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## Missions History of the Early Church

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## 2

## Missions History of the Early Church A.D. 100 – 500

After the last Apostle John died the Church was left with the final inspired written record of the revealed will of God. There was no other infallible recourse for the Church and many views and different doctrines were introduced. The lack of careful exegesis and agreed upon method of biblical interpretation resulted in a freedom to interpret the revelation in a way that made sense to the interpreter, in stead of coming to the conviction of what the original author and Holy Spirit meant at the time of writing the inspired text. It became more important what it meant to the interpreter, or worse, the text was twisted to prove doctrines not taught in the text at all (i.e. the divine powers of the saints and Mary).

By the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century doctrines such as baptismal regeneration, ... were already essential to the faith. The major differences concerned the deity of Christ, a doctrine deemed essential to salvation, had already split the Church into opposing views. In order to secure the unity of the Christian Church a central authority had to be established. At first it was the councils then later it would become the Pope.

The divergent views grew during between 100 AD and 313 AD since the Church had no central figure or authority structure. Once the Emperor Constantine stopped the persecution of the Church in 313 A.D., he took steps to bring about the unity of the Church by calling a general council of all the leadership. In 325 AD he summoned 318 bishops to the Council of Nicea near Constantinople, the Eastern capital of the Empire.

This Council became the dividing point of this period of the history of the Church: Ante-Nicea [*before* Nicea] and Post-Nicea [*after* Nicea]. Vos divides the Early Church leadership by the "Fathers," a term of respect used for the leadership until around 500 AD. These men were more involved in explaining and defending the faith than in the direct extension of the faith via evangelism and church planting.

- the Apostolic or Post-Apostolic Fathers (AD 95-150)
- the Apologists (AD 140-200)
- the Polemicists (AD 180-225)
- the Theologians (AD 225-460) (Vos, 1994)

We will examine each of the Ante- and Post-Nicene periods for their Growth Factors, Extent of Growth, Key Personnel, and the Methodologies used. In each area we shall seek to discern personal applications and principles that are valid consideration for contemporary ministries.

Much of the known history of this period is framed by the following highlights of the various persecutions against Christians. Vos describes the initial Jewish persecutions referred to in Acts, and then **first Roman persecution** began with Nero in A.D. 64 who blamed the Christians as conspirators for the burning of Rome. Though it probably had little to do with Christian doctrine yet Paul and Peter got caught in the dragnet. Forms of killing included being fed to wild animals, crucified, beheaded, or set on fire to provide nocturnal lights.

**The second persecution** came from Domitian in A.D. 95, which was primarily directed against the Jews for refusing to pay taxes for



Nero (37-68)

building an exorbitant Temple for Jupiter as well as the imposed emperor worship. Christians were caught in this same situation, notably the Apostle John. In the second century the church leader and apologist, Tertullian wrote his often-repeated quote, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

**The third persecution** originated with Pliny, governor of N. Asia Minor, Bythnia, who sought to stop the massive defections to Christianity from A.D. 109-111. "Pliny wrote to the emperor Trajan (r. 98-117) for advice. Trajan replied that Christians were not to be sought out; but if reported and convicted they were to be punished, unless they repented and worshiped the gods. Anonymous information was not to be received against them. Thus an official policy was established" (Vos, 1994).

Pliny described his approach of interrogation to the emperor saying, "So far this has been my procedure when people were charged before me with being Christians. I have asked the accused themselves if they were Christians; if they said 'Yes,' I asked them a second and third time, warning them of the penalty; if they persisted I ordered them to be led off to execution" (Tucker, p. 24). Not all were willing to face death for their faith and recanted, some after considerable torture.

Conversions were occurring everywhere, such that the unity of the Empire was at stake. In 117 the Roman emperor Hadrian (76-138) executes 11,000 soldiers who were Christian converts, as well as two bishops of Rome.



Marcos Arelius

**The fourth persecution** came from Marcos Arelius (121-180) who changed the policy to directly seek out evidence against the Christians and to blame them for all natural disasters. He was unusually cruel and barbarous.

In the East the remaining Jews rebel against the Roman rule, begin again to persecute Christians for three year until 134, when the Romans intervene. They obliterated Jerusalem for the second time killing 580,000 Jews, almost the entire population of Palestine died or fled. This was the final destruction of the nation of Israel until the nation is re-established in 1948. In 136 Hadrian re-founds the city as a pagan city and constructs a temple of Jupiter on the site of Solomon's temple.

**The fifth persecution** was regional rather than empire wide. Septimius Severus, who ruled from A.D. 193-211, enacted a law prohibiting the spread of Christianity, thus forbidding the conversion to Christianity. Violent persecution erupted in Carthage, Alexandria, Rome and Corinth. The father of Origin, a Christian apologist, was beheaded, along with many of his students.

**The sixth persecution** was under Maximinus from A.D. 235-238, which targeted his persecution against the leaders of the Christian movement.

**The seventh persecution** was again empire wide from A.D. 249-305 from a number of emperors. As the empire began to disintegrate the Christians were blamed for every problem. Decius Trajan (r. 249-251) was convinced a state religion was necessary for unification and stability of the empire. Anyone failing to make a pagan sacrifice for the Empire and receive a certificate (*libellus*) would be killed. This brutality shifted public opinion in favor of Christianity. An issue developed when some Christians yielded to the pressure and made a public sacrifice or bought a certificate. Should they be accepted back into the Church?

**The eighth persecution** began in A.D. 258 under Valerian (r. 253-260) was merciless for those who refused to offer pagan sacrifices for the Empire, which was taken

as an act of disloyalty, rebellion and treason, thus worthy of capital punishment. The bishops of Rome, Carthage and Spain were killed. Valerian was humiliated in defeat by the Persians in the East, which would eventually demand a stronger administration in the East, and the eventual move of the capital to the East.

Following this brief persecution a period freedom extended from A.D. 260-303.

**The ninth persecution** (303-311) started under Diocletian<sup>1</sup> (r.284-286, later joint rule with Maximian) and Galerius (r. 293-305 as Caesar, then 305-311 as Augustus with Constantius, r. 305-306) who was known for his hatred of Christians, when Diocletian commanded the destruction of all Christian places, sacred texts and church leaders were imprisoned. This was the largest and bloodiest official persecution of Christianity. He offered the Christians to renounce their faith or be killed, especially in Italy and N. Africa. This persecution ended by A.D. 305 when Diocletian retired.

Constantine (son of Constantius) and Licinius, brother-in-law to Constantine (r. 308-324) became joint leaders of the two regions of the empire (East and West) and granted tolerance to the Christians in A.D. 315 with the Edict of Milan.

**The final persecution** came under Licinius who came under pressure to break the liberal policy returning the persecution in the East, only to be defeated by Constantine.

Vos describes some of the beneficial effects of the persecutions, especially the impact of the faithful testimony of dying martyrs. With no social or economic benefit to becoming a Christian the motives for conversion were more sincere. While fleeing persecution the believers were forced to migrate into areas where the gospel was unknown.

The persecution forces the Early Church into a final definition of the NT canon of Scripture. If they were going to die for the writings of Holy Text and take the risk of copying and preserving manuscripts then they made certain each text was part of the inspired canon. Likewise, the difficult times gave rise to the Apologists who "produced reasoned defenses of Christianity that countless generations since have used in defending their own faith" (Vos, 1994).

These years of persecution had a lasting effect on the overall church: Who today worships Mithras? Who follows Mani? Who burns incense to Isis, Osiris, Minerva and the countless other deities of the Roman pantheon? The willingness to die for their faith made a compelling argument for its reality.

Constantine (272-337) became the sole emperor in A.D. 324 and made Christianity a legal religion and restored properties previously confiscated and rebuilt destroyed churches. He called all the bishops of the Christian church to gather under his protective headship to resolve the primary controversy over the deity of Christ, a major obstacle to the acceptance among the pagans and divergent groups of Christianity.

Constantine's mother, Helen built many churches over Christian historical sites in modern-day Turkey and Israel. At the close of the fourth century Theodosius forbid all heathen religions and established Christianity as the official state religion of the



Constantine

<sup>1</sup> Diocletian divided the empire into four sections. First Maximian was made co-emperor of the West (while Diocletian became emperor of the East). Then Galerius and Constantius were made Caesars or junior co-emperors over a quarter of the empire.

empire in A.D. 392.

Now the Church was faced with a myriad of new problems that would keep its focus on internal politics and infrastructure, while a few courageous leaders would expand the Church into huge and hostile pagan tribal areas outside the Empire as they came threatening the Roman territories.

By the end of the fourth century the victorious Church became the persecutor of minority groups and dissenters within its own membership. This heavy hand of persecution would mar the reputation of the Church until the present time.

