

# Church History

## ANCIENT PERIOD—AGE OF UNIFICATION

*325AD-590AD*

### I. THE COUNCIL OF NICEA (325)

#### A. The Part of Constantine in the Council

1. Constantine the Great (306-337)
  - a. Converted in 312
  - b. Published Edict of Milan in 314
    - i. An edict of toleration
    - ii. Property was restored
    - iii. Freedom of worship was granted

#### B. The Purpose of the Council

1. To settle the Arian controversy
2. To settle the controversy concerning the observance of Easter
3. For Constantine to establish his authority over the churches
4. To set up an ecumenical state church

#### C. The Setting of the Council

1. Called together by Constantine the Great
2. Held in 325 AD
3. Held in Nicea
  - a. The second city of Byanthis
  - b. Close to Constantinople, Constantine's new capital
4. Attendance
  - a. About 300 bishops
  - b. Between 1500 and 2000 total

### D. The Three Parties

1. Arius
  - a. His life
    - i. 250-336AD
    - ii. A learned scholar who lived a pure life
    - iii. Received his religious training in Antioch
    - iv. Pastored in Alexandria, Egypt
    - v. Excluded from the ministry in 320 by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria
    - vi. Supported by many of the eastern congregations
  - b. His view of Christ
    - i. He was created by the Father
    - ii. He was subordinate to the Father
    - iii. He was neither fully God nor fully man
    - iv. He was created before everything else, in turn created all other things, and is therefore the highest created being
    - v. He is worthy of worship
    - vi. These views would align with Origen – (see page 35).
  - c. His views of the Holy Spirit
    - i. Considered the Holy Spirit to be a person or angel.
    - ii. Holy Ghost had a beginning as a creature.
2. Athanasius
  - a. His life
    - i. 293-373 AD
    - ii. A recognized theologian & ascetic
    - iii. Wrote a Life of Saint Antony - Anthony the Great (251-356)
      1. Called the “Father of Monks”
      2. Not because he was the first, but because he so inspired others to live a life of asceticism.
    - iv. Was a deacon to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria in 325 AD
    - v. Presented his view of the person of Christ in Nicea
    - vi. Became Bishop of Alexandria in 328
    - vii. Exiled four times (some historians say five times) between 336 and 365 by three different emperors.
    - viii. Was a defender of the Trinity against Arianism.
    - ix. Died in Alexandria in 373.
  - b. His view of Christ
    - i. The distinction between Father and Son is eternal
    - ii. The Son is identical in substance (consubstantial) with the Father
    - iii. The Son is independent in personality from the Father
3. Eusebius of Caesarea
  - a. His life
    - i. 260-340 AD

- ii. Baptized and ordained at Caesarea
  - iii. Learned of Origen through Pamphilus (240-309)
    - 1. Admirer of Origen
    - 2. Taught at Caesarea
    - 3. Founded library there which specialized in Origen's works.
  - iv. Wrote several commentaries and his Ecclesiastical History
  - v. Very closely associated with Constantine in his establishment of Christianity as the state-church.
  - vi. Prepared 50 copies of the New Testament for Constantine in 331 AD.
  - vii. At Nicea, he first leaned toward Arius, but then accepted the Creed of Nicea.
- b. His view of Christ
- i. Rejected that the Son was created (view of Arius)
  - ii. Rejected that the Son and the Father were of the same essence or "consubstantial" (view of Athanasius)
  - iii. Accepted the subordination of the Son to the Father as taught by Origen.
- E. The Results of the Council
- 1. The creed of Nicea
    - a. Declared Jesus Christ to be God and of the same substance as the Father.
    - b. By the threat of exile, was finally signed by all of the bishops except Arius and two others.
  - 2. Arius & others who would not accept the creed were condemned & exiled
  - 3. Decreed that Easter be observed on Sunday only.
    - a. Some Christians were observing the day of the Jewish Passover which fell on different days of the week.
    - b. Unbelievers thought it scandalous to have some Christians fasting and penitent and others not.
  - 4. Twenty canons, or general laws of discipline, were also established
    - a. The eighth canon referred to the Novatians, which were called Cathari, stating that there should never be two bishops in the same city.
    - b. The thirteenth canon stated that a bishop may impart communion to those at the point of death if they desire it.
- F. The Significance of the Council
- 1. Sealed the merging of church and state with Constantine calling and presiding over the council.
  - 2. Began the tradition of basing orthodoxy on creeds and not on the Bible.
  - 3. Began the practice of civil persecution for religious heresy.

