respect for the Roman past.

Third, to unite the revived Roman Empire under _____, Roman Catholicism.

Fourth, to foster education to create _____.

Fifth, to exalt the German way of life.

The attempt to achieve these goals required constant warfare.

V. CONQUEST

Charlemagne handsomely rewarded his warriors with land and he developed a large army that was fiercely loyal to him. He solidified his hold on modern _____ and _____. He conquered most of _____, _____, _____, and _____. Most of _____ came under his control peacefully.

He was recognized by the Byzantine leaders as the Holy Roman Emperor, even though it must have been distasteful to them to do so.

VI. CHARLEMAGNE AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Charlemagne was determined to create one universal culture for Europe and to use the Roman Catholic Church to do so. He used military force to convert the last remaining pagan Germanic tribe, the Saxons, to the Roman Catholic Church. His soldiers marched tens of thousands of Saxons to the rivers of Germany to be baptized. Those who refused were _____.

The money of the Empire was used to build elaborate churches. Tithing to the Catholic Church became _____.

VII. THE CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE

Charlemagne is famous for the revival of learning that he sponsored. Scholars and books from around Europe were gathered at his court. Previously, _____ had served as the primary depository of the scholars and literature of Europe. Now the full force of the Empire was behind the progress of European scholarship. However, as Francis Schaeffer points out, it is important to remember that this was education for the clergy: "But, note carefully, all of Charlemagne's scholars _____. Learning was not general. We still remember those days in our English language – our word, clerk is related to the word cleric, that is, a member of the clergy. It seems that, though Charlemagne himself learned to read, he never learned to write." *How Should We Then Live*, p.44.

Schaeffer further points out how that this revival of learning in the church influenced the art of the era. "With the scholarly revival of the Carolingian age, there also came an artistic revival. People in later centuries wondered at the costly and exquisite jewels, religious objects, and books. Most of these – like a talisman of Charlemagne which contained a relic and an ivory bookbinding of the crucifixion – emphasize the religious orientation of the artistic revival of that time" – Ibid, p.44

VIII. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF LAW

The Germanic tribes filled Europe with the idea that _____ not the state or even the ruler. This was fused with the idea that God was sovereign. Every king and emperor was under the law of his tribe or nation. He could be resisted or even overthrown if he broke the law.

German rulers took _____. This is the beginning of the concept of _____.
(In the U.S. government, officials take an oath to uphold the constitution.)

There was constant conflict between the concept of the revival of the Holy Roman Empire, the supremacy of the Pope and the idea of the rule of law. Much of the Middle Ages is a story of the conflict between these three ideas.

IX. THE DECLINE OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

The glory of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne did not last long. Later rulers did not rise to the occasion. During the Middle Ages, leaders were given a permanent name after their passing which summed up how their generation felt about their greatest characteristics and accomplishments. Charles the Hammer and Charles the Magnificent were succeeded by men like Charles the _____, Charles the _____, and _____ (who ruled in his fifties and sixties).

The Holy Roman Empire remained a force in European affairs for over 800 years, but it rarely even faintly resembled the influence that it had under Charlemagne.