### **Missions in the Ante-Nicean Church**

By 110 the Celtic churches had formed in England, by 140 in Wales, by 180 in Scotland and by 250 in Ireland. They remained in isolation until 3 British bishops attended major Church Councils in 314. With the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons in 450 and the extermination of Christianity in England, the Celtic churches remained free from Rome and Western influence until the Synod of Whitby in 663.

By the end of the first century the Church there were perhaps “no more than 100 congregations; mainly urban, and primarily Greek speaking” (Terry, 1998, p. 167). Kidd quotes Tertullian (A.D. 200) who boasts, “We have filled every place belonging to you, cities, islands, castles, towns, assemblies, your very camp, your tribes, companies, place, senate, and forum! We leave you your temples only” (Kidd, 1920, p. 143).

One of the well-known martyrs of the early church was **Polycarp** (69-155), identified as a disciple of John the Apostle. What we know of Polycarp comes from his pupil and disciple, **Irenaeus** (d. 202), apologist and theologian, and later bishop of Lyons, Gaul [France]. Polycarp was one of the last leaders who was won to Christ by an Apostle [John] and knew many who had seen Jesus.

Philip Schaff wrote concerning Polycarp’s forceful ministry against paganism that he was denounced throughout all Asia Minor as the “atheist,” that is, “the teacher of Asia, the destroyer of our gods.” He was seen as glorifying a dead man and his messages on the teachings and miracles of Jesus, which John had told him firsthand, were convincing. Schaff reports of his letter to the Philippian church, of his focus on Christ saying, “Of Christ it speaks in high terms as the Lord, who sits at the right hand of God to whom everything in heaven and earth is subject” (Schaff, 1979, p. 666).

Tucker quotes Elliott Wright who wrote, “He was the gentlest...of men...a case study in humility.” He was remembered as a man of prayer—a man who, according to one ancient source, “prayed constantly night and day” – prayer that did not interfere with his daylight hours devoted to teaching and his night to studying the Scripture” (Tucker, p. 31).

When persecution broke out in 156 every attempt was made to get him to recant his faith in the “cult” of Jesus. “Why, what harm is there in saying, ‘Caesar is Lord’ and offering incense and saving yourself,” the officials continued pleading, “Swear by the divinity of Caesar; repent and say, ‘Away with the atheists’...Take the oath and I will let you go.” Polycarp was unshakable, then uttered the words that will forever be associated with his name: “For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?” (Tucker, p. 32). He was burnt at the stake for refusing to deny his Lord.

By 120 the first evidence of Christians were reported in Romania, and by 130 Moldavia had its first Christian communities. In the west the first Christians are reported in Morocco and Portugal (Roman frontier provinces). By 150 the first Christians were reported in the S. of Germany, making Augsburg their center. By 500 Christianity became the major religions and in 722 archbishop Boniface worked for the conversion of all the German people.

By 150 Latin had become the common language of Christian communities in the West and the Church of Rome, replacing the Greek language, which had dominated the Christians for over 100 years. By 190 the NT in Latin was completed.

Without any apparent strategy Christianity spread out geographically in every direction, frequently because of persecution. For the first hundred years the churches used Greek in their services appealing to the poorer classes, while in N. Africa the churches used primarily Latin, which appealed to the higher or educated classes. Historian Kenneth Scott LaTourette calculated that by the end of the second century Christians were active in all the provinces of the Roman Empire as well as Mesopotamia (LaTourette, 1929, p. 85).

By the beginning of the third century the following groups had become Christians: the different tribes of Gaetuli, Mauri and all the regions of Spain and various tribes of Gaul, and sections of Britain. In addition "the Sarmatae, the Daci, the Germans, the Scythians and many remote peoples, province and islands" (Terry, 1998, p. 169).

Tradition holds that by 190 there were widespread turning to Christianity in vast numbers in N. Africa and reports of believers in Kurdistan and Hindu Kush, and northward around the Caspian Sea. Though we have little writings that have survived this period, it seems apparent that Christians were committed to planting the gospel among all the peoples of their day and within their awareness, often at great sacrifices.

## End of the second century

Six generations have passed since the ascension of Christ. According to Barrett and Johnson the world is 2.4% Christian and 9.3% evangelized, with Scriptures translated into 7 languages and a total number of 177,000 martyrs, which is 1.5% of all Christians. This is at the rate of 1,200 per year.

In the Hellenistic world of the second and third century Christianity was considered little more than a "barbarous superstition, and the Bible simply an inferior collection of texts unworthy (by Greek aesthetic standards) of serious consideration" (Franke, 2003, p. 18). The catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt, founded in 150, sought to apply a Jewish technique of allegory to relate Christian teaching to Greek philosophical thought.

**Origen** was asked to lead this school at the age of eighteen. He lived an austere life "characterized by extreme self-discipline and ascetic practices, including his own self-castration in accordance with a literal reading of Matthew 19:12" (Franke, p. 19).



**Origen 185-254**

Though under intense pressure and persecution he trained leaders and published Bible studies for distribution. Ambrose was a wealthy convert who was impressed with Origen's intellectual capacity, such that he provided him with a modern publishing staff of stenographers, copyists and calligraphers as well as funds to publish his works. "The stenographers wrote down Origen's words in shorthand as he lectured

and turned their notes over to the copyists, who produced a manuscript for him to revise. The calligraphers then reproduce as many copies as were needed in a clear and elegant hand” (Franke, p. 19). Thus Origen became one of the most prolific writers of the Early Church.

Origen’s approach could be identified with a contextual approach to exegesis, that is, he sought to utilize the Greek philosophical tradition of developing a moral meaning from ancient Greek philosophy, instead of focusing on the details of the myths. He not only sought to borrow truths from pagan culture, but to apply the same allegorical approach to his interpretation of NT Scriptures.

His three levels of learning, which correspond to the three aspects of the human body – body, soul and spirit – were derived from Platonic philosophy. The bodily level is the bare letter of the text or the literal meaning, primarily for the simple minded; the psychic level is seen as the moral meaning of the text or what is “beneath the surface of the text”, which provides guidance for discerning proper and ethical conduct. The spiritual or allegorical level is that which points to Christ and the relationship between the Christian and his God. This mystical meaning, though hidden and not obvious, is present in the text. It is the task of the Christian exegete to uncover this hidden and symbolical meaning. This method would guide the Church’s interpretation until the sixteenth century.

The apologetic argument of Origen for the Jew was to answer why Christ did not fulfill all of the Messianic prophecies was that they had to be understood spiritually for their deeper meaning, not literally. For the arguments against the Gnostic sects who rejected the OT on the grounds that it taught a different God (one of vengeance, jealousy, capricious and provoking sin and evil) from the God of the NT (one of love), Origen could understand the Gnostic interpretation, if the OT were taken literally, so he was obligated to understand the OT allegorically.

Origen equated the Gnostic problem with that of the Greek philosophy, which sought to defend the belief in the inspired character of Homer’s writings, the Iliad and the Odyssey, “in the face of the charge that they portrayed morally suspect behavior. Homer’s supporters maintained that the poems were symbolic and when read in their true, allegorical sense contained no moral or religious difficulties” (Franke, p. 20).

Contemporaries condemned this approach, refusing his ordination in Alexandria. His critics could see that this method of interpretation would lead to doctrinal chaos. “Origen does provide us with an objective lesson in the pitfalls of accommodation – the practice of too closely associating the Bible and Christian faith with the values and presuppositions of a particular social, cultural or philosophical outlook” (Franke, p. 23). Adaptations of his method of interpretation would guide the Latin tradition and the Reformation for centuries.

In 220 Origen wrote, “Many people, not only barbarians, but even in the Empire, have not yet heard the word of Christ... The gospel has not yet been preached to all nations, since it has not reached the Chinese or the Ethiopians beyond the river, and only small parts of the more remote and barbarous tribes” (Barrett and Johnson 2001, p. 114).

An Egyptian monk named **Nesteros** expanded Origen’s three-fold interpretation into his four ways or “senses” of a text. He explained this paradigm by examining the various meanings of “Jerusalem” in the Bible.

“Jerusalem in its **literal and historical sense**, said Nesteros, is simply a city in the Holy Land. That is the Bible’s first sense its literal and historical meaning.

Besides this, however, Jerusalem is also a **symbol** (*typos*) of the Church, God's redeemed and sanctified people. That is its second or **allegorical** sense (Gal 4:24 – *allegoroumena*).

Nesteros said that Jerusalem is an image of the redeemed but struggling Christian soul; this is its their or **moral sense**.

Finally, Jerusalem is that heavenly city on high (Gal 4:25; Rev 21:2), the final expectation of our hopes, and this is its fourth or **anagogical sense**<sup>2</sup> (Reardon 2003, p. 31).

These “four senses” became the foundation of all monastic readings of the Bible and is referred to in all theological writings for over a millennium. A visitor to Nesteros' remote monastery, **John Cassian** (360-435), would later spread this methodology throughout European monasteries.

