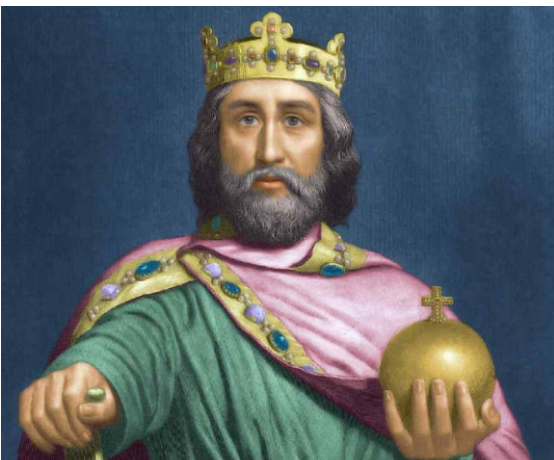


40. CHARLEMAGNE'S WORKS OF PEACE

Maybe you are tempted to think that Charlemagne's life was nothing but being engaged in wars. To believe that would be wrong. True, Charlemagne ruled with a rod of iron to keep his enemies in check, but he did more than that. Much more! He brought thriving prosperity to his people. And not just to his people, but to all the nations he conquered as well.

Charlemagne ruled the Franks, the Frisians, the Saxons, and many other tribes, who became Charlemagne's subjects after he defeated them. It would have been difficult to rule over such a diverse bunch of people, requiring lots of wisdom. Each nation spoke its own language. Each nation had its own customs, religion, and laws. Now Charlemagne had to unite all these nations with all their differences into one empire. He did this through the common bond of the Gospel!

The languages were different, the morals varied, and each nation's customs and cultures unique, yet they *could* become one through Christianity. That would be the glue that bound them together. Charlemagne believed the church was central. He did everything he could to make the church prosper. Nothing was too much for him in his effort to make that happen. He carefully watched over the church of the Lord, regulating and managing everything. Much wisdom was necessary for this great task, and God gave him



Charlemagne748-814
<https://sites.psu.edu/sdapassion>

that wisdom. Naturally, he had his faults, even significant faults, but that does not alter the fact that he tried to take care of the church as a father.

But what about the pope? Didn't Rome teach that *he* was the head of the Church? Didn't the *pope* see himself as Christ's viceroy on earth?

The great missionary, Boniface, acknowledged the pope as the highest authority in the Church. He even *persecuted* those who refused to acknowledge the pope as the head of the Church!

But Charlemagne didn't follow Boniface in this. No way!

Charlemagne did acknowledge the pope and even considered himself his friend. Remember how he had come to the pope's help in the war with the Lombards? But Charlemagne would never *submit* to the pope. He was too independent for that. Instead, Charlemagne blazed his own path when it came to ecclesiastical matters.

CHARLEMAGNE TAKES CHARGE OF CHURCH MATTERS

If a bishop died somewhere, Charlemagne didn't leave the appointment of a replacement to the pope. No way! He did that himself! *He* chose the most capable replacement and did not ask for the pope's approval!

Charlemagne also took care of the monasteries and even took a personal interest in them. He visited them and made sure that the abbots ran them properly. He reprimanded and punished any monk who misbehaved.

In addition, Charlemagne also encouraged good education. Almost all monasteries had convent schools. He regularly visited those schools. The powerful king sat down in the classrooms while lessons were in progress. He would ask questions to make sure that instructions were being listened to and the students were doing their best. Anyone who hadn't done his best was sure to get told off by the king!

You can be sure that the students' hearts would beat anxiously when the king entered the school!



Charlemagne visits a school.
<https://www.lookandlearn.com/>

He did not only examine the students but also the teachers. Charlemagne had a hearty dislike for lazy students and lazy teachers. Although Charlemagne was often on the warpath, he made sure that he would visit the monasteries and schools when he was home.

The king also regulated the income the bishops needed to buy food and clothing. Charlemagne said:

"I can take care of that."

He ordered that all the members of the congregations had to pay tithes. So, everyone had to pay a tenth of their income to their bishop, or as we would say today, their minister. Now there were bishops of large cities, and there were also bishops of tiny villages. Of course, the bishops in the cities received much more money than the bishops in the small villages. So those in the large cities became very wealthy, while those in the small towns remained poor. This difference caused jealousy and possibly even envy and hatred between the bishops. Charlemagne thought:

'Oh no, this is no good. I will make sure that the one does not wallow in luxury while the other struggles in poverty.'

