

# Life Notes

## THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

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### #11. Summary of The Church in the Tenth Century

"The Dark Ages" is a term used to describe this period of western civilization. It is my contention that such a title is pejorative toward the Church. Admittedly, the church had lost her way in many respects, but it wasn't a period of church-induced barbarism or savagery. The Church had promoted architecture, the arts, and education in many respects, but she had essentially lost sight of her primary mission - the evangelization of the Lost. We will excel at nothing extraneous when we walk away from our primary calling.

Secular historians refer to later periods as "The Renaissance" (14th-17th centuries) and as "The Enlightenment," or "The Age of Reason" that dominated the 18th century in Europe. All of these descriptions essentially cast the idea of Christianity and faith as being "dark," without light or redeeming qualities. The Renaissance was seen as a rebirth of political, cultural, artistic, and economic betterment. The "Age of Reason" was specifically pitted against "The Age of Faith," and has been called "The Century of Philosophy."

But how should we view the tenth century and the culture that had largely been created by Christendom?

Empires and kingdoms were beginning to fall apart, and it seemed the balance of power was shifting toward the institutional church. Though Christendom was the primary beneficiary of the cultural and economic vacuum in Europe, her straying from spiritual vitality rendered her unable to rise to the occasion properly.

During this period, educational standards fell among the clergy, and many Christian leaders were almost ignorant of God's Word. Little spiritual direction was provided to congregations as they faced impending destruction from forces such as the Muslims, Vikings, and assorted tribes of Barbarians.

But there were some bright spots! The Benedictine Monks devoted themselves to Scripture, worship, and intentional Christian living. These monasteries in eastern France brought a new fire to Christian living. Much of their enthusiasm was communicated to Christian communities.

Remember Methodius and Cyril? Because of their efforts, Christianity took root and blossomed in Russia in 988 AD when Prince Vladimir and his twelve sons were baptized. Most of the people of Kiev followed the example of the royal family. In retrospect, we see this as the beginning of the Russian Orthodox Church.

As the tenth century came to an end, the church had regained her footing culturally, and had in large measure survived the barbarian invasions. In many instances, the invaders themselves were converted to Christianity. Centuries earlier, a common Christian prayer was "Deliver us, O Lord, from the wrath of the Northmen." But by the end of the tenth century, Vikings had become a committed part of Christ's Church. As the Roman Empire divided along geographic lines, the Church did as well. The political seat of the Roman Empire shifted from Rome to Constantinople. While this both helped and hindered the Church in the East, it left a power vacuum in the west that was filled by the Papal administrations.

Was the tenth century really dark? Perhaps in some ways, but probably no darker than today in many respects. The challenge before us is still rife with political instabilities, economic challenges, and the need for Christ's Church to return to her first love and her primary calling.