

8 Agent for Change: Charlemagne

The Christian Faith

What does it mean to "have faith"? The church teaches that faith has three parts: knowledge, agreement, and trust. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, a Christian knows the historical facts about Christ that are revealed in Scripture, agrees that they are true, and trusts the promises of grace in Christ for salvation.

Some people have claimed that Christians must feel their faith with their emotions as well as know about Jesus in their mind in order for faith to be real. But there is no division between *knowing* and *feeling*. God has created human beings with both, and if we are saved, it is both in mind and heart, body and soul.

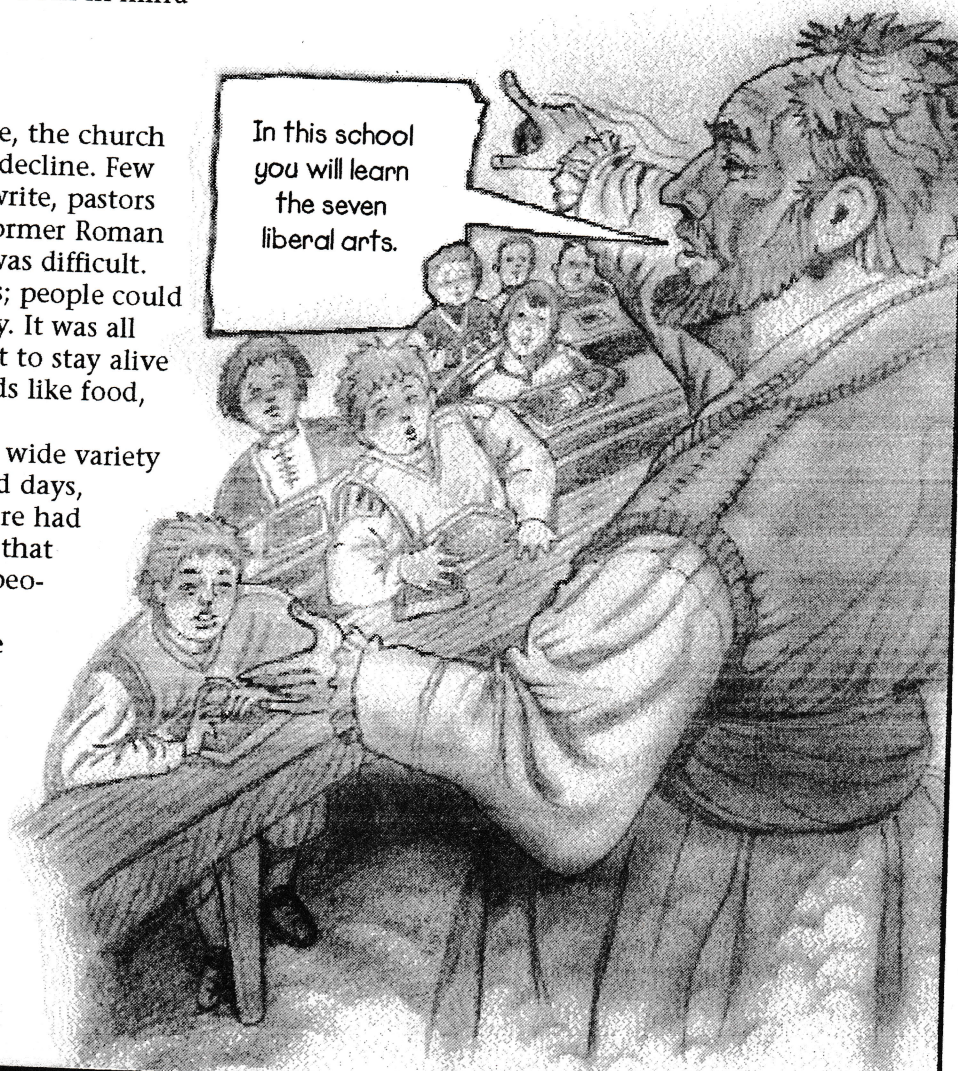
Europe in the Early Middle Ages

Following the fall of Rome, the church suffered from an educational decline. Few people knew how to read or write, pastors and others alike. Life in the former Roman Empire from about 400–800 was difficult. The political scene was a mess; people could only hope for peace and safety. It was all that most people could do just to stay alive and to get the most basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing.

In the church, there was a wide variety of worship practices. In the old days, being part of the Roman Empire had united people. Now it seemed that there was little to keep God's people together. People could not read the Bible, even in the rare instance when one was available. The works of the great thinkers of the early church, like Irenaeus, Cyprian, and Augustine, were not easily available. Soon errors began to creep into the church.

The Establishment of the Holy Roman Empire

It was in this setting that a remarkable individual appeared who would help to improve life. Called Carolus Magnus in Latin and Karl der Grosse in German, we know him better by his French name: Charlemagne, that is, Charles the Great. Born in 742, he was the oldest son of Pepin the Short. From modern France, he expanded his father's lands to the south, the north, and the east until his kingdom touched the shores of the Mediterranean Sea (parts of Spain and Italy), the Atlantic Ocean (France and Germany), and the Danube River (Bavaria and Eastern Europe).



