

III. Popes and Franks: A New Order

A. The Rise of the Popes

1. After the fall of Rome, the Christian bishop of Rome gradually became known as the “pope” (from the Latin word “papa”).
2. Jesus had said to one of his disciples, Peter, “...*thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.*” Thus, after Peter became the bishop of Rome, his successors claimed a special role in the growing religion.
3. After the Huns invaded Europe but were defeated at the **Battle of Chalons of 451 AD** (see map on page 7, again!) they descended on Rome itself. Then a mysterious meeting occurred between their leader, Attila, and the bishop of Rome, named Leo.
4. Attila did not sack Rome, and Leo earned a reputation as a great leader.
5. Still, as the leader of *Nicene* Christianity, he was surrounded by *Arian* barbarians (the people to whom Arius had been able to teach after being expelled from Rome).
6. To whom could a Nicene Christian church leader turn for help?

B. The Rise of the Franks

1. The Visigoths, Romans, and Franks had allied together to fight the Huns at Chalons, and were successful. Had the battle gone differently, there would have been no Europe. Europe simply would have been part of Asia.
2. Afterwards, the Franks attacked the Romans at the Battle of Soissons in 486 AD. What followed was even more important.
3. At the **Battle of Tolbiac in 496 AD**, as the Franks battled another tribe called the Alemanni, their leader Clovis found himself facing almost certain defeat, and decided to follow *Nicene Christianity* if he won.
4. In the Dark Ages, the conversion of a king to a different religion was not a merely private matter. The entire tribe followed suit. All the Franks became Nicene Christians.



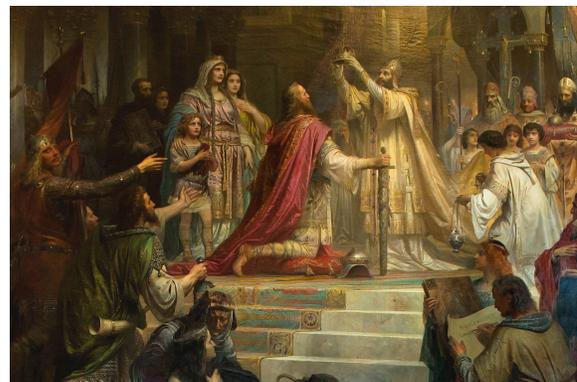
The Battle of Tolbiac by Ary Scheffer depicts Clovis’s desperate summons of the Christian god in the midst of his battle. *The Baptism of Clovis* by François-Louis Dejuinne shows the subsequent conversion of the Frankish king.

C. The Alliance of the Popes and Franks

1. In light of the conversion of Clovis, the Franks became a natural ally for the bishops of Rome, so that they could truly become *popes* for Europe.
2. Then some of the Franks, called the Carolingians, also decided to ally with the pope. Here is what happened...
3. Clovis was descended from a warrior named “Merovig,” who had been the Frankish champion at Chalons in **451 AD**. The “Merovingians” did not feel they needed the pope as a special ally. They were doing well enough themselves.
4. However, they became what historians refer to as the “do-nothing” kings, letting officials called the “Mayors of the Palace” do all the hard work.
5. When the Muslims entered Europe in **711 AD** (initiating the great conquest of the *Reconquista*) it was the Mayor of the Palace, Charles Martel (Charles “the Hammer”) who answered the call to defend France— *not* the king. At the **Battle of Tours of 732 AD**, Charles defeated the Muslims.
6. The fact that the Mayors of the Palace were doing all the work drove *them* to seek an alliance with the popes so *they* could become kings.
7. Charles’s son, Pepin, asked the pope for permission to depose the Merovingian king and take power for his family, the Carolingians (named after Charles “Martel,” because Charles in German is “*Carol*.”) The pope’s permission was the ingredient he needed to avoid a civil war.
8. Charles Martel’s grandson — Pepin’s son — was *Charlemagne*.
9. It was Charlemagne who finally crossed into Italy and defeated the Arian Lombards, creating an alliance of Franks and Popes.
10. Thus in **800 AD**, Charlemagne was crowned “Emperor of the Romans” by the Pope.



The Battle of Tours (732 AD) as depicted by Charles Steuben. Charles Martel wields his axe in defense of the Christian world.



The crowning of Charlemagne in 800 AD by the pope represented the culmination of the rise of both the popes and the Franks and a new hope. However, the union would not last.