

CHURCH HISTORY SESSION 2
The Age of the Christian Roman Empire
312-590

INTRO: Tonight we are going to study a time of significant transition for the church. We will see the transformation of Christianity from being a persecuted minority to becoming the dominant force in the Roman Empire. Along the way we will look at some of the major developments that came at this time: Doctrinal clarification, the development of monasteries, the rise of the Pope and the split with the Eastern Orthodox church.

I. The Conversion of the Empire

A. By the end of the 3rd century the Roman Empire was in disarray.

1. There had become a revolving door of Emperors.
 - a. Each succeeding Emperor would clean house from the Emperor before.
 - b. Into this mess stepped Diocletian, a Roman general.

2. He ruled the Roman Empire for 20 years (284-305)

3. Diocletian restored order to the Roman Empire.

- a. He took charge in a dramatic way when he killed his closest rival before the Senate.
- b. He reversed the territorial losses of the Empire by recapturing Germany, Britain & Persia.
- c. He divided the administration of the Empire between four imperial courts.
- d. He moved the centers of power out of Rome and closer to the areas that needed attention.
- e. He made his own court a Nicomedia.
- f. He divided the administrative power among four men; two designated Augustus and two designated Caesar with slightly less power.

B. Diocletian was one of the most savage persecutors of the church.

1. For the first 18 years of his reign he left the Christians alone.
2. Two years before the end of his reign he unleashed the most vicious persecution of the Church ever.
3. This attack on the church was unexpected for several reasons.
 - a. There were impressive church buildings in all the major cities by this time.
 - b. Diocletian's court was full of Christian officials.
 - c. His wife and daughter were Christians.
4. Without warning Diocletian unleashed his army on the Christian community.
 - a. He ordered church buildings to be destroyed.
 - b. He prohibited Christian worship.
 - c. He ordered the burning of the Scriptures.
 - d. He had the Bishops arrested, imprisoned, tortured and many killed.
 - e. He ordered the wholesale slaughter of those who refused to renounce Christianity.

5. In 305 Diocletian abdicated the throne and forced the other Augustus, Maximian, to do the same.

6. The new Augustus in the East, Galerius, kept up the persecution.

a. He made it his goal to wipe out Christianity.

7. The other Augustus, Constantius Chlorus, in Britain, suspended the persecution and began to show favor to the Christians.

8. The people in general grew weary of the constant bloodshed.

a. The martyrdom of thousands of Christians only strengthened the faith.

b. Public opinion swung in favor of the Christians.

c. Galerius, on his death bed, admitted defeat and issued a proclamation of tolerance.

d. This ended the last persecution of Christians from Rome.

9. After the death of Galerius a struggle ensued over control of Rome.

a. Constantine, the son of Constantius, defeated Maxentius and captured Rome.

b. Facing a superior enemy Constantine turned to the God of the Christians for help.

c. When he defeated his enemy, he saw this as an act of God that confirmed Christianity.

10. At this point Constantine officially converted to Christianity.

a. There were still many vestiges of the old order in his life.

b. He began to openly favor Christians and made many positive strides forward.

- He granted Christian ministers the same exemption from taxes as the pagan priests.

- He abolished crucifixion.

- He called a halt to the gladiatorial battles as a punishment for crimes.

- He made Sunday a public holiday.

c. He also made many significant changes in his private life.

- He spoke openly of his Christian convictions.

- He had his children raised as Christians.

- He practiced a Christian family life.

d. He was baptized by Eusebius shortly before his death in 337 and was buried in his baptismal robes.

C. Constantine moved the seat of power out of Rome.

1. He established his throne in Byzantium, in the east of the Empire.

2. The city was remained Constantinople.

3. It carried that name until 1930 when the Turks renamed it Istanbul.

4. Under the protection of Constantine the church took center stage.

a. Eusebius presented Constantine as the ideal Christian ruler.

b. The church saw its new status as the means of fulfilling the Great Commission.

c. Some Christians saw all this as providential. Rome laid the groundwork for Jesus' message to spread to the world. Now Rome would make it possible to covert the whole world.

5. There was a price tag to this new power.
 - a. Constantine ruled the Bishops like civil servants and expected complete obedience.
 - b. Masses of people flooded into the church for many reasons, many of these were not true believers.
 - c. The purity of the church was being compromised.

