

## The Wisdom of God on Display – Distraction (AD 600-900)

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” – Matthew 16.18

Thursday Night Bible Study – 28<sup>th</sup> January

Question: What buildings do you visit as a tourist in Europe?

### 1. Serfdom anyone?

- Feudalism (response to fall of Rome)
- Alfred and Charlemagne

*Alfred, unshakeable pillar of the people of Wessex, a man full of justice, vigorous in war, wise in speech, and – above all else – learned in holy literature; for he translated countless numbers of books from Latin into English, with such variety and skill, that not only scholars but anyone who wished could understand them. O Redeemer Christ, save his soul! – funeral speech*

- Western and Northern Europe ‘Christianised’
- Constantine’s enduring legacy?

*It was around this time that a document called the donation of Constantine appeared. This claimed to be a letter from the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, to pope Sylvester I. A story had grown up that Sylvester had miraculously cured Constantine of leprosy; in gratitude, Constantine had supposedly written this letter to Sylvester, in which he acknowledged that the pope was superior to the emperor, and granted the papacy the right to govern the city of Rome and all imperial territory in Italy and the West.*

*– 2000 Years of Christ’s Power*

- Rise of Islam (foundation for Crusades)

### 2. Theological Wanderings

- What does Jesus do?

*The substance of bread and wine is effectually changed into the flesh and blood of Christ, so that after the priestly consecration there is nothing else in the eucharist but the flesh and blood of Christ, although the figure of bread and wine remain to the senses of sight, touch, and taste. – Paschasius Radbertus*

- Who runs the church? (part 1) – rise of the papacy
- Who are the ‘real’ Christians? – monks and virgins

*The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary’s real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ’s birth ‘did not diminish his mother’s virginal integrity but sanctified it.’ And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as the ‘Ever-Virgin.’*

*– Catechism of the Catholic Church*

- Who runs the church? (part 2) – divisions between east and west
- How do we worship? - iconoclasm
- How bad are we? How strong is God? – weakening of doctrine

### 3. Local Church Life

- Gregory the Great
- The Mass becomes prominent
- Theological education increases (foundation of universities)
- Mystics and ascetics

### 4. Lessons

- As Christianity spreads, the world becomes a better place. (Colossians 3.18-4.1)
- The church must watch out for the pursuit of worldly popularity. (1 John 2.15-17)
- Worship God sincerely, and worship God alone! (Revelation 22.8-9)

Application Questions:

1. What have you learned or found helpful from tonight's study?
2. What temptations to idolatry does the church face today?
3. How would you respond to someone who says, 'I don't get much out of sermons; I'm a visual learner.'
4. In the medieval period, Christians believed true devotion was expressed through withdrawal from the world. What does the Bible actually teach?
5. Mysticism is often appealing to Christians. How should we think about experience and the Word of God?