In 225 Persia was extensively penetrated by Christians, with over 20 resident bishops.

However, the repeated story throughout the next two millenniums would be that the gospel would spread into new territories for a few centuries, only to be crushed by evil and cruel enemies. The resulting population would have to be re-evangelized.

### ***General Factors affecting Church Growth***

The persecutions of the churches were on-and-off-again and localized, which permitted the church to grow freely in many areas of the empire. In general, the conditions were open to the expansion of the church. John Terry lists six major factors that facilitated the growth of the churches:



**Roman Road**

1. The Roman transportation system. The Roman roads were the contemporary advanced means of all weather travel, which permitted mobilization and migration of early evangelists. These roads connected one end of the empire with the other.
2. The presence of Roman legions throughout the empire made travel safer and freer from marauders and pirates. The *Pax Romana* [Roman Peace] assured a military stability on land and sea making it ideal for migrations. This would facilitate travel until the barbarian invasions beginning with the Alemannic [German] invasion reaching through out Italy, France and Spain around 260, which would increase in frequency and effectiveness.
3. The near universal use of the Greek language and culture permitted the early evangelists to communicate the gospel clearly to everyone in the empire. After AD 150 Latin took precedence in the West, but Greek remained the common language in the East.
4. The awareness of Greek culture and philosophy encouraged the quest for answers and the truth, and encouraged the dissatisfaction with the superstitious

<sup>2</sup> *Anagoge* (Gk. “climb” or “ascent” upwards) is a way to see spiritual, mystical or invisible meaning to visible fact, a “religious or ecstatic elevation, a mystical feeling.”

and animistic views of traditional pagan religions. The Western Church would be molded by the deductive logic and allegorical interpretation methods of the Greek philosophers.

5. The presence of Jewish synagogues throughout the Roman Empire, where monotheism was taught and defended, brought many Gentiles into awareness of and commitment to the OT Yahweh. Early Jewish Christians found an open forum for proving that the Messiah was first to suffer for the sins of mankind, then return as King of kings.
6. Many Gentiles now knew of the personal God who allowed a personal relationship with men by dealing personally with their sin issue. These “God-fearers” were the primary Jewish target audience of the apostle Paul and the early Jewish evangelists.



Synagogue in Italy

Contemporary Christians likewise have similar positive opportunities in our modern day. Travel to most parts of the world is easy, economical and safe. The contemporary euphoria for English is increasingly permitting a single language to dominate the world. The Scientific Method has encouraged analytical thinking giving opportunity for a convincing and reasonable religion to be acceptable (apologetics). The presence of “nominal” Christians around the world gives great preliminary focus for evangelism of nationals, who, when trained, can minimize the “foreignness” of Christianity in a given country.

The inadequacies of atheistic humanism have opened the door to mysticism and New Age theories in the quest for a genuine relationship with the divine. The message today of a meaningful relationship to a Personal and Living God has significance to many cultures.

### ***Extent of Growth in the Second and Third Centuries***

The Christians of the first and second century appear to have been eager to share their new faith with others. Perhaps the proximity to the historical events made their story to seem more factual, real and personal, whereas with time their message would become more mystical and subjective. When the synagogues refused to admit Jewish evangelists or their numbers diminished from attrition, the primary center for teaching and preaching was in private homes, usually by itinerating evangelists in the second century. Christian centers, instead of synagogues became to source of monotheistic understanding.

In spite of frequent severe persecution the churches continued to grow and multiply. John Foxe described their zeal in his *Book of Martyrs* saying, “In that age every Christian was a missionary. The soldier tried to win recruits...; the prisoner sought to bring his jailer to Christ; the slave girl whispered the gospel in the ears of her mistress; the young wife begged her husband to be baptized...; everyone who had experienced the joys of believing tried to bring others to the faith” (Foxe, n.d., pp. 39-40).

The first evidence of a permanent constructed church building was dated at 200. Provinces or states where the gospel was first evident at this time included Slovenia, Switzerland, Sahara, Belgium, Hungary, Ukraine, and Gibraltar.

In 202 the emperor Septimius Severus launched the 5<sup>th</sup> imperial Roman persecution, prohibiting the conversion to Christianity or Judaism. A special target was Egypt with more than 100 a day being martyred.

**Eusebius** (263-339) described the church at Rome in 251 quoting from a letter written by Bishop Cornelius of Rome. He stated there were 46 presbyters, 7 deacons, 7 sub-deacons, 42 clerks and 52 exorcists, readers and janitors. He also stated that they supported 1,500 widows and needy people in the church. Some have therefore, estimated that the possible population of the Christians in Rome may have been over 30,000 meeting in small groups in homes (Terry, 1998, p. 169). Eusebius described the dedication of these early traveling evangelists that would forever be the measure of dedication. Neill's *History of the Christian Church* quotes Eusebius who wrote:

At that time many Christians felt their souls inspired by the holy word with a passionate desire for perfection. Their first action, in obedience to the instructions of the Savior, was to sell their goods and to distribute them to the poor. Then, leaving their homes, they set out to fulfill the work of an evangelist, making it their ambition to preach the word of the faith to those who as yet had heard nothing of it, and to commit to them the book of the divine Gospels. They were content simply to lay the foundations of the faith among these foreign peoples: they then appointed other pastors and committed to them the responsibility for building up those whom they had merely brought to the faith. Then they passed on to other countries and nations with the grace and help of God (Neill, 1964, p. 24).



**Eusebius of Caesarea**

Barnett and Johnson report that by 300 there were over 40 church buildings in Rome, with probably 5% of the population being Christian. If this is indicative of what had happened in many major cities then it is likely such churches existed in at least five to eight major cities of the Roman Empire.

By 280 the Christians on the caravan trails, such as the 4,000-mile Silk Road trek through India, had spread the gospel to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. By 410, 25% of these entire populations were Christians.

It appears that the approach was to reach the people most like yourself. The Church historian Stephen Neill quotes Celsus, a second century philosopher and opponent of Christianity, who wrote:

Their aim is to convince only worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor women, and children... They would not dare to address an audience of intelligent men...but if they see a group of young people or slaves or rough folk, there they push themselves in and seek to win the admiration of the crowd. It is the same in private houses. We see wool-carders, cobblers, washermen, people of the utmost ignorance and lack of education (Neill, 1964, p. 45).

The empire was passing through difficult times defending itself against the raiding tribes from the North and East giving the churches a periodic reprieve from some of the persecution and the freedom to grow throughout the empire. In 285 the Empire partitioned itself into the Eastern and Western Empires. In one or two provinces at least half the people were Christians and in several cities Christians were the majority.

Harnack estimated the number of Christians in the empire at three or four million at the time of Constantine by A.D. 325. (Harnack, 1908, p. 2:325) What brought about this growth?

### ***Missionaries and Bishops of the Ante-Nicean Period***

The itinerating examples left by Paul and the other apostles encouraged the succeeding leaders to be as courageous in taking the gospel to the peoples of the world. Eusebius described their mission as:

"The holy apostles and disciples of our Saviour, being scattered over the whole world, Thomas, according to tradition, received Parthia as his allotted region; Andrew received Sythia, and John, Asia, where ...he died at Ephesus. Peter appears to have preached through Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia, to the Jews ... finally coming to Rome" (Eusebius, 1984, p. 82).

The *Didache* ["Teaching"] was an anonymous work used as a catechism of Christian lessons and a set of rules for approved itinerating teachers and evangelists from the second century who, evidently, traveled from church to church never staying very long. Schools eventually would develop, but most were trained through personal discipleship and apprenticeships. One of these training centers was in Alexandria. An early leader in this school, Pantaenus, was thought by Eusebius to have traveled as far as India as a missionary (Eusebius, 1984, p. 190).

Edessa, in the SE part of modern Turkey, by the end of the second century was the first state to make Christianity a state religion. Syriac was the language, thus became the first written language into which the NT was translated. Kraft says that by the beginning of the fourth century Christians were the majority of the population, in spite of the persecution.



Cappadocia was a rugged region where Christians in central Asia hid during times of persecution, where underground cities existed for centuries. From this citadel evangelists traveled into Armenia. Churches were carved into the mountainside. Small pockets of believers had existed since the mid-first century where tradition states that Apostles Thaddaeus and Bartholomew preached there between AD 40-60.

**Gregory the Illuminator** (257-331) was raised a Christian in Cappadocia, and later sparked a mass people movement by being called out of his prison cell to restore King Tiridates III from his insanity. As a result of his restoration, the King granted Gregory full rights to bring the conversion of the entire nation to the Christian faith. In veneration of Gregory, parts of his body were sent to major cathedrals (head in Italy, right hand in Armenia, left hand in Lebanon). Such was the veneration of the "saints" that they believed by touching their preserved body parts, bones, hair, etc., that you were contacting them even though they were dead. This practice of believing in the power of body parts of martyrs or saints (especially cadavers that do not deteriorate) are seen as supernaturally empowered for healings and miracles. Often these parts are buried beneath the altar of a new church to grant special power to the church.