D. The Power of the Church grew

1. In 380, Emperor Theodosius made belief in Christianity mandatory.
2. Church buildings were designed to emphasize the hierarchy of Christ and the emperor.
3. The emperor became a demigod.
4. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, took on Theodosius and forced him to submit to the power of the church.
5. Ambrose discovered the power of excommunication to control leaders.
6. The cracks began to form between the east and the west.

II. The Doctrine of the Trinity

A. The Trinity is a uniquely Christian concept.

1. No other religion embraces this idea.
2. The doctrine of the Trinity caused a major conflict in the church.
3. It was none other than Constantine that forced the church to settle this matter.
 - a. After his conversion he hoped Christianity would unite the Empire.
 - b. He was disturbed by the conflicts over doctrine, which were heating up in the absence of persecution.
4. The issue of the Trinity came to a head around 318 in the area of Alexandria.
 - a. Arius, a prominent pastor, challenged the idea of the Trinity.
 - b. He claimed that Jesus was the first and greatest created being.
 - c. This teaching appealed to the former pagans and Gnostics.
 - d. Arius had a flare for swaying public opinion. He put his ideas into the form of jingles that were quickly picked up and sung by the common people everywhere.
5. On the other side of the issue stood the Bishop of Alexandria.
 - a. He called together a synod at Alexandria in 320.
 - b. The outcome was that Arius was excommunicated.
 - c. Arius turned to his friend and powerful ally Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia.
6. A show down emerged between the church in Nicomedia, the political capital, and Alexandria, the intellectual capital.

7. Constantine understood that this explosive issue had to be dealt with quickly.
 - a. He called for a council to be held in Nicea.
 - b. 300 bishops, most of whom had personally faced the persecutions, assembled.
 - c. They came in style, as guests of the royal court.
 - d. In the beginning Constantine presided over the council and stressed the importance of it.
 - e. Then he stepped aside and let the church leaders proceed.

- B. The catalyst for the council was responding to Arianism.
 1. The issue of Arius' theology was quickly addressed and condemned.
 - a. After the council Arius and the two bishops who supported him were exiled.

 2. The council realized that they needed to develop a statement that would guard the church against such theological attacks in the future.

 3. Different people suggested different approaches.

 4. In the end a creed that probably originated in Palestine came to the forefront.

 5. The council inserted one very important phrase, "True God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father."

 6. After several more days of inconclusive debate the Emperor stepped in and declared that they should accept this creed. It became known as the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

7. Another outcome of the Council of Nicea was the establishment of Easter.

There is no annual celebration of the resurrection of Christ recorded in the New Testament. The Jewish Christians linked it with the Passover and so observed it on the 14th day of Nisan (April) regardless of the day of the week. However, Gentile believers later celebrated the annual resurrection of the Lord's day.

In the year 325 at the Council of Nicea, it was decided that Easter would be observed on the First Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox (the time when the sun crosses the equator, approximately March 21 and September 22). This is still our method of determining the date of Easter. It will always fall between March 22nd and April 25th.

The name "Easter" comes from a pagan holiday which fell during that time of the year. It was a very joyful holiday with much brightness and tradition observed. From this, we get some of our tradition (Easter outfits, decorating of baskets, etc.)

8. What seemed like a glorious victory for the church had hidden consequences.

- a. After this time Constantine and others often stepped in to control church offices.
- b. Churchmen were banished or exiled based on who had the ear of the Emperor.
- c. The most dramatic case was of Athanasius who became the Bishop of Alexandria after the Council of Nicea. Over the next 50 years the struggle with Arianism continued. Athanasius, an opponent to Arius, was banished and returned to power 5 different times.

9. The battle over Arianism was the battle for the full deity of Christ.

- a. A group called the Semi-Arians suggesting a change in one word of the creed. They wanted to change *homoousios* (same) to *homoiousios* (like).
- b. The outcome of this would have been belief in two gods.
- c. Christianity would have become another pagan religion.

C. Understanding the Trinity

1. The church has always struggled to understand the Trinity.
2. Most of the analogies that we use to describe the Trinity fall apart at some point.
3. There are two analogies that have been appealed to by the church since the 4th century.
 - a. The social analogy: In a social sense it is possible for three people to be so close that we think of them as one unit. This analogy clarifies the threeness of God but not the unity of God.
 - b. The psychological analogy: A person has three distinct functions of mind, emotions and will. This helps us see the unity of God but leaves God's threeness vague.
4. The social analogy was introduced by the three Cappadocian fathers.
 - a. The distinctions between the three divine persons were solely in their inner divine relations.
 - b. God is one being with three carriers: one Godhead in three persons.
 - c. The Latin word *persona* originally meant a mask worn by an actor.