4. Began the practice of holding church councils equal to or greater than the Bible in authority for matters of faith and practice.

## G. The Ecumenical Councils

1. Introductory Remarks
  - a. Councils beginning with Nicea, which were accepted as authoritative in their creeds & decisions
  - b. Seven councils are accepted by both Roman Catholics & Eastern Orthodox as well as some Protestants
  - c. Fourteen others, for a total of twenty-one, are accepted by the Roman Catholics only. These fourteen include:
    - i. Council of Constance (1414-1418)
    - ii. Council of Trent (1545-1563)
    - iii. Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)
2. The Seven Ecumenical Councils
  - a. First Council of Nicea (325)
  - b. First Council of Constantinople (381)
    - i. Required belief in the trinity for citizenship
  - c. Council of Ephesus (431)
  - d. Council of Chalcedon (451)
  - e. Second Council of Constantinople (553)
  - f. Third Council of Constantinople (680)
  - g. Second Council of Nicea (787)

## II. DECLINE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

### A. Internal Decline

1. The form of government
  - a. Republic
    - i. At the beginning of the first century BC
    - ii. Real power was in the Senate
  - b. Empire
    - i. Julius Caesar took power in 49 BC
    - ii. Augustus Caesar became emperor in 30 BC
    - iii. Real power switched to the Augustus although the Senate continued to function
    - iv. No system was set up for the orderly transfer of power
    - v. By 200, the strongest general usually became the Caesar
  - c. Rome ceased to be the capital of the empire
2. The army
  - a. Made up entirely of Italian soldiers in the first century
  - b. Many frontier soldiers were used in the second century
  - c. In the third century, barbarians became Roman soldiers in great numbers

3. Economic stagnation
  - a. Trade between provinces decreased
  - b. Many provinces became self-supporting
  - c. The cost of civil government continually increased
  - d. The cost of army protection continually increased
  - e. Slave labor, upon which the Romans relied for manual work, became scarce
4. Taxation
  - a. Had to support ever increasing armies & bureaucracy
  - b. Bureaucracy became very corrupt
  - c. The rich were either exempted or avoided paying taxes by bribing tax collectors
  - d. The middle class was destroyed
    - i. Men with some property, but little influence
    - ii. Had the greatest burden of taxation
    - iii. One reason why so many went into monasteries
5. Weakening of frontiers
  - a. Germans entered empire as slaves or workers
  - b. Later, many Germans enlisted in Roman armies
  - c. Bands of German warriors fought for Rome under their own leaders
  - d. Friendly Germans were allowed to settle in frontier regions

### B. Barbarian Invasions

1. Around 400, the Huns, a nomadic Mongolian people, began attacking the Germanic peoples, who, in turn, began migrating into Roman territory.
2. In 406, the Vandals looted their way through Gaul into Spain.
3. In 410, the Visigoths captured and plundered the city of Rome. In the same year the Roman empire forever lost contact with Roman Britain.
4. The Vandals migrated from Spain into North Africa in 429 & took power there.
5. In 455, another group of Vandals looted Rome again.
6. The last western Roman emperor was deposed in 476. Historians used to date this as the end of the Roman Empire.
7. Gaul was seized by the Franks under Clovis in 486.
8. The Ostrogoths, in 489, conquered Italy.
9. The situation around 500 AD
  - a. The Vandals held North Africa
  - b. The Ostrogoths held Italy
  - c. The Visigoths held Spain & part of Gaul
  - d. The Franks held most of Gaul
  - e. The British still fought with the Germanic tribes over Britain
10. The later development of Europe
  - a. The Vandals were destroyed by Byzantium in 533. The Moslems held North Africa by 700.

- b. In 552, Byzantium defeated the Ostrogoths. Italy, in the last Germanic invasion, was attacked by the Lombards in 568. The politics of Italy were in disarray for many years.
- c. The Visigoths held on to Spain until they were conquered by the Mohammedans in 711.
- d. The Franks remained to become the strongest kingdom in Europe during the middle ages.
- e. The Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes, etc) eventually conquered Britain & formed the country of England.

