

Dawson: Six Ages of the Western Church

Each age has three successive movements: (1) Intense spiritual activity as the Church faces a new challenge; (2) A period of achievement in which a Christian culture arises in a kind of equilibrium; (3) A period of retreat and crisis as new challenges arise and old arrangements fail.

First Age: The Apostolic Age (1 -- ca. 300)

1. The Apostolic Age: unique as being the beginning, founded in the life of Christ.
2. Penetration of the Graeco-Roman world (3rd century); Christian apologists.
The age of martyrs and confessors. (the Apostles, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Agnes, Cyprian, Cecilia, Justin Martyr et al)
3. Attempt to destroy the Church in the Great Persecution of Diocletian (280-300).

Second Age: The Patristic Age (ca. 300 -- ca. 650)

1. Triumph of Constantine (312) and the beginnings of Christendom.
2. Classic age of the Church Fathers (4th-5th centuries).
The age of great theologian bishops. (Augustine, Jerome, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, Basil, John Chrysostom, Athanasius, Cyril et al)
3. Loss of unity through heresy; loss of the East to the Moslems (620-650).

Third Age: The Carolingian Age (ca. 650 – ca. 1000)

1. The missionary conquest of European Germanic peoples.
2. Formation of the Holy Roman Empire (crowning of Charlemagne: 800).
The age of Benedict and the monastery. (Scholastica, Patrick, Columba, Boniface, Bede the Venerable, Frideswide)
3. Collapse of the empire, partly from new barbarian onslaughts (Vikings, Hungarians).

Fourth Age: The High Middle Ages (ca. 1000 – ca. 1500)

1. Reforms of Gregory VII: spiritual reaction against secularization (11th cent).
2. Medieval Christendom at its height (13th cent.: St. Louis, Innocent III, Aquinas).
The age of the Mendicants: Francis and Dominic and their followers. (Anselm, Thomas Becket, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, Anthony)
3. Papal schism (end of 14th cent.), fragmentation of Europe, Reformation (1517).

Fifth Age: The Age of the Baroque

1. The Catholic Reformation (Council of Trent: 1542-66).
2. Baroque culture; international missions(17th cent.)
The age of the Apostolic Societies: Jesuits, Ursulines (St. Ignatius, Francis Xavier, Isaac Jogues, Angela Merici, Charles Borromeo, Francis de Sales, Margaret Mary)
3. Europe's elites secularizing with Enlightenment (18th cent); French Revolution (1789).

Sixth Age: The Modern Age

1. Catholic revival (19th cent.); First and Second Vatican Councils
The age of lay movements...