

# Life Notes

## THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

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### #7. Summary of The Church in the Sixth Century

Four personalities dominate Church history in the sixth century. Benedict, who became the champion of Monasticism; Justinian the Great, emperor of the Roman Empire; and two missionaries in Britain, Ninian and Columba, who transformed Scotland into a substantially Christian region.

Benedict of Nursia (480-547) was born in central Italy, and is famous for The Benedictine Order of Monks which reflect his approach to service. There is a document called The Benedictine Rules that reflects his influence on two levels: spiritual excellence (how the Monks should live a Christ-centered life on earth), and administrative protocol (how to conduct monastery life efficiently). These rules have been in effect for over 1500 years, and cause Benedict to be considered the Father of the Christian Monastic Movement. His life was accentuated by miracles attributed to genuine Holy Spirit power, and his effect on the Roman Church was one of increased purity and devotion.

Justinian I ruled from Byzantium (later known as Constantinople) from 527-565. He was able to restore large parts of the empire lost to barbarians in Italy and along the coast of North Africa. Administratively he also codified Roman Law, resulting in it becoming part of the foundation of many legal systems in Europe. He strengthened Christianity by constructing many churches, including the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Basilica in Constantinople, considered by many to be the finest church building in the world. He is called "the last Roman," indicating the Empire was changing considerably by

the time of his reign. Because of his many accomplishments, he was known as "the Emperor who never sleeps." Under Justinian, Christianity became more or less permanently linked to the idea of the Roman Empire.

Scotland was still considered a barbaric land in the sixth century. Four tribes competed for control of the region. The Picts (painted ones), the Angles, the Britons, and the Scots. The land was consumed by spiritual darkness, with Druids serving as the pagan priests of the land.

Ninian came to southwest Scotland and created a small monastic community. From this base, he added more communities until the Picts were becoming Christians in large numbers. He is credited with the idea of evangelization by planting communities of Christians in areas devoid of Believers. Following the example of Ninian, Columba (521-597) came to the island of Iona on the west coast of Scotland. He established a community of over 100 Christians, and branched out into the rest of Scotland using the same approach. We know Columba was a student of St. Finnian, and some scholars believe Ninian and Finnian may have been the same person. Iona became the center of Christianity in Scotland for at least three hundred years.

These two men are evidence to the power and attractiveness of Christianity lived in purity and power in unchristian areas.

Two events arose in the next century that would shape and shake the church until this day. The rise of Gregory the Great, and the rise of Islam through Mohammed. It was a century in which the church largely forgot her mission, but the Remnant was counting on the promise made by Christ - "I will build my church!"