By 301 Armenia became the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as its official state religion. Most of these conversions occurred due to a large influx of



missionaries covering the countryside. From their beginning the Armenians held to a monophysite<sup>3</sup> view of Christ. This view would continue to be divisive until the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

**Gregory of Thaumaturgos** [*wonder-worker*] (213-270), a student of Origen, was made the bishop of Pontus, a majority pagan

diocese. His record gives us some insight into the strategy of how the early churches expanded so rapidly. Capable disciples were made bishops in cities where as little as 10 believers existed, with the responsibility of expanding the church to cover the entire city. It is reported that Gregory went to Pontus when there were only 17 believers, when he was forty years old. Though he ruled in his diocese for only thirteen years, when he died there were only 17 pagans in the whole town.

Kane reports, “A forty-year period of peace, from 260-300, gave the church an opportunity to extend its influence without the handicaps and hardships which accompany persecution. These four decades, just before the Diocletian persecution, were a time of unprecedented growth for the Christian Church. Converts by the thousands flocked into the churches, bringing their patrimony, and in some cases their paganism, with them. The church became the richest religious organization in the empire” (Kane, p. 17)

By the turn of the century, 300, or 9 generations after Christ, the world is 7.3% Christians and 17.1% evangelized, with Scriptures translated into 10 languages. The total martyrs since AD 33 now is at 627,000. This means 1.3% of all Christians since the Ascension have been martyrs or at the rate of an average of 4,500 per year. The areas of the strongest Christian development in the Roman Empire are Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, North Africa, also in Rome and Lyons, in Gaul. The chief numerical strength remains in the East, but there is no area in the Empire that is totally unevangelized.

### ***The Great Persecution***

The tenth and final Imperial Roman persecution was about to begin in 303 under Diocletian, which targeted the clergy and bishops. This persecution resulted in a number of defections and the destruction of all church buildings and Scripture portions that could be found. It is recorded that 3,500 formal or official executions of church leaders and bishops and an estimated 750,000 Christians killed or executed in 10 years of systematic slaughter (Barrett and Johnson, p. 115).

The two great sins of the Roman lifestyle were idolatry and immorality. To live in a world dedicated to these vices and yet remain “unspotted from the world” was the continual challenge of the believers. The best solution of the time was to leave the world for life in a monastery.

<sup>3</sup> Monophysitism means that Christ has only one nature (divine), which was contrary to the Chalcedonian position (451) that held that Christ had two natures (one divine and one human united in one person, Christ, which is known as the hypostatic union). The Oriental [Eastern] Orthodox churches held this view (Armenian, Syrian, Coptic and Ethiopian Christian churches).

### ***Effect of Controversies on Missionary Efforts***

It should be noted that after the first century the Jews proved to be most resistant to the Christian message. After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 the break between the Jews and the Christians expanded. By the time of their rebellion in 134 there was growing animosity against the Jews by the Christian population. There were few Jewish Christian leaders by the mid-second century. As the Jews first persecuted the early Christians, so the "Christians" would persecute the Jews for centuries. The Jewish issues raised in the NT cease to be a conflict by the Second century. The principles from these Scriptural conflicts guided the Church in the understanding of dealing with later issues.

Besides the external conflicts of persecution, the internal conflicts of theological debate over the nature of Christ caused subtle doubts and often diverted the main focus of the churches from evangelism to defending their respective position on the issues. Leaders who were involved in spreading whichever was their Christian view were not necessarily writers, so our knowledge of their action comes from other writers.

Milton Rudnick reports, "The list of major Christian doctrinal controversies during the first five centuries is long. Among the groups regarded as dangerously false were: Judaizers, Docetists, Gnostics, Marcionists, Montanists, Monarchians, Novationists, Donatists, Arians, Nestorians, and Monophysites." Besides these doctrinal issues there were groups that debated over the proper date of Easter and how priests were appointed. Rudnick wrote, "It is impossible to measure the negative impact of these controversies. In all likelihood it was considerable" (Rudnick, 1984, p. 14).

### **Gnosticism**

One of the earliest heresies was called Gnosticism. The initial form was the target of Paul's argument (Col 2:8, 18-19) as well as John (most of 1 John). Vos describes Gnosticism as a "product of religious fusion" borrowing elements of Judaism, Christianity, Greek philosophy and Oriental mysticism, which resulted in a system of thought that sought to combine revelation with the "wisdom of this world," in an eclectic religion. They taught that matter was evil and spirit was good, a Dualism structure.

Gnostics attempted to answer the problem of how a good God could create an evil world. The solution was a system of emanations, that is, beings that emanated from God who became increasingly evil. The last being who emanated from God was Demiurge, a somewhat evil God, who was identified with Jehovah of the OT and who was thought to be the Creator of the world and man.

This good God felt pity on man and sent the highest emanation, Christ, to meet man's need of salvation. Christ came as an emissary of light from the kingdom of light to dispel man's spiritual darkness. Atonement through His death was not considered necessary. Since matter was evil, the Messiah's body was only an appearance. He used a human body from His baptism until His death on the cross, that is, Christ was the spirit of Jesus, who came and went since the spirit could not die (Vos, 1994).

The word Gnosticism comes from *gnosis* the Greek word for "knowledge." The emphasis is on attaining the knowledge of the good God, which would ensure salvation. The true Gnostics, which were very few, were born with a high degree of intuitive knowledge of God. Christ's teachings would help them to overcome the material world

and enable them to establish communication with God thus gaining entrance into the kingdom of light. Ordinary church members could attain salvation by faith and good works, but the majority of mankind did not have a chance to be saved.

The goal of the Gnostic and the average church member was to experience God by initiation into the mysteries of marriage to Christ, baptism and other mystical rites of the church. The way to redemption required a low estimate of the flesh, even punishing the body by extreme asceticism. When a Gnostic died the soul was released from the prison of matter and returned to the *Pleroma* [the world soul] (Vos, 1994).

Gnosticism did not survive officially as an open religion very long, primarily due to the aggressive attacks of the Polemicists (i.e. Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus). However, according to Vos much of the basic philosophy infiltrated Christian theology giving rise to asceticism, which led to monasticism, and the division of Christians into clergy and laity. The controversy forced the Christian Church to define her doctrinal basis from the Scriptures and obligated the rise of the authority of the bishops as the defenders of the faith.

### **Montanism**

By around AD 150 **Montanus**, a leader of the churches of Phrygia, in central Asia Minor, rejected the formalism and worldliness of his contemporary church and sought to revert to the Early Church's miraculous and supposed spiritual nature. The deadness of formalism was countered with a charismatic Spirit, impulsiveness and worldliness were countered with asceticism and extreme legalism.

Montanus wanted his followers to be the elite of spiritual Christians preparing them for the coming age of the Spirit. He proclaimed a new age of prophecy and thus, the continuation of revelation in ecstatic encounters with God. Montanus himself claimed to be the promised *Paraclete*, the embodiment of the Spirit. He claimed a new age of the Holy Spirit. In 156 he called for all Christians to come to Phrygia to await the Second Coming. Montanus with prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla began to prophesy that the heavenly Jerusalem would soon descend to Earth at Pepuza, a small village town in Phrygia, thus launching the Kingdom of God.

Meanwhile the Church declared that biblical revelation had come to an end as well as the cessation of special revelatory gifts (prophecy, tongues, knowledge). In 230 the Synod of Iconium excommunicated the movement, but it continued underground until about 880.

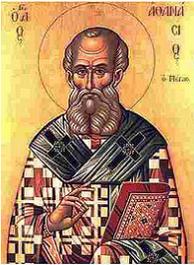
Some of the differences he had with the Catholic Church were: 1) his prophecies superseded the doctrines of the Apostles; 2) the emotional and ecstatic prophesying was contrasted with the quiet and reverential worship in orthodox Christianity; 3) Christians who fell away under persecution could never be restored, which contrasted with the orthodox Christians who accepted restoration to the Church; 4) the prophets of Montanism did not speak as messengers, but were possessed by God as they spoke in the first person.

A notable disciple of Montanus was **Tertullian** (160-220), who migrated to Carthage where he claimed the rights to a basilica that had been dedicated to martyred members who had been originally Montanists. In the time of Augustine its members had dwindled to a few. He reported that they reconciled their church to the Catholic Church and dissolved themselves.

In spite of his differences Tertullian's writings against heresy, especially Gnosticism, gained him great respect, such that he became the teacher of Cyprian, the predecessor of Augustine and the chief founder of Latin theology.