He passed a law preventing the city bishops from keeping all the wealth to themselves. They had to divide their income into four equal parts. One fourth was for the bishops of the smaller places. They had to give the next fourth to the poor of their congregations. The third fourth was for the

building or maintenance of churches and monasteries. Finally, they were allowed to keep the last fourth for themselves.

This ruling was very wise and sensible.

The mighty king of the Franks provided for the Church of God like a wise father.

CHARLEMAGNE AND THE POPE

Some might think:

"But what about the pope? Did he approve of these measures? Shouldn't Charlemagne have asked him for permission to organise all this?"

Whoever thinks that is mistaken. Charlemagne didn't ask the pope *anything*. Whatever he considered necessary and beneficial for the church, he did. Whether he liked it or not, the pope had no say in it, and it was in his best interests to keep quiet because he needed Charlemagne. You will recall that the Lombards had invaded his territory, and Charlemagne had come to his aid with his mighty army. So the pope had to remain good friends with Charlemagne.

As you can see, Charlemagne was not afraid of the pope. No way! If the pope did something that wasn't right, Charlemagne would reprimand him. Whenever necessary, the king of the Franks dared to tell the pope the truth decisively and firmly. In those days, there were already a lot of images hanging in the churches. Images of Peter, Paul, Mary, the mother of the Lord, and others hung in prominent churches. Charlemagne was opposed to that. He hated the worship of images, and that's why he strictly forbade it in his realm. He personally made sure that his men removed them. Even the pope didn't dare to resist this ruling!

In the year 800, Charlemagne visited the pope in Rome. On Christmas day, December 25, 800, he went to church in Rome. When he kneeled to pray, the pope unexpectedly pressed the emperor's crown on his head. And so that day, the pope crowned the king of the Franks as emperor. Why did the pope do that?

Did he want to make Charlemagne even more powerful?

No, not at all.

Sure, the pope was thankful for Charlemagne's help and was happy to reward him for that. But the pope also had another reason. He wanted to be superior to the king. So, the pope of Rome, the great representative of Christ on earth (or so he thought), should have the *greatest* authority. That's the reason he crowned Charlemagne. It was as if he were saying:
"King Charlemagne, I, the superior, crown you, my inferior, to be emperor."
How arrogant!

Would Charlemagne have realised the pope's motive when the pope crowned him emperor? He probably did.

But he didn't refuse the emperor's crown at that time. That would have looked rather ungrateful. It would also have made a bad impression on his subjects, who were applauding the crowning of their king. And so, Charlemagne accepted the emperor's crown on that Christmas Day in the church at Rome.

But when he became old and ill, Charlemagne placed his emperor's crown on his son's head, who succeeded him. He didn't ask the pope to do that, nor did he ask the pope's permission! This



The pope crowns Charlemagne.
<https://www.corrispondenzaromana.it/>

act shows that Charlemagne had little regard for the position of the pope.

GOVERNING THE COUNTRY

Charlemagne was not only a powerful protector of Christianity. He also took excellent care of the government of the country. He recognised that good government would help protect the Church.

Charlemagne could not govern his mighty empire all by himself. Not only was it too large, but Charlemagne was often away at war. For that reason, he divided his empire into many provinces. At the head of each province, he placed a governor who was called a count. The count had to rule his appointed territory in the name of Charlemagne. The king remained the feudal lord, and the count was his subordinate who was responsible for making sure the province was well-governed. If arguments arose within his province, he had to administer justice. He had to look after public safety and punish criminals. He had to make sure that the people obeyed the laws Charlemagne had made. He also had to protect the church. In times of war, he had to make sure that his soldiers were ready for duty. Each province had its own army. All the small provincial armies together formed the large army which Charlemagne used to fight his wars.

Charlemagne demanded that his counts keep things in good order. If that did not happen, he would punish that count, even severely.

But suppose there was a count who was not honest? Or a subordinate who didn't govern well? What about a count who oppressed his subjects? How would the king find out about it? Charlemagne also organised that. Every year he sent out some men who travelled across the whole empire. They went from city to city, from province to province. Those men were called 'missi dominici', or literally 'envoys of the lord', or palace inspectors. When the inspectors came, they asked the people if there were any complaints about the counts and if so, they investigated them. If they found the complaints to be valid, they reported them to the king.

They would usually dismiss the count and give his province to another count. In severe cases, they could follow it with the death sentence. No wonder the counts were careful in the way they ruled! The inspectors always took some clergymen with them, who inspected the churches and the monasteries.