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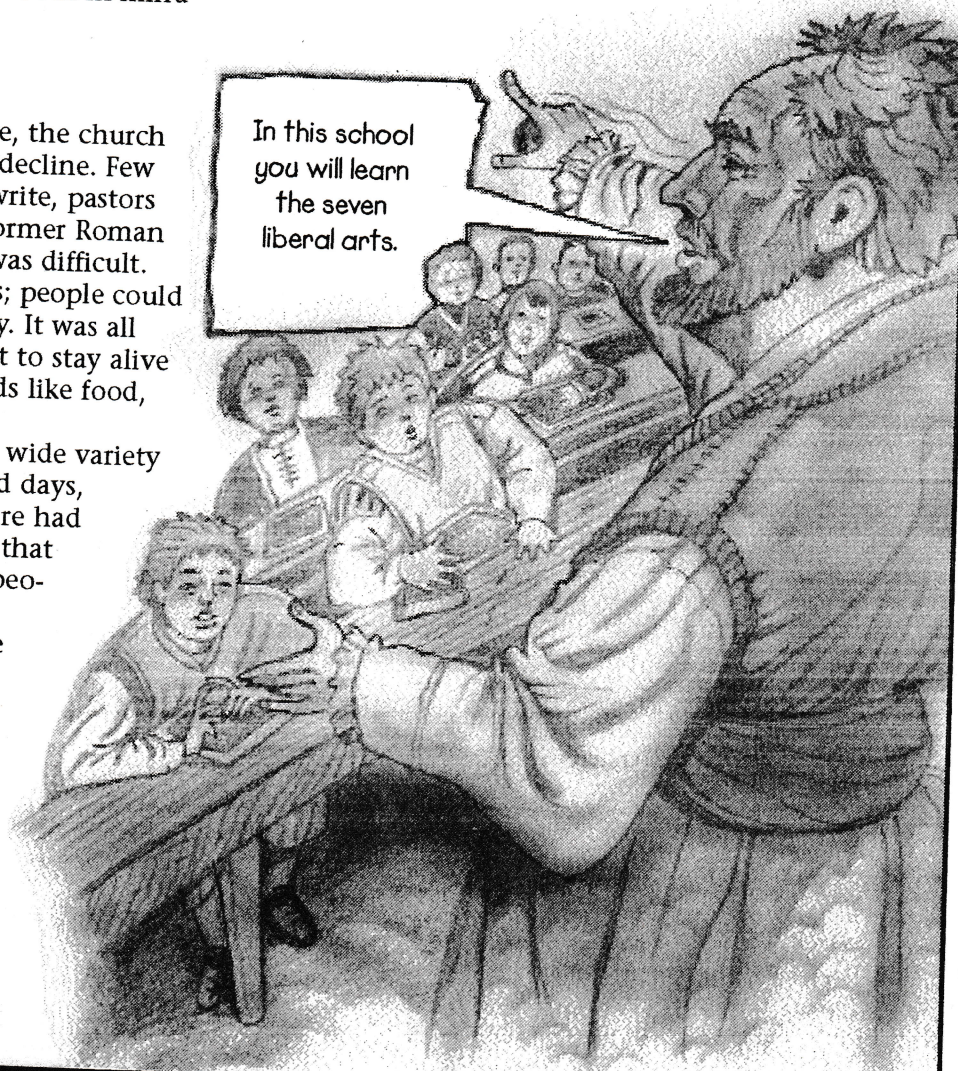
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In 799 Charlemagne came to Rome at the request of Pope Leo III, whose enemies were threatening to get rid of him. The Pope rewarded Charlemagne for his help and loyalty. On Christmas Day 800, Leo crowned Charlemagne first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

The Carolingian Renaissance

Emperor Charlemagne worked to improve both the government and worship. He emphasized education for pastors and the ability to read for more people. To help achieve better education, he began a series of schools called the "Carolingian Schools." The best of these was the "Palace School." Here students learned how to read, write, think, and use mathematics and music. This type of education was made up of the seven liberal arts: the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the more advanced *quadrivium* (music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy).

The Palace School also offered education to people who didn't work for the church. Later in the Middle Ages, the Palace School provided a model for Cathedral schools, and Cathedral schools became the model for the university as we now know it.

Charlemagne was also involved in improving the church. He worked to define doctrine, brought order to worship services, and stressed the importance of church music.

In 813, Charlemagne chose his son Louis I as co-emperor and the one who would take over as emperor. Charlemagne died the following year. Despite Charlemagne's efforts, errors still remained in the church. Many believed that their good deeds contributed to their salvation.

Charlemagne set an example for future emperors too. He sometimes got in the way of the church's work, and later emperors would do the same, sometimes hurting the church's mission.

Questions to Ponder

1. How might being uneducated form a barrier to being a Christian? Can too much education also be a problem?

[Accept responses explaining how both can be barriers.]

2. What were the main things that Charlemagne reformed, and why were they so important?

[Charlemagne's reform of education, government, and the church helped bring unity and peace to the people of Europe.]

3. In what ways was Charlemagne a good emperor? What were his weaknesses?

[Charlemagne was a change agent, but he sought to exercise authority over the church.]

4. In what ways did Charlemagne affect the life of the church positively?

[He worked to educate the clergy and emphasized the importance of music in the worship life of the church.]

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Did You Know?

After the death of Charlemagne, his empire began to decline under weak rulers. Feudalism emerged as people willingly gave themselves and their property to those strong enough to protect them.

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To Review and Remember

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Proverbs 9:9-10