### III. RISE OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

#### A. Development as the State Religion

- 1. Constantine the Great (306-337)
  - a. Converted in 312
  - b. Published Edict of Milan in 314
    - i. An edict of toleration
    - ii. Property was restored
    - iii. Freedom of worship was granted
  - c. In 319, he exempted clergy from taxation, military service, or mandatory office holding
  - d. In 321, he made Sunday a legal holiday and allowed people to will their estates to the church
- 2. Julian the Apostate (356-358)
  - tried to restore paganism and failed
- 3. Theodosius the Great (378-395)
  - a. Made paganism a crime punishable by law.
  - b. Prohibited sacrifices, visits to pagan temples, and all forms of idolatry.
  - c. Issued decrees that made Nicene Christianity the state religion.
  - c. Considered the complete triumph of Christianity.
- 4. Results of merging church and state
  - a. Membership mixed
  - b. Doctrine compromised
  - c. Pagan morals and practices accepted
  - d. Hierarchy encouraged
  - e. loss of church self-government
  - f. Persecution of heresy by church

#### B. Development of the Church Hierarchy

- 1. Church offices multiplied

- a. Bishops
  - b. Presbyters
  - c. Elders
  - d. Deacons
  - e. Sub-deacons
  - f. Acolytes (to light candles)
  - g. Readers (to read scriptures)
  - h. Door-keepers
  - i. Grave-diggers
  - j. Exorcists (appointed to cast out devils)
  - k. Arch-deacons (chief of staff for bishops)
2. A pyramid of offices was created
- a. Presbyters became numerous but unimportant as simply pastors of smaller churches
  - b. The bishop gained more and more power until he became an overseer of all the churches in a certain area, called a bishoprick.
  - c. Metropolitans gained power over a number of bishops and were later called arch-bishops.
  - d. The bishops of five cities became the most important, and were called patriarchs
    - i. Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem
    - ii. Of these, Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch were the most powerful although Constantinople later rivaled Rome for greatest importance
    - iii. These three churches claimed age, historical importance and apostolic influence

### C. Development of the Doctrine of Roman Supremacy

1. No mention at all is made of an overall bishop for the first two centuries
2. Clement of Rome (c. 95) was the first to mention Peter as being at Rome
3. Ignatius (50-150) was the first to speak of the “catholic” church
4. Cyprian’s (200-258) teaching on church government became the basis for the Roman Catholic doctrine
  - a. There is only one church
  - b. Salvation is not possible outside that church
  - c. The church is controlled by bishops
  - d. The bishops are successors of the apostles
  - e. The unity of the church rests upon the unity of the bishops
  - f. The Roman church is the mother and root of the Catholic Church
  - g. Rebellion against the bishop is rebellion against God
5. Calixtus, bishop of Rome, says for the first time in 220, that Matthew 16 refers to the Roman papacy. (See – Matthew 16:16-19)
6. The decree made at the Council of Nicea (325) elevated the churches of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch, but did not single out Rome.

## D. Development of the Practice of Roman Supremacy

1. Bishop Victor of Rome (196) excommunicated the eastern church over the date of Easter
2. Emperor Arelian (273) said that the bishop of Constantinople must be approved by Rome
3. Heresy appeals were being made to the bishop at Rome in 343
4. In 366, Bishop Damasus induced the emperor Gratian to give him the title of Pontifex Maximus, the ancient chief priesthood of the city of Rome
5. Council of Constantinople (381) recognized the priority of the Roman bishop
6. The Roman bishop issued a decree (385) that the bishops in Spain were bound by his decrees
7. Innocent the First (401-417 AD) claimed that all of the official churches in the west owed obedience to Rome
8. Leo the First (440-461) is considered by some to be the first pope. He bribes Attila the Hun to stay out of Rome.
9. In 495, no major ruler anywhere was in communion with the pope. In 496, Clovis, King of the Franks (modern day France, Netherlands, and part of Germany), was converted and saved the political power of Roman Catholicism.

## IV. POST-NICEAN WRITERS

### A. Ambrose

1. 339-397AD
2. Grew up in Rome and became governor of the province of Emilia in 370
3. Became bishop of Milan in 374 by popular vote of the people
4. Was taken from unbaptized layman to bishop in 8 days
5. Studied Greek, Jewish and Christian philosophy (including Philo and Origen)
6. Known as critical interpreter of the Bible
7. In his sermons, he defended the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament by using philosophical allegory.
8. Augustine was converted and baptized under his ministry
9. Conflict with Theodosius I
  - a. In 390, the Emperor Theodosius commanded a massacre in Thessalonica
  - b. Ambrose rebuked him and would not allow him communion



- c. After a feeble resistance, Theodosius did public penance in the cathedral of Milan