- d. In relation to God the mask is not worn by God to hide but to reveal his true character.
- e. We should not think of three persons as we do today, but as three personal disclosures of God that correspond to what he is really like.

- 5. The psychological analogy was introduced by Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo.
 - a. He began with the premise that man is created in the image of God.
 - b. In a way we can understand God through an understanding of our minds.
 - c. Humans have memory, intelligence and will.
 - d. These three aspects represent the unity of God as well.

III. Christ in the Creeds

A. At the heart of our faith is the incarnation.

- 1. In Mark 8:27-30 Jesus confronts the question of how people view him.

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

[28] They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

[29] "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

[30] Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

- 2. Ever since then the church has had to answer this question again and again.

3. In 451 a General Council at Chalcedon affirmed that Jesus was "complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, ... in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division or without separation, ... coming together in one person."

- 4. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians agree with this statement.

- 5. Christians in Egypt, Syria and India do not.

B. Christology

- 1. The church has always struggled to understand exactly who Jesus is.

- 2. Two major schools of thought about understanding Jesus.

3. Alexandria: emphasized the divine nature of Jesus. The leading voice in Alexandria was Origen.

- a. He coined the term the God-man to speak of Jesus.
- b. He put his focus on the Logos (Word) coming from God to humanity. John 1:1-3,14
- c. This mystical approach was later developed by Gregory of Nyssa.
 - He taught that Christ, the Logos, had united in himself the divine and human nature.
 - Both natures remained distinct yet their attributes were mutually exchangeable.

- 4. The school in Antioch put their emphasis on the historical, human nature of Jesus.

- a. They stressed the complete manhood of Jesus.

- b. His two natures remained distinct. They were joined rather than personally united.
 - c. They viewed Jesus like one of the prophets except he had perfect fullness of grace & power.
 - d. They taught that the Word lodged in the man Jesus as in a temple.
5. This debate was fueled by a growing political influence in the church.
- a. The church changed after Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Empire.
 - b. Bishops in chief towns of the provinces were called archbishops.
 - The name for their realm of influence and power is “see”.
 - c. The bishops in the premier cities of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch were considered higher than all the rest and were called patriarchs.
 - d. In the debate over Christology Alexandria and Rome allied and Antioch and Constantinople allied.
 - e. These alliances were as much political as they were theological.

C. The Rise of Heresies about Christ

1. The debate about Christology raged for 100 years, 350-450.

2. The first heresy came from Apollinarius of Laodicea. a psychological approach.
 - a. He contended that human nature is made up of body and soul.
 - b. When the Word came down he displaced the soul of Jesus creating a unity of nature.
 - c. Jesus’ humanity became just the container for the Word’s salvation work.
 - d. This was rejected by the 2nd General Council of Constantinople in 381.
 - e. In essence the argument was that if Jesus did not have a human soul than he could not redeem the human soul.

3. The 2nd heresy was associated with Nestorius.
 - a. Nestorius had been a famous preacher in Antioch and became the Bishop of Constantinople.
 - b. He rejected the designation of Mary as the “God-bearer, Mother of God.”
 - c. It appeared that he was advocating that Christ joined two persons.
 - d. He did not deny Jesus divinity but strongly upheld his humanity.
 - e. He saw the union as a moral conjunction, or a merging of wills, rather than an essential union.
 - f. He refused to attribute the human actions and suffering of Jesus to his divine nature.
 - g. “I hold the natures apart, but unite the worship.”
 - h. In the end he was condemned more for political reasons than theological ones.
 - i. Nestorius ran afoul of Cyril the patriarch of Alexandria because of his treatment of Jews, heretics and for his “interference” with the discipline of other patriarchs.
 - j. At the General Council of Ephesus (431) he was deposed and exiled to Egypt.
 - k. His followers did not give up. They fled to Persia and established the Nestorian Church.
 - l. They reached out to Malabar, India, Turkestan, Tibet and China.
 - m. In 1380 the Nestorians were virtually destroyed by Muslim persecution.
 - n. Today there is still a Nestorian church in Syria, Iraq, and Iran numbering 80,000, in India numbering 5,000 and in the US numbering 25,000.