This entire system of government is called the Feudal System.

Charlemagne also took an interest in agriculture. As a result, farmers received better implements with which to cultivate the soil. In addition, he introduced various new crops which were not yet known. Charlemagne was also keenly interested in cattle breeding and did whatever he could to introduce improvements.

He took care of commerce.

He built new roads.

His workers dug canals through which merchant ships could sail.

They built bridges and made dykes to protect the country from flooding.

With all these advances, trade improved. And so, Charlemagne brought prosperity and progress throughout his empire. It is unbelievable how much Charlemagne achieved. He was indeed a father to his people in every area of life. Only the criminals, thieves and murderers did not fare well during his reign. He punished them severely and sometimes brutally.

Charlemagne had many castles. Often, he lived in one for a few months at a time. One of his favourites was the Valkhof Castle near the Dutch-

German border. Unfortunately, the French later ruined this castle.

Another of his favourites was Aachen in Germany. Aachen was the capital of his empire. Wherever he lived, he faithfully attended church.

When the king was not out on a military campaign, he still had plenty of work to do. During the day, he received all kinds of visitors who came to him for advice. Often, he was out visiting monasteries and schools or out and about performing some of his other tasks.

Occasionally he gave himself time to relax. Then he would go hunting for boar or deer. He was a good hunter.

He would spend time with his family in the evening and have someone read the Bible or Augustine's writings for him. Then, if he could not sleep at night, he would practice his writing skills.

Despite his hectic schedule, Charlemagne always had a kind word for the simple folk under his care. No wonder he was known as 'Charles the Great'!

In the last years of his life, he was quite sickly and spent a lot of time worrying about what would become of his mighty empire after his death. Louis, his only surviving son, was not very strong. Would he be able to reign with a firm hand and repulse the enemy when they attacked? Charlemagne doubted it, and this thought troubled and discouraged him.

One day he was standing on a beach looking out to sea when he saw a small fleet of ships sail past.



Charlemagne encouraged cattle breeding <http://mafta.com/breeding-cattle.html>

Immediately he asked:

"Who are they, and where do they come from?"

His men answered:

" They are the Danish and the Vikings."

This answer renewed his worries for the future of his empire. Would his son be able to control those pirates?

So he did what he could to secure the empire as much as possible. He reinforced all the coast guards and ordered more warships to be built. But he died before anyone could carry out those orders, and nothing came of them.

January 28, 814, Charlemagne died at Aachen. His people buried him there.

When Charlemagne began his reign, Christianity was under significant threat. However, when he died, it was flourishing throughout his whole empire. By championing the cause of the gospel, Charlemagne secured peace and prosperity for his subjects.

All this does not mean that Charlemagne had no faults. He sure did. Just think of how he treated his first wife, the daughter of Desiderius, the king of the Lombards. Think of the massacres of the rebellious Saxons. Think about how he used the sword to spread the Gospel. Yet, despite all these

sins, God used Charlemagne as a tool to firmly establish His Church in many countries. He was a wheel in the great clockwork of God. And a necessary one...

QUESTIONS

1. How did Charlemagne endeavour to unite the Franks, Frisians, Saxons, and other nations within his empire?
2. What was the relationship of Charlemagne to the pope? Explain in detail.
3. List five examples of ways in which Charlemagne as king took over the affairs of the Church.
4. What is tithing?
5. Why was the Pope willing to allow Charlemagne so much independence?
6. What was Charlemagne's opinion regarding image worship? What effect did this have on his empire?
7. Why did the pope crown Charlemagne?
8. Why didn't Charlemagne refuse to receive the crown at the pope's hands?



Charlemagne's castle in Aachen, Germany. <https://www.mozaweb.com>

9. Why did Charlemagne divide his empire into many provinces? Explain this provincial government.
10. List the duties of the count.
11. Who were the missi dominici? What was their task?
12. How was a negligent count punished?
13. What progress was made respecting agriculture and commerce?
14. How did Charlemagne use his free time?
15. What fears entered Charlemagne's heart when he was old?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. It is said that Charlemagne stood for law and order, civilization and culture, and Christianity. Prove this from this chapter.
2. Draw a map of Charlemagne's empire.
3. Why is Charlemagne called 'the meteor in the dark midnight'?
4. What commands are given to rulers in God's Word?
5. Analyse Charlemagne in terms of the commands given to rulers in the Bible. Did he fulfill his calling? Explain.