### B. John Chrysostom

1. 347-407AD
2. Born, saved and baptized at Antioch
3. Famous for his preaching and teaching of the Bible
4. Chrysostom means “golden-mouthed”
5. Studied law, then became a hermit-monk, and was finally ordained as a priest
6. Became bishop of Constantinople in 398
7. In 403, he was exiled because of his strong preaching against sin in high places
8. He died in exile near the Black Sea
9. Emphasized the literal interpretation of the Bible
10. Known mainly for his practical application of scripture to every day life

### C. Jerome

1. 340-420AD
2. Educated in Rome
3. Lived as a hermit for several years
4. Served in Rome (382-385) as secretary to Pope Damasus
5. In Rome, he held classes for a circle of noble Roman widows and virgins
6. When he went to Bethlehem in 386 with some of these women, Paula financed a monastery for him there
7. Commissioned by Pope Damasus to write a standard Latin Bible, which he based on Origen’s Hexapla
8. Sought to adapt Latin literary studies to the purposes of Christianity
9. Defended the perpetual virginity of Mary and regarded marriage as greatly inferior to celibacy
10. Corresponded much with Augustine

### D. Augustine

1. 354-430AD
2. Born in North Africa in the area known today as Algeria
3. Studied and followed several different philosophies in his youth
  - a. Greek philosophy (Cicero)
  - b. Manichaeism
  - c. Neoplatonism
  - d. Christianity
4. His conversion

- a. In 386, at the age of 33
- b. Upon reading Romans 13:14
- c. Was then baptized by Ambrose
- d. He soon left his common-law wife of 9 years
5. Three major disputes
  - a. Manicheans—a group he belonged to in his youth
  - b. Donatists
    - i. A separatist group
    - ii. Convinced the civil authorities to persecute them
    - iii. Wrote the first major defence of religious persecution
  - c. Pelagians—his predestination clashed with their free will
6. Was bishop of Hippo, North Africa, from 396-430AD
7. When he died in 430, the Vandals were besieging the city
8. Major books
  - a. Confessions—an autobiographical record of his youth
  - b. City of God—a philosophical work interpreting history as a conflict between the city of God and the city of the World
9. He taught that the Bible should be interpreted according to church tradition
10. His teachings concerning predestination were later taught by John Calvin and St. Thomas Aquinas
11. Considered the most influential ancient theologian

### V. DEVELOPMENT OF MONASTICISM

#### A. Stages in the Development of Monasticism

1. Asceticism in the churches advocated by different church leaders
2. Hermit Life
3. Cloister Life
4. Monastic Orders

#### B. The Spread of Monasticism

1. Men such as Origen, Augustine of Hippo, and Jerome promoted asceticism as a higher form of Christian service
2. Monasticism began and developed first in Egypt
3. Hermits became so numerous in the desert that they joined together in cloisters
4. Pachomius, St. Basil and St. Benedict developed rules for the monasteries
5. St. Basil of Cappadocia brought monasticism to Asia Minor in the fourth century
6. St. Martin of Tours founded a monastery in Gaul about 367
7. Monasticism became very important in the British Isles in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries (Ireland, Britain, England)

### C. Antony the Hermit

1. 250-355AD
2. Began to practice asceticism at 20
3. Ate a meal of bread and salt once a day
4. At 35, he went to live in solitude at a mountain on the Nile
5. He later organized the monastic life of the hermits who imitated him
6. He imagined the devil appearing to him in many forms
7. A Life of St. Antony was written by Athanasius
8. He had much to do with the later hermit and monastic movements

### D. Symeon the Stylite

1. 390-459AD
2. Sought meditation and closeness to God by sitting on top of a stone pillar
3. He ate, slept, prayed and meditated on top of these pillars
4. The fourth pillar he used was about 40 feet high and only 3 feet in diameter at the top
5. He sat on top of this pillar for 20 years until his death

### E. Pachernius

1. Lived in the early fourth century in Egypt
2. A soldier in his youth
3. Lived for 12 years with an old hermit
4. Organized a society of monks on an island in the Nile which reached membership of 3000 in his lifetime
5. Divided monks into 24 classes according to spiritual advancement
6. They supported themselves by various kinds of labor: agriculture, ship-building, etc.
7. Had all things common
8. Carried out special hours of devotion

### F. Benedict of Nursia

1. Died c. 547
2. Founded the monastic order of the Benedictines in 529
3. He created the Rule of St. Benedict which became the chief rule of Western Monasticism
4. His first monastery, Monte Cassino, was a converted temple of Apollos on a 1700 foot high hill in central Italy
5. Early Benedictines included St. Augustine of Canterbury, St. Boniface, and Pope Gregory I