4. The 3rd heresy came from Eutychus.
 - a. He held that the Christ had one nature not two. Monophysitism

- b. The human nature of Jesus was absorbed completely in his divine nature.
- c. This heresy was rejected at the 4th General Council of Chalcedon.

D. Pulling it together.

1. In response to Arius the church affirmed that Jesus was truly God. Nicea 325
2. In response to Apollinarius the church affirmed that Jesus was truly human. Constantinople 381
3. In response to Nestorius the church affirmed that Jesus was not divided into two persons. Ephesus 431
4. In response to Eutychus the church affirmed that Jesus' humanity and deity were not changed into something else. Chalcedon 451
5. These premises are held by most Christians in Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy.
6. There are some groups that reject Chalcedon and hold to the single nature of Jesus.
 - a. Coptic Church, the largest Christian body in Egypt today.
 - b. Jacobite Church in Syria and South India.

IV. The Beginnings of Monasticism

A. Monasticism was born out of a desire to escape the secularization of the church.

B. It began as a movement of isolated hermits.

1. The movement owes its beginning to The Shepherd of Hermas.
 - a. This work suggested that the New Testament teaches the precepts of faith, hope and love as binding principles for all.
 - b. In addition it suggested that there is a higher way for those who would pursue it.
2. This idea led to men who forsook the world and lived isolated lives in the desert.
 - a. They were called hermits, which comes from the Greek for desert.
 - b. This movement began in the regions around Egypt.

C. In 320 a former soldier named Pachomius instituted the first monastery.

1. He understood that isolation promoted a lack of accountability & eccentricity.
2. He established a regular common life with fixed hours, manual work, uniform dress and strict discipline.
 - a. Basil, who died in 379, formed the first Rule of Discipline for monasteries. This Rule is still used by the Greek Orthodox Church.
 - b. The monastic ideal stood in stark contrast to imperial Christianity.
 - c. It called people to total commitment to Christ through living an ascetic life.
3. The monks assumed a threefold vow: poverty, chastity, and obedience.
4. The monasteries served an important role in the developing church. They restored spiritual discipline, provided leadership and fostered scholarship.

5. Jerome (340-420) was the pioneer of monastic scholarship. He produced the first translation of the Old and New Testaments into Latin. It became known as the Vulgate. This was the authorized version for the Roman Catholic church up to modern times.

D. One of the most influential people in the development of monasteries was Benedict.

1. In 529 he established the now most famous monastery in Europe at Monte Cassino.
2. He developed the Benedictine Rule.
3. In his rule he combined restraint with some degree of freedom.
4. The government of the monastery was in the hands of the Abbot.
 - a. The monks selected the Abbot and then vowed total obedience to him.
5. Benedict prescribed that a monastery should be self-sufficient.
6. He required 7 worship services in each 24-hour period, with special emphasis on the service at 2 AM. This service was called the 'vigil' All the services, except the vigil, were only 20 minutes in length and consisted mostly of reciting the Psalms.
7. Benedict mandated specific times of work and study. All his monasteries had libraries and became centers of study. They were instrumental in preserving the writings of the Latin Church Fathers and the masterpieces of Roman literature.

V. Augustine

1. He became a very powerful voice in the church.
2. Around 400 he became the Bishop of Hippo.
3. He found himself fighting against the Donatists who felt the church was corrupt.
4. This fight produced several outcomes with longstanding consequences.
 - a. He advocated that the church would always be a mixed multitude until Christ returned.
 - b. He stated that the sacrament does not belong to the priest but that the priest is only the conduit of God's grace. The moral standing of the priest is not what is important as long as the priest is aware of what he is doing.
 - c. He came to advocate the use of force to suppress those who oppose the church.
5. Augustine also fought the battle against Pelagius.
 - a. Pelagius taught several things that were viewed as heresy.
 - Human sin is not inherited from Adam. Each individual is free to act righteously or sinfully.
 - Death was not the consequence of Adam's sin.
 - It is possible for a person to live a sinless life. Some have.
 - God predestines no one. Forgiveness comes to all who exercise faith alone.
 - There is no need for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit because man has the power within himself to please God.
 - b. Augustine countered this in several areas.
 - All humanity is in Adam and lost in sin.
 - Man's only ability to do good comes from God as a free gift of grace.
 - God chooses some to receive grace. This grace comes through the work of Christ and through the church, especially the sacraments.
 - All who receive baptism receive regenerating grace and are free to serve God by his grace.

