

# Section 10 – Roman Christianity

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## After Rome

The Roman Empire's decline and fall is not our subject here. Suffice to say that during the reign of Diocletian and the Tetrarchy in 285 CE it split into two Empires, with two bureaucracies and two capital cities.<sup>1</sup> The Western empire was based initially in Rome and later Milan and Ravenna, and the Eastern in Constantinople, modern Istanbul. The Western Empire declined after successive waves of invasion and finally came to an end in 476 CE while the Eastern survived until it fell to the Ottomans in the 15th century CE.

This was not the end of Roman influence. The Roman Empire had long since begun to devolve power into the hands of local rulers – the Herodian Dynasty of Biblical Galilee had been one such – with the specific understanding that these rulers exercised power in the name of Rome. After 476 CE, the temporal power of Rome in the West collapsed, but its religious authority remained, through the Papal rights to legitimise monarchs and to arrange royal marriages.

The presence of the Goddess at the heart of Christianity was maintained as the Roman Empire fell away. As Mary Theotokos, she had been cemented into place during the period before Christianity's adoption as the formal religion of the Roman Empire. France became 'the first daughter of the Catholic Church', and Marianism was adopted enthusiastically; it persists today, despite the changes made at Vatican II. Many cathedrals in France are either built on older temples to the Goddess or have prominent badges of the Goddess in visible locations. Typical of these are the ceremonial entrances at Autun, Chartres and elsewhere, where Christ is depicted in front of a huge, encircling *mandorla*. This iconic shape is always representative of the Goddess.<sup>2</sup>

Medieval art contains a very sophisticated language of symbolism, which allows the viewer to interpret the narrative within any piece of art. While today such ability is restricted to those who have studied it, this language was understood by ordinary people at the time the art was being made. The vast majority of these people were illiterate, but they were sophisticated. Visual art was a lingua franca that everyone understood. It is unthinkable that Medieval artists, like

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<sup>1</sup> And also, usually, two Emperors, though not always; Constantine, who adopted Christianity, was ruler of both Empires.

<sup>2</sup> The mandorla, also known as the *vesica piscis* or *yonis* can also be seen in the fish shape common as bumper stickers on cars owned by Christians. It is even used as the official symbol of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Gislebertus at Autun, would have created these monumental images without fully understanding the message implicit within them.<sup>3</sup>

After the fall of the temporal Roman Empire, the Popes maintained their authority over European culture and politics. God had married Mary, the Goddess, so now she belonged to him, and he exercised her power; the male priestly hierarchy was the bureaucracy that administered it. They had the authority to crown kings and extend their property rights over other kingdoms through royal marriages, as well as to give all men power over women through the ceremony of marriage.

The Church became the single most important political organisation in the whole of Europe. In every royal or princely court within Catholic Europe there were senior clergymen, bishops, archbishops and cardinals, whose function was to ensure that the Pope's will be done. For over a thousand years, the Papacy wove a web of influence that bound Europe together, driven by its power to sanction monarchs and their marriages.

Catholic Christianity, now distinct from the Orthodox form that had evolved in the Eastern Empire, was spread by these European monarchs to the Americas, Asia and elsewhere, and in turn these territories came under the control of the Papacy.<sup>4</sup> As the church spread over the planet, it took the Goddess and set her up in high places everywhere. Without the core message of Goddess theology – Resurrection – there simply is no Christianity.

Today, Christianity accounts for over a third of the world's population, and even where secularism has begun to chip away at ancient faith, the cultural consequences of millennia of Goddess theology remain powerful. From our earliest awareness as wandering hunter-gatherers to our domination, as a species, of the planet today, the Goddess has always been, and remains, with us.

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<sup>3</sup> Although it is generally true that between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance the names of individual European artists are unknown, Gislebertus is a remarkable exception.

<sup>4</sup> As was exemplified when Pope Alexander (the Borgia Pope) gave all the Americas to the King of Spain.