

VI. European History 2.0

A. Learning about a Cultural Block of Many Parts

1. Our studies so far have focused on a Europe that revolves around a Franco-German core. The Frankish Union united France and Germany, and its failure led to their separate evolution until Napoleon tried to re-unite them. After his failure, Germany rose to primacy and tried to overwhelm France in two world wars. That catastrophe pushed them to lead the partnership of the European Union today.
2. The European Union is more than France & Germany, of course. It is a cultural block of 27 countries (out of 43 in Europe), with all its members accepting *supranationalism* in their own way and making their own contribution to the union.
3. Since the study of 27 countries is more than we can do, we have to be careful about adding pieces to the puzzle that are helpful in giving us a more complete picture without overly complicating our efforts.
4. Since it is the Western European nations that did the most to shape the wider world, and it was they who established the European Union in the first place, our efforts are best served by focussing on them. In addition to France & Germany, our main goal will be to grasp the roles of England, Iberia (Spain & Portugal), and Italy on the rise of Europe.

B. The Rise of Catholic Christianity in Early Europe

1. All the countries of Western Europe accepted Catholic Christianity when the first formed.
2. As we saw in our study of the ancient world, it was the Roman emperors Constantine and Theodosius who established Catholic Christianity in Rome itself.
3. Although the barbarian tribes were not Catholic at first, we know that the Franks accepted Christianity, as did their neighbors (sometimes, by being conquered by the Franks.)
4. The biggest strength of the Catholic Church was that its leaders were very educated and they created a bureaucratic system that was very organized, with a kind of religious monarch at the top: the pope.

C. The Reconquista (711-1492) and the formation of Spain and Portugal

1. After the conversion of the Visigoths of Iberia to Catholic belief, Iberia was invaded by a new enemy that arrived across the Strait of Gibraltar from Africa. This new enemy—imperial Islamic civilization—would permanently shape the fate of the region:
2. The Christians of Iberia were either conquered by the invading Muslims or pushed up into the northwest corner of the peninsula.
3. From there, the Christians gradually fought to reclaim their land. The Spanish word for “reconquest” is “reconquista,” thus this long torturous period of the rise of the nations of Spain and Portugal is called *the Reconquista* (711-1492).



The Growth of the Muslim empire—the Caliphate—from the time of Muhammad’s death (c. 632 AD) to the penetration of Iberia in the West and India in the East (c.711 AD).

4. The first of the two modern countries to form during this extended series of wars was Portugal, whose first leader Afonso, declared an independent kingdom. The other Christian kingdoms could not dislodge him from power while also while also fighting the Muslims, so this allowed the small country of Portugal to develop side-by-side with its neighbors and over the centuries to become the modern *nation* that it is.
5. Meanwhile, the area we think of today as Spain continued to be split, with its two main kingdoms Castile and Aragon finally united by the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile.
6. The unity of Spain made possible the final push against Muslim-held Granada in the south of Spain, which was finally conquered in 1492.



The Conquest of Granada, by Francisco Pradilla Ortiz depicts Ferdinand (in red) and Isabella (on the white horse) receiving the final submission of the Muslims in 1492.

7. The importance of the *Reconquista* is that it made the nations of Spain and Portugal what they are. Nations are countries with unique histories and traditions—and a common enemy. Obviously, a nearly 800-year war to expel a conqueror of a different religion made the Spanish and Portuguese to strongly identify as Catholic Christians.