- Salvation is not assured. Only those who persevere to the end will truly be saved.

6. Augustine wrote *The City of God*, which has had influence in the church ever since.

VI. The Beginnings of the Papacy

A. Any discussion about the papacy is controversial.

1. According to the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, Jesus Christ established the papacy with the apostle Peter; and the Bishop of Rome as Peter's successor bears the supreme authority over the whole church.

2. Protestants and Orthodox both deny this claim.

3. The true beginning of the papacy as we know it came in the time of Leo I (445).

4. The term papa originally referred to the fatherly care given by any and every bishop. It was only reserved exclusively for the Bishop of Rome in the 16th century.

B. Why did Rome come to prominence?

1. Rome was the imperial capital and the church there was known for orthodoxy and charity.

2. The church in Rome was the largest and wealthiest.

3. Several early Christian writers referred to Peter and Paul as the founders of the church in Rome.

4. As the church organization developed two significant things happened.

a. The authority of church councils to settle matters of theology.

b. The authority of certain bishops over other bishops.

5. As the church grew it adopted the structure of the empire.

a. The church in a provincial town became the episcopal center.

b. The Bishops of the larger cities exercised authority over provincial bishops.

c. The empire was divided into major regions: Rome exercised authority in Italy, Carthage in North Africa, Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch in Syria.

6. As churches were established in the rural areas "priests" were assigned by the bishop to serve them.

7. It was on the wings of these changes that the Bishop of Rome rose to prominence.

C. Two Competing Forces.

1. In 381 a council was held in Constantinople that set the stage for the papacy and the split of the church.

2. The Bishop of Constantinople (in a political move) was officially declared an equal with the Bishop of Rome.

3. Damasus, the Bishop of Rome objected but to no avail.
a. A separate council was called in Rome which stated that the Roman Church should take precedent over all others because of Jesus words to Peter, "On this rock..."

4. Constantinople's power increasingly came from political influence.

5. The power of Rome increasingly came from the church.

D. Pope Leo I solidified the establishment of the papacy in Rome.

1. Emperor Valentinian III in 445 officially recognized the Bishop of Rome as the undisputed head of the church.

E. In 451 the council of Chalcedon granted equal power to the Bishop of Rome and of Constantinople. At this point the church gained two heads: The Roman Church of the Western Empire and the Greek Church of the Eastern Empire.

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B. Diocletian was one of the most savage persecutors of the church.

C. Constantine moved the seat of power out of Rome.

D. The Power of the Church grew

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A. The Trinity is a uniquely Christian concept.

B. The catalyst for the council was responding to Arianism.

The Nicene Creed

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Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

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2. The social analogy was introduced by the three Cappadocian fathers.
3. The psychological analogy was introduced by Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo.

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B. Christology

1. The church has always struggled to understand exactly who Jesus is.

2. Two major schools of thought about understanding Jesus.
 - a. Alexandria: emphasized the divine nature of Jesus.
 - b. Antioch: emphasized the human nature of Jesus.
3. The leading voice in Alexandria was Origen.
4. The school in Antioch put their emphasis on the historical, human nature of Jesus.
5. This debate was fueled by a growing political influence in the church.

C. The Rise of Heresies about Christ

1. The debate about Christology raged for 100 years, 350-450.
2. The first heresy came from Apollinarius of Laodicea. a psychological approach.
 - a. The 2nd General Council of Constantinople in 381.

3. The 2nd heresy was associated with Nestorius.
 - a. The General Council of Ephesus (431)

4. The 3rd heresy came from Eutychus.
 - a. The 4th General Council of Chalcedon.

D. Pulling it together.

1. In response to Arius the church affirmed that Jesus was truly God.
2. In response to Apollinarius the church affirmed that Jesus was truly human.
3. In response to Nestorius the church affirmed that Jesus was not divided into two persons.
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IV. The Beginnings of Monasticism

- A. Monasticism was born out of a desire to escape the secularization of the church.
- B. It began as a movement of isolated hermits.
- C. In 320 a former soldier named Pachomius instituted the first monastery.

D. One of the most influential people in the development of monasteries was Benedict.

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