

propitious, the beleaguered purchased peace, and the victors, returning home, honored Christ by observing fasts and giving alms to the poor.²¹

While political and military victories brought new areas under Roman Catholic influence, defeats often brought a return to paganism. Such was the case in 845 when Anskar saw fourteen years of labor destroyed by invading Danish raiders from the north. They swept down on Hamburg, sacking and burning and driving Anskar into hiding. When he sought protection from a neighboring bishop, the bishop refused to help because of political rivalry.

But after a series of political alliances and military victories, Hamburg was again under Christian control and Anskar was given expanded authority. As military threats lessened, he was able to devote more time to spiritual ministry. He was an ascetic who regarded prayer and fasting as paramount—though never to be done at the expense of useful activity. He insisted his monks be ever occupied with work, and he himself was often seen knitting while he prayed. As with most medieval spiritual leaders, he was credited with great miracles, but he personally sought to avoid all such praise, telling others that “the greatest miracle in his life would be if God ever made a thoroughly pious man out of him.”²²

Anskar died peacefully in 865 without the martyr’s crown that he had longed for. But that certainly was not the greatest prize that eluded him. In spite of all his efforts, he was unable to establish a permanent base for Christianity in Scandinavia. After he died, the people reverted to paganism, and not until after the tenth century did the Catholic Church gain a sure foothold in that region.

Safeguarding the borders was a continual struggle for the successors of Charlemagne. By the time one boundary was secured, another was being invaded by the enemy. This was particularly true in central Europe, which had long been ravaged by invasions from the east—a situation further complicated by warring ethnic factions and political rivalry. “On the one side was German imperialism or Papal ambition, and on the other Byzantine imperialism.”²³ Enter two brothers from Thessalonica—a city visited by Paul eight centuries earlier.

Cyril and Methodius

Like most medieval mission ventures, the work of Cyril and Methodius was tied to political maneuvering. Caught between East and West, a Moravian prince whose territory had been invaded by Western forces reached out to Constantinople—not for military might, but for missionaries. He wanted missionaries who could teach the people in their own language.

Cyril (whose given name was Constantine) and his brother Methodius were already seasoned missionaries—though for both, missions was a second career. They were raised in a Christian family, sons of a high-ranking military officer. Cyril became a philosopher and educator, whose first missionary experience was that of a Christian apologist to Muslims and later as an evangelist to the Khazars in Russia, many of whom were apparently converted through his teaching. Methodius, a civil servant, entered the monastery and then joined his brother in the mission to the Khazars.

In the early 860s Emperor Michael III of Constantinople arranged for Cyril and Methodius to begin a new mission among the nominally Christian Slavic peoples of central Europe. Like so many peoples before and after, the Christian faith had seemed to them entirely foreign. Now they would have their own alphabet devised by Cyril, and the gospels and liturgy in their own language. The brothers’ ministry had a profound spiritual influence

in the region and also gave the Slavic peoples a sense of identity that they had not had previously. Their achievements, according to Latourette, had “lasting consequences for Slavic literature, not only in Central Europe and the Balkans, but also in Russia.”²⁴

EIGHTEEN CENTURIES OF ADVANCE

0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900

<p>MEDITERRANEAN WORLD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (64) Nero persecution begins • (67) Martyrdom of Peter and Paul • (70) Destruction of Jerusalem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (156) Martyrdom of Polycarp • (303) Diocletian persecution begins • (165) Death of Justin Martyr <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (203) Martyrdom of Perpetua <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (325) Council of Nicaea • (638) Islam conquers Jerusalem • (340) Ulfilas begins ministry with Goths • (313) Constantine issues Edict of Milan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (595) Gregory the Great commissions Augustine
<p>NORTHERN AND WESTERN EUROPE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (361) Martin of Tours begins missionary work • (432) Patrick arrives in Ireland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (496) Conversion of Clovis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (744) Founding of • (563) Columba arrives in Scotland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (827) Anskar • (716) Boniface begins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (800) Charlemagne • (732) Battle of Tours
<p>ASIA AND AFRICA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (635) Nestorians arrive in China
<p>THE NEW WORLD</p>	

Their missionary tenure, however, was not without controversy. Roman Catholic clerics resented the outsiders and their translations into the vernacular. To counteract the opposition, the brothers journeyed to Rome in 867 and there gained the endorsement of the pope. Before they could return to their Slavic mission, however, Cyril died. Methodius returned to the mission but found himself caught between political and religious rivalries for the remainder of his life. Yet, with the help of disciples, he continued to translate the Bible and other literature. Today the brothers are commemorated by both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches and are seen as precursors to the translation work of Martin Luther and of translators of the modern missions era.

Raymond Lull

The politically oriented missionary endeavors of the Roman Catholic Church during the medieval period brought many new regions into the sphere of Christian influence. But the church was losing ground at the same time—and not just *any* ground. The Holy Land—the very center of Christianity in the early centuries—was shaken to the core by the invading armies of Islam. “With lightening speed,” writes J. Herbert Kane, “they conquered Damascus (635), Antioch (636), Jerusalem (638), Caesarea (640), and Alexandria (642).” Unlike the marauding barbarians that had brought down the Roman Empire more than two centuries earlier, the Muslims often brought culture with them. It was a time when “Arab civilization was at its height”—a time when “Baghdad boasted twenty-six public libraries and countless private ones.”²⁵

But no amount of culture or civilization could compensate for the losses, which came at a time when the West was barely holding its own against barbarian invasions. But for Charles Martel, whose army was victorious at the Battle of Tours in 722, France and all of Western Europe might have fallen to Muslim control. The Christians were clearly on the defensive. The long-delayed response to this tragic situation was itself a tragedy of monumental proportions—coming in the form of the Crusades. With no strategic planning, the Crusades had a snowball effect, the consequences of which are still being felt today. The swarms of people that set out for the Holy Land over a two-hundred-year period (1095—1291) caused unspeakable damage, and tens of thousands of lives were lost. Though the early crusades were favored with a degree of military success, those gains were lost in the end. So bitter was the animosity of Muslims toward Christians that even today the memory has not been erased.

Not all Christians of this period, however, believed that military force was the appropriate way to deal with the Muslims. During the early thirteenth century, while the crusading spirit was still at high pitch, Francis of Assisi proposed that the Muslims should be won by love instead of by hate. His first two attempts to evangelize them were completely unsuccessful, but his third attempt in 1219 brought him into the presence of the sultan of Egypt. Restricted by language barriers, Francis nevertheless made a feeble attempt at presenting the gospel. Though there is no evidence that any actual conversions resulted from his efforts, his example paved the way for others to view Muslims as potential brothers in Christ. Among them was Raymond Lull, an outstanding missionary of this period.

Lull was born in 1232 to a wealthy Roman Catholic family of Majorca, an island off the coast of Spain in the Mediterranean that had been taken back from the Muslims not long before his birth. As a young man he served in the Spanish court of the king of Aragon. Though married with children, he had mistresses on the side, and “by his own testimony