### Arian Controversy

By AD 318 **Arius** (250-336), a bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, openly expressed his difficulty accepting the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead, though it had been the view held by the majority of the Church for 300 years. He defended the monotheist principle on the one hand and the Logos-Christ as an independent being on the other. He taught that Christ was different from the Father in essence being created by the Father at the beginning, thus Christ could not be eternal.



**Athanasius 293-373**

**Athanasius**, archdeacon of Alexandria, challenged him defending that Christ and the Father were the same in essence and equally eternal. He contended that if Christ were mere human, then faith in Him could not bring salvation to humanity. He argued that for a man to suffer the penalty of sin for others, then the quality of the infinite or divinity (as God-man) was essential.

In AD 321 Arius was removed from his bishopric, but a number of other leaders had already become convinced of his views. The Armenian and Coptic churches were separated from the Catholic churches. An ecumenical council at Nicea in AD 325 was called by the emperor to resolve the issue in favor of the clearly taught deity of Christ.

### Nestorianism

**Nestorius**, bishop of Constantinople, had been a disciple of Theodore of Antioch at the School of Nisibis, which was the most respected learning center in Asia. The school functioned as a spiritual community rather than a seminary. Theodore taught his students that biblical exposition focused on what the Bible literally said, rather than imaginings of what the teacher wants the text to say.

Nestorius was accused of being a heretic and banished to a monastery in Egypt for teaching (1) that Mary was not the mother of God (His divinity), but the mother of Christ (His humanity); (2) that Christ was one person (*prosopon*, "face or appearance") with two natures (*physts*), human and divine. The Council of Chalcedon used the term for one person of *hypostasis* with two natures (*physts*). In a world of multiple languages where every statement had to be translated, thus slight nuance differences were inevitable. The controversy led to the ecumenical council at Ephesus in AD 431, which agreed that the linkage of the divine with the human in the God-man was necessary to make the payment to satisfy the penalty for an infinite number of human sinners. Even though this slight distinction earned Nestorius' exile he always subscribed to the historical creeds of the West (Harris, 2000, p. 496).

The Nestorians were condemned in the Empire so they migrated to the East into Persia. Some of them would reach as far as China with their evangelism by AD 650.



**Nestorius 386-451**

Kane stated, “in the subsequent centuries the Nestorian Church became one of the greatest missionary churches of all time” (Kane, p. 14).

In 1625 a monument was discovered in China that details the first Nestorian Christian Missionary, **Alopen**, who arrived in China in 635. He had been warmly welcomed by the Emperor T'ai Tsung, who studied Christianity, approved it and gave orders for its dissemination. With a copy of the Scriptures he began the translation into Chinese.

Soon they had monasteries in hundreds of cities in ten provinces. Nestorian Christianity would continue for two centuries in China until a Taoist Emperor, reacting primarily against the Buddhist 200,000 monasteries, ordered all monks to return to private life. Later the Nestorians would gain influence under the Mongol rule in China and still be present when the Franciscan missionary John of Monte Corvino arrived in Peking in 1294.

### *Nestorian Missionary Model*

The Nestorian communities sent out mini-communities to reproduce themselves. They consisted of professional missionaries (ordained monks, priests and bishops) and lay believers, such as merchants, soldiers, refugees, etc. “They grew their own food and taught the converts to do so also. They preached the gospel and baptized converts among the Hephthalite Huns (a Turkish people). They wrote down the Huns’ language for the first time, translated the Scriptures, and taught the Huns to read and write. We must admire their mission’s striking success at integrating evangelism, education, church planting, and even agriculture” (Harris 2000, p. 497).

From its origin in Persia the Nestorian Church spread to Baghdad, into Central Asia. Everywhere they went they established mission communities with local nationals. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century Nestorian missionary monks won converts from the Persian state religion, Zoroastrianism, from Mongol and Korean shamanism, from Buddhist, Islam and Hinduism, despite the fact that in many instances it was a capital crime to convert. The Nestorian Church would survive 700 years in China where foreign missionaries and Chinese converts translated portions of the Scriptures.

Alliances for immediate advantages proved to be detrimental to the long-term function. In 522 while under persecution some Arab Christians appealed for military help to the closest Christian power in Ethiopia. An army of 70,000 Ethiopians marched into Yemen killing so many pagan Arabs and Jews that Christianity never could overcome the carnage. Mohammed was born shortly thereafter and grew up with these stories. In China the close association with the T'ang Dynasty turned against them when a Buddhist empress, Wu Hou declared Buddhism as the State Religion (691) and persecuted anything connected with the former T'ang Dynasty.

However, the Nestorian Church survived terrible persecution by the religions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism and Shamanism. They were seldom publicized in the West since they had been discarded (unjustly?), but their impact was far broader than other branches of Christianity for a hundreds of years. Sadly they became inwardly focused as the state church in Iran, Armenia and in the hills of Kurdistan and lost their missionary priorities.

At last, however, the Church of the Roman Empire was unified as to the nature and person of Christ. It is hard to give your life for Christ when church leaders are debating who He was. Finally, a council at Chalcedon in AD 451 defined the two natures of Christ, both truly God and truly man.

### *Western Missionary Methods*

Terry sees seven significant methods used to expand the church throughout the empire and beyond.

1. *Public Preaching* was common when persecution did not restrict it. The evangelists were unashamed and zealous to bring their hearers to repentance and belief, forcing upon them a "crisis of decision."
2. *Teaching new converts (catechetical schools) and future leaders* (for presbyters) assured the continuity of the church. The main schools were in Antioch, Alexandria, Edessa, Caesarea and other places, which were used for both training and evangelism. The great missionary bishop, **Gregory Taumaturgos**, (213-270) was converted by Origen (185-254) at the school in Alexandria (Harnack, 1908, p. 362).
3. *Early Christians used their homes* both for hospitality for strangers and for the meeting places for young congregations. This allowed the churches to grow unhindered and unlimited.
4. *Oral witness through personal testimony* was the main tool for evangelism. Written literature was used by the apologists and polemicists to explain debated issues. There was no organized evangelistic strategy or missionary organization. The laymen were the preachers to their neighbors, friends and business associates. Kane quotes Will Durant, "nearly every convert, with the ardor of a revolutionary, made himself an office of propaganda."

With no weapon but truth and no banner but love, these single-minded, warm-hearted followers of Jesus traveled by land and sea to all parts of the empire, and wherever they went they gladly shared their new-found faith with friends, neighbors and strangers. As slaves, traders and later on, soldiers, they used their secular calling to advance the cause of Christ. Even as exiles they carried the contagion of their faith to distant shores and inhospitable regions. (Kane p. 20)

5. *The personal contact and example* left indelible impressions on observers. Terry quotes **Justin Martyr** (100-165) in his Apology saying:

"He has urged us ... to convert all ... and this I can show to have taken place with many that have come in contact with us, who were overcome, and changed from violent and tyrannical characters, either from having watched the constancy of their neighbor's lives or from having observed the wonderful patience of fellow travelers under unjust exactions, or from the trial they made of those with whom they were concerned in business" (Terry, 1998, p. 173).



**Justin Martyr**

6. *The public testimony when forced to testify before tribunals* for their faith. One of the most remarkable was that of **Polycarp** of Smyrna when he said: "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong; and how can I now blaspheme my King that has saved me?" (Eusebius, 1984, p. 147). The

cruel Roman persecution did not weaken the Christianity; rather it was strengthened by it.

7. *The social services* that Harnack describes ten different ministries early Christians used to impact their neighborhoods: "alms or giving, support of teachers and officials, support of widows and orphans, support of the sick and infirm, the care of prisoners and convicts in the mines, the burial of paupers, the care of slaves, providing disaster relief, furnishing employment, and extending hospitality" (Harnack, 1908, pp. 152-153).

There was no difference between social service and evangelism.

What was the methodology that was used to transmit the authentic historical faith of the Apostles from generation to generation? The method that was used to assure fidelity was three-fold: schooling, singing and sacraments. Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary writes:

*Schooling* involved doctrinal summaries. Much like memory verses today, they presented the core of the faith, not with the detail of the creeds that emerged after the Council of Nicaea, but with enough content to delineate the most central ideas about God, Jesus, and forgiveness through Christ's death. 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Romans 1:2-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 reveal this early church schooling. *Singing* involved hymns. Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20 show how much theology was contained in what the earliest church sang. *Sacraments* involved the teaching presented at baptism and Communion. Here one can think of the words spoken over the Lord's Table ("On the night he was betrayed Jesus took the bread ... This is for you") or the picture of baptism summarized in Romans 6:2-4, which proclaims that Christ has put the old life to death and given new life (Bock, 2007, p. 42).

### Missions in the Post-Nicean Church

The hostile politics of the Ante-Nicean period was dissolved with the Edict of Milan (also called Edict of Tolerance) in A.D. 313 and the political favor of the emperor Constantine. As a result many new member flooded into the churches with obvious insincerity. Religious tolerance would change to official sanction and eventually Christianity would become the only state religion permitted. Each step brought many factors affecting the character, growth and health of the church.

Lactantius, a Christian writer, retransmitted this edict to the governor of the province of Bithynia:

"Our purpose is to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each person has desired, whereby whatsoever Divinity dwells in heaven may be benevolent and propitious to us, as to all who are placed under our authority. Therefore we thought it salutary and most proper to establish our purpose that no person whatever should be refused complete toleration, who has given up his mind either to the cult of the Christians or to the religion which he personally feels best suited to himself. It is our pleasure to abolish all conditions whatever which were embodied in former orders directed to your office about the Christians, that every one of those who have a common wish to follow the religion



**Constantine**  
272-337

of the Christians may from this moment freely and unconditionally proceed to observe the same without any annoyance or disquiet” (Wright, 1990, p. 100). To this day state churches continue this agreement between Christianity and the Empire from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Christians in independent “free” churches have considered the Constantinian revolution as practically the fall of Christianity, some comparing it to the fall of Adam and Eve. Soon this declaration would be redefined and tolerance would be lost in the exaltation of Christianity to the obligatory state religion of the Romans.

Twelve years later on July 4, 325 about 300 Christian bishops and deacons from the eastern half of the Roman Empire gathered in Nicaea, a small town near the Bosphorus Straits which link the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

Emperor Constantine the Great spoke briefly to say, “Division in the church is worse than war” and commissioned the bishops to define once and for all the issue over Arianism. If Christianity was to serve as the unification factor of the Empire then all must hold to one faith. Christianity was on the way to becoming the obligatory state religion of the Romans.

Arianism appealed to the new converts to Christianity from pagan religions, which held one supreme God who makes a number of lesser gods who do God’s work, traversing back and forth from heaven to earth. It was difficult to convince these former pagans that Christ was the eternally divine Word, equal to the Almighty Father. Constantine considered this an insignificant issue, but he demanded unity by force, whichever side of the fence the bishops sided on.

Constantine had already convened 220 bishops who had met for two months to decide on an acceptable definition of Jesus Christ. When the Council met, most were willing to compromise, except one young deacon from Alexandria named **Athanasius**, who insisted that Arius’ doctrine left Christianity without a Savior and he called for a creed that made clear Christ’s full deity.

In the council they produced another creed with the phrase, “True God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father...,” which was finally accepted. However, the issue continued for more than a century until the Council of Chalcedon (461) in Asia minor (Turkey), where the Fathers concluded that Jesus was completely and fully God. Furthermore, they concluded that Jesus was fully man and fully God in one normal person thus combining the two natures. Now the story of Jesus was genuinely good news: as a human being, Jesus could fulfill God’s moral law, suffer and die a real death and as truly God, his death could be just payment to satisfy divine justice to forgive sins.

This, then, became the orthodox position till this day. Any view contrary to this view was considered heresy and anathematized by the Church. In the East, major sections of Christianity were thus condemned: the Coptic Church, Armenian Church, Syrian Church, and the Nestorians.

### **General Factors affecting Post-Nicean Church Growth**

1. The emperor’s favor also brought governmental involvement in church business. This was obviously a benefit for the government, not just a commitment to truth. Terry quotes Eusebius who wrote that Constantine told a group of bishops: "You are the bishops of those within the church, but I would be a bishop established by God of those outside it" (Terry, 1998, p. 175). Although his primary focus was

- the tribes within the empire it made evangelism an integral part of any expansion of the empire.
2. The approach and immigration of pagan tribes brought large people groups within the reach of the churches. With the official approval of Christianity, there was little choice for immigrants, but to convert, if they sought integration with Rome.
  3. The government needed a strong religion that would unify the empire and support the authority of the emperor, who was likewise the head of the Church in the East. Christianity seemed to fit this requirement, so it found great support from the authorities. Christians were also seen as effective in civilizing the pagan tribes coming into the empire. This would become a two-edged sword: it would attract many positively, but it would also require the church to enforce its membership with great authority, eventually with the penalty of treason or capital punishment.
  4. The migration of tribal people into Roman territory opened them to accepting new ideas, especially Christianity. Whenever there is a perceived need to assimilate into a new community or culture there is openness to Christianity. Few if any of the tribes were ever converted to Christianity outside the empire.
  5. The success and growth of the churches created a momentum that fed itself for a period of several hundred years. Success breeds success, whether right or wrong. Success, therefore, should not be the measure of what is right. Truth is the only valid measure, but this concept would be lost for a millennium.
  6. The parochial system began by 330, mimicking the Roman system of government, which divided the Empire up into parishes. By 400, the parochial system was established in most cities along the coast of Gaul and the evangelization of rural Europe was well advanced.
  7. Constantine orders 50 valiums Greek Bibles for use in the new churches in Constantinople, similar to Codex Sinaiticus (350), Codex Alexandrinus (420) and Codex Vaticanus (350), which is considered the most perfect extant Bible. All these versions were uncials or 1-inch high capital letters. Minuscule's or small cursive-style letters were not introduced until 750, and did not replace the use of uncials until 1050. Hundreds of copies of the manuscripts are extant today. These were extremely expensive copies of the Bible, but this assured that people could hear the biblical text read in the churches, which was the believer's only exposure to the written Word.
  8. By 367 the Church finally agree upon the entire canon of the NT with 27 books being listed in Athanasius' Easter Letter for the East, and by the Synod of Rome (382) for the West, followed by the Synod of Carthage (397) for the entire church. At last an undisputed NT canon upon which to base one's faith.
  9. In 405 **Jerome** completed the Latin translation of the Bible that was to correct the inaccurate Greek copies in existence and provide a Latin foundation for the Western Church in Latin. This translation project was a twenty-three year effort. In the OT translation he consulted with Jewish rabbis and discovered that the Hebrew Bible did not include the books known as the Apocrypha. Jerome was forced to translate them as well but labeled them *liber ecclesiastici* ["church books to be read for education"], and not to be considered *liber canonici* [canonical books to establish doctrine]. This same attitude would be followed in the Protestant Bibles a thousand years later.



10. As Christianity and Roman culture melted together forms of worship changed. Pagan temples became Christian churches. Since the emperor was now a worshiper a simple service no longer sufficed. Hinson wrote, “The pomp and circumstance of the imperial court was adapted to honor the Emperor of emperors. Processionals, lights, special dress, and numerous other elements added to the grand setting. The living joined the vast company of saints, angels, and heavenly hosts in the glorious praise of God” (Hinson, 1993, n/a). This “communion of the saints,” both living and dead, led to the celebration of the “birthdays” of martyrs, then prayers for martyrs, which soon was seen as unnecessary since, having given the ultimate sacrifice, were ushered immediately into God’s presence. Thus the martyrs did not need the prayers of the church; rather the church needed the prayers of the martyrs. Thus the merits of martyrs as well as the sacrifices of ascetics and virgins were given honor, and then they became the objects of veneration and solicitation in prayers (Galli, 1993, n/a).

Jerome wrote in 378: “From India to Britain, all nations resound with the death and resurrection of Christ” (Bennett and Johnson, p. 115).

### *Extent of Growth in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries*

With the official approval of the emperor Christian churches grew beyond the ability to train and organize. Though for a period the Church was shaken by doctrinal controversy, which was initially resolved by the Council of Nicea, and the centralized authority of the emperor and bishop. The vast administrative and training task forced the leadership to choose short cuts such as visual representations of Bible stories and persons (idols). Ruth Tucker describes this change:

The vibrant evangelism that was conducted during the post-apostolic period began to wane in the early fourth century during the reign of Emperor Constantine. Christianity became a state religion, and as a result, the churches were flooded with nominal Christians who had less concern for spiritual matters than for political and social prestige. Christianity became the fashion. Elaborate structures replaced the simple house-churches, and creeds replaced the spontaneous testimonies and prayers. The need for aggressive evangelism seemed superfluous – at least within the civilized Roman world (Tucker, p. 25).

The mandate from the emperor was clear: there could be no restrictions to church membership according to the Emperor Constantine in 328. It became a question of national unity. One begins to wonder, who was using who? Was the state using the Church as a means of national unity, or was the Church using the state as a means of power and forced conversions?

“Since you know my will, grant free admission to all those who wish to enter the church. For if I hear that you have hindered anyone from becoming a member, or have debarred anyone from entrance, I shall immediately send someone to have you deposed at my behest and have you sent into exile” (Thiede, 1990, Issue 28).

The expansion of Christianity both within and without the boundaries of the Empire included the Visigoths, Burgundians, Franks and Vandals in the North and Northeast and also several Arab tribes in the East after settling in Roman territories.

As the monastery movement was beginning Egypt took the lead. In 346 there were over 500,000 monks (7% of the population of Egypt) that lived in various monasteries,

but a plague would sweep through Egypt decimating most of the centers of Christianity this same year.

By 380 the city of Antioch of 150,000 population was 50% Christians and increasing rapidly.

**John Cassian** (360-435) traveled as a hermit from modern-day Romania to Egypt where he entered a monastery. There he learned of the meditative approach of Nestorius' four-fold approach<sup>4</sup> to Bible understanding, as discussed earlier. Through a series of events he would eventually found a monastery in Marseilles and create the model of monastery life and meditation in the West for a thousand years. Much of the evangelization of new territories were due to these itinerant evangelistic monks, who fed themselves on the Scriptures then boldly preached it in the open air.

By 500 there were Christian congregations in India and Ceylon, as well as Arabia and Persia (Latourette, 1929, pp. 1, 231). Little is known of these early groups since they were persecuted and eventually dissolved leaving little recorded evidence of their accomplishments.

Once Christianity had established the definition of orthodoxy, the next stage was to establish a *Christian nation*.

Christian Roman Emperors might establish the Church, might punish heretics, might make laws claiming allegiance to Christ, might claim to represent Christ, but tribal peoples knew a far stronger law than any Emperor could enforce, that of custom. Custom is binding upon every child born into a primal community and non-conformity to that custom is simply unthinkable. A communal decision to adopt the Christian faith might take some time in coming there might be uncertainty, division, debate for a while, but once thoroughly made, the decision would bind everyone in that society. A community must have a single custom. It was not necessarily a case of strong rulers enforcing their own choice. In Iceland, which was a democracy with no central ruler, the Assembly was divided down the middle between Christians and non-Christians. When the decision for Christianity was eventually made, the non-Christians felt bitter and betrayed, but no one suggested a division into communities with different religions. Religion in fact is but one aspect of the custom which binds a society together. There can be only one Church in a community. And so barbarian Christianity brings to fruition the idea of the Christian nation (Walls, 2001, p. 20).

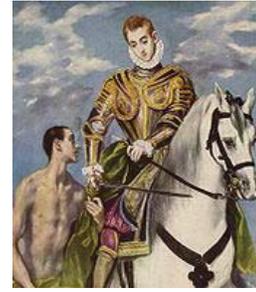
### ***Missionaries and Bishops of the Post-Nicean Period***

The Roman government was very interested in converting as many of the threatening barbarian tribes to Christianity as possible, thus more easily to assimilate into Roman culture and the less threatening they would become. Tucker wrote, "The prospect of converting them to Christianity became a much-sought-after goal of government officials who strongly supported the work of aggressive evangelists such as Martin, Bishop of Tours. Martin was a fourth-century soldier who entered a monastery and went out from there spreading the gospel throughout the French countryside. Some of the earliest and most effective "foreign" missionaries, though, were not aligned in any way with the state or the church at Rome" (Tucker, p. 25).

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<sup>4</sup> The four-fold interpretation of historical, allegorical, moral and anagogical meanings.

The bishops were the key factors for the expansion of the church for the next centuries. Some of the most notable in this period were Ufilas, Martin of Tours, Ambrose of Milan and John Chrysostoma. Leaders were first trained then proven in ministry before being given an assignment among a pagan people. The term was not initially given to lead a large congregation, but rather to head up new pioneer areas where few if any believers existed with the expectation that they would prove their selection as a bishop by their effectiveness in ministry.



**Martin and Beggar**

**Martin of Tours** (316-397). After a tour in the army he was trained theologically then joined a monastery near Milan. He became famous for doing miracles and was chosen to be their bishop. He agreed if he could continue living in a monk's cell in the monastery he established. He traveled throughout Gaul (modern day France), winning many to Christianity, destroyed pagan shrines and turned them into churches and monasteries.

**Ulfila** (310-383). After training he was consecrated as bishop of the Christians living among the Goths (Visigoths) in A.D. 341, probably a mixture of Romans and Goths in modern-day Romania. Although he accommodated his ministry to the Arian Christianity because the Emperor Valens who followed the Arian beliefs, he was instrumental in turning the Goths to Christianity. He returned to his people to work as a missionary. His significant contribution was to create the German alphabet and complete the first Bible translation from the Greek into Visigothic by a missionary for missionary purposes. Fragments of his translation have survived in a library in Sweden.

**Ambrose of Milan** (338-397) was primarily remembered for his influence on Augustine of Hippo, his student, and for his missionary work in Tyrol. However, he is counted as one of the four original "doctors of the [Catholic] Church" and one of the most influential persons of the fourth century.

On one occasion Frigetil, queen of the Marcomanni people met a Christian traveler who witnessed to her. She accepted Christ as thanked the traveler for instruction in her new faith. He advised her to consult Ambrose. When the queen wrote requesting instruction, Ambrose replied in a long letter written in the form of a catechism. He also urged her to persuade her husband to keep peace with the Romans. She persuaded her husband, who federated his kingdom with Rome. Eventually all of her people became Christians (Terry, 1998, p. 177).



Ambrose was a Christian universalist, believing that all people would eventually achieve salvation. He taught and persuaded the Popes to accept his Mariology, and the immaculate conception of Mary at her birth. He lived a constant battle with Arians, especially the ministers of Emperor Valentinian, as well as the conflict of several senators who sought to restore the ancient Altar of Victory and the seven Vestal Virgins along with other pagan ceremonies. In order to stop this pagan resurgence, Ambrose halted the celebration of the Eucharist to all the Christian community until Theodosius, the new emperor, repented; otherwise Ambrose would excommunicate him.

**John Chrysostom** (347-407), archbishop of Constantiople, was greatly concerned about winning the pagans and Jews, so he funded training schools for native Gothic evangelists. He sent many missionaries into pagan lands and wrote apologetics with the

aim of winning pagans. He wrote: “Go and make disciples of all nations’ was not said for the Apostles only, but for us also.” Some of his sermons were directed against the Jews remain controversial for their Christian anti-Semitism. He also taught that the final Antichrist would be under the direct inspiration of Satan and would appear immediately before the Second Advent of Christ, which he said would happen in 430!

**Patrick of Ireland** (389-461). Born in Britain he was captured by raiding Irish and enslaved in Ireland for six years when he was allowed to leave. The ship he sailed on was blown off course to Gaul (Franks) where he was captured and enslaved again. He refers to the Franks as being pagan (their conversion is dated in 496-508).

He managed to escape to Britain. He saw in a vision an angel carrying a letter entitled “The Voice of the Irish” which said, “We beseech thee, holy youth, to come and walk with us once more.” Patrick interpreted this as a divine call to return to Ireland, where he preached for over thirty years.

The Irish worshipped the sun, moon, wind, water, fire, and rocks and believed in good and evil spirits of all kinds inhabiting the trees and hills. Magic and sacrifice—including human sacrifice—were part of the religious rites performed by the druids or priests. They were classic animists.

Patrick first was able to secure permission from King Loigaire to grant religion toleration for Christians. The king’s brother gave him a piece of land for a church. Once the church was established Patrick moved to a new area where the gospel had never been preached. Tucker wrote “by 447, after fifteen years of preaching, much of Ireland had been evangelized” (Tucker, p. 39).

Terry reported that Patrick tried to win the local leaders and through them the local people. Though only slightly educated he taught a Celtic Christianity and brought Ireland into relationship with the Roman church. Patrick is credited with using the 3-leafed Shamrock [clover] to teach the doctrine of the trinity.



Patrick is credited with planting 200 churches in Ireland while baptizing 100,000. He establishes hundreds of monasteries begun by 445. The Celtic Church remains independent of the Roman Catholic Church until the British rule after 1200.

“His first step in evangelizing a new area was to win the political leader in hopes that his subjects would fall in behind him, and he was not averse to lavishing gifts on these local rulers. Unlike so many of the Roman Catholic missionaries, however, Patrick and the Celtic missionaries who followed him placed great emphasis on spiritual growth. Converts were given intensive training in the Scriptures and were encouraged to become involved in the ministry themselves. Women played a significant role in the Celtic churches, though as a single missionary Patrick was cautious in his relationship with them, “refusing the gifts of devout women lest any breath of scandal should arise” (Tucker, p. 40).

Since Patrick was not from the hierarchy and prominent Church Fathers, rather an ordinary Christian with a missionary vision, he became a symbol and proof that any Christian could live out the Great Commission to spread the gospel to people who have never heard. His example would inspire later missionaries to undertake great missions to evangelize abroad for centuries. Few countries can compare to the number of Irish missionaries that have been sent around the world from this island for the gospel.

*In summary:* Ulfilas spent 40 years evangelizing the Goths, who in turn became missionaries to other unreached Germanic peoples that were invading the Empire. Patrick planted the Irish Celtic church that later became a center for further evangelizing Britain and much of Western Europe. The Nestorian mission spread from Mesopotamia and Persia to India, Central Asia and China. Many peoples groups remained unreached. But by the year 500 the vast majority of the citizens of the Empire were calling themselves "Christian." Jesus now ruled the realm that sanctioned his execution.

### ***Missionary Methods***

Most notable of the methods used during this period and into the next thousand years was *Monasticism*. These were fortified homes for a large number of monks. The primary purpose was to renounce the world and live in isolation, but others wanted to use the monasteries as an extension base to preach out to the pagans. The ordination of monks was primarily to preach boldly to the pagans. With this methodology Christianity penetrated into the Arab world in the East and Brittany, Scotland, and Wales in the West.

The monastery served as a center for education, a retreat for serious meditation and a life of intense prayer and virtuous striving for a holy life.

The preeminent example is the Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia (d. 547), which became the dominant monastic code of the entire western half of Christendom. In Benedict's rule the monk's entire waking day, roughly seventeen hours, was divided among three activities: manual labor, the prayerful reading of Holy Scripture (*lectio divina*), and choral prayer, especially the praying of the Psalms. Even while the monk ate his sparse meals each day, he listened to one of his brothers reading Holy Scripture.

The monks and nuns pursued their goals – purity of heart and the gift of constant prayer – by ingesting massive daily dosages of Scripture. They gave themselves total to God not only by denying themselves and serving others, but by allowing themselves to become saturated in and absorbed by the power of God's Word.

Monks took seriously that principle of Jerome of Bethlehem (347-419) who said, "To be ignorant of the Scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ" (Reardon, 2003, p. 31).

Most notably Christianity spread through the *witness of lay people*: merchants, soldiers, captives and travelers. It was told that two such travelers, Aedesius and Frumentius, were captured by the Abyssinians and made stewards of the king's household. They became trusted and allowed to have preaching services. When allowed to return to their home, Frumentius reported to his bishop in Alexandria, Athanasius. Frumentius was soon consecrated as a Bishop to Abyssinia where he founded the church in Ethiopia.

There was no special method that gave the unusual growth during this period from AD 300-500. Most of it was almost inevitable by becoming the state religion, but superficial conversions were soon apparent. The frequent and free use of itinerate preaching and teaching brought the majority of the faithful into the churches.

Much remains to this day of the writings of the apologists (largely since the cessation of persecution in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century), which now was given official sanction and wide distribution. The assurances of forgiveness and divine approval in a world of animistic pagan fears brought a great sense of confidence where there had been none.

By 500 historians give estimates to the size of the Christian church to be between three and eight million, in fact, the majority of the population of the Roman empire called

themselves Christians and missionary envoys were spreading Christianity in various directions outside the empire. It was beginning.

### **Doctrinal Controversy and Development in latter Early Church Period**

Major doctrinal issues slowly but surely were resolved through a number of synods and ecumenical councils. The primary issues of Christology (deity, human and divine in one body) were analyzed from every aspect and final agreement was made by the seventh century (Third Ecumenical Council, 681). The issue of the deity of the Spirit was officially finalized in the Council of Chalcedon, 451.

Other issues arose, (then the **Pelagian**<sup>5</sup> issue of salvation, icons/statues issue and the authority of the bishop of Rome) but a salvation by faith in the Church, penance and good works became the bedrock of the Catholic Church and salvation was dispensed only through the sacraments of the Christian church. This would soon be more clearly defined specifically as the Roman church doctrine with the ascendancy of the bishop of Rome to the supreme authority.

The two major doctrinal debates that would affect the church for centuries to come were the official positions taken on the means of salvation and the supremacy of the bishop of Rome. These two issues would then spin off a number of logically deduced doctrines that has led the Catholic Church further from biblical truths.

### **Semi-Pelagianism**

While the Eastern Church was focused on the issue of Christ's deity, the main theological issue that arose in the Western church concerned the nature of man and salvation. The two main protagonists were Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo in N. Africa, and Pelagius (354-420), a British monk who came to Carthage in N. Africa. The two leaders clashed with their views which rose to a major issue.

Pelagius taught that Adam's sin only affected Adam and all mankind was born as Adam, innocent until choosing to sin, thus there was no original sin contaminating all men. Sins of individuals were due to following Adam's bad example and society of the individual. God's grace enlightens man's reason enabling him to understand and do the will of God, but humans can chose to do God's will without the aid of God's grace. Divine grace only assists man who chooses and acts in complete independence. Physical death has nothing to do with sin but a natural limitation of the human organism. This was a fairly common view within Catholicism of his day.



**Augustine of Hippo**

On the contrary, Augustine held to the unity of mankind—they had all sinned in Adam, thus men sin because they are sinners and corrupted by sin's effect, thus are unable to good works to achieve salvation. He viewed faith to believe as a gift from God and that God determines or elects some to be saved. The non-elect simply never receive

<sup>5</sup> Pelagius (354-440) taught that original sin did not taint man's human nature; thus the free will of man could choose good or evil without Divine aid. Adam's sin was merely a bad example, while Jesus' life set a "good example"

the grace to believe. He also spoke of the divine gift of perseverance in the faith, making salvation a work of God from the beginning to the end. His joining of justification and sanctification would bring a doctrinal problem into the church.

Synods, a general council of North Africa, and finally the ecumenical council at Ephesus in 431 all condemned Pelagius.

Augustine's theology likewise became a controversy. He emphasized the inner Christian life and minimized the external ceremonies. He denied the Eucharist had any sin-atonement power apart from the faith of the Christian. He opposed the predominant sacramental method of achieving salvation. His depreciation of the value of baptism and his confusion between justification and sacramental method of achieving salvation resulted in Augustine's decrease in influence. Pelagianism eventually was condemned and a sort of semi-Pelagianism won out. This was a system where grace and human works were to join in achieving salvation only within the authority and sanction of the Roman Catholic Church and its sacramental system.

The first six ecumenical councils met from 325 to 681 to resolve the major theological controversies, and this was also the period when the hierarchy of the church was developing along with its internal infrastructure.

### **Rise of the Roman Bishop over the Catholic Church**

When Christianity became a tolerated and recognized religion (AD 325) the priesthood of the clergy, apostolic succession, the ruling regional bishop and the supremacy of the Roman bishop first over all other bishops were already established. After a century of debate in 452 Pope Leo I of Rome declared the bishop at Rome to be over the bishop of Constantinople for four main reasons: (1) she claimed Petrine foundation. She twisted history to say Peter founded the church at Rome in A.D. 42, although it has a number of biblical and historical contradictions. The teaching of apostolic succession back to the apostles (i.e. Antioch could trace back to Paul) gave Peter the advantage since he was the leader of the apostles and the supposed "rock" on which the church would be built. (2) The bishop of Rome was superior in the West (the whole of Europe), while Constantinople was superior in the East (much smaller). In the seventh century when the Muslims conquered the entire East except Constantinople, Rome was left much more powerful. (3) After the move of the capital from Rome to Constantinople (330), the political power in the West (Rome) gradually declined. During the following centuries powerful tribal groups invaded the West creating chaos. Often the only major institution in Rome was the church, which was forced to take on civil functions (mayor of Rome, political negotiator, etc.). (4) The Church in the West (Rome) was not as divided by doctrinal issues as was the church in the East. When controversies arose, Rome was the most orthodox (Catholic), which gave her a stronger position to extend her supremacy.

#### ***Bishop Leo I, 440—461***

During the Vandal conquests in N. Africa he secured recognition of the authority of the Roman



church in negotiations. He imposed his authority in Gaul, Illyricum (Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia) and Spain. He negotiated with Attila the Hun in 452 to save Rome and calmed the mass murdering of a population by the Vandals in 455. His prestige was such he obtained a declaration from emperor Valentinian III (419-455) that all the bishops of Gaul (France) and the Western provinces were to be subservient to the bishop of Rome and governors were to compel bishops to go to Rome when summoned. His statement on the two natures of Christ became the phraseology of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 which has been an accepted orthodox Christology ever since.

### ***Bishop Gelasius, 492—496***

Gelasius approached the authority issue by claiming moral superintendence over political rulers. He recognized there are two spheres of rule, spiritual and temporal, he claimed that the church must **give account to God for the deeds of kings, and thus the king must submit to the church in spiritual matters.** This would give the Pope great power over secular leaders in the medieval period. He was the first to receive the title “Vicar of Christ” by the Roman synod of 495. This meant he was the representative or substitute for Christ on earth.

### ***Conversion of Clovis, 496***

When Clovis who was a prince among the Franks converted to orthodox Roman Catholicism his whole standing army was baptized as well. All the other tribal princes were Arian, which gave him the excuse to attack and defeat the Arian Goths. He would eventually conquer about half of modern France and lay the foundation for the **Charlemagne empire.** Thus orthodox Catholic Christianity would dominate in the West. Frankish kings would later defend and protect the Pope and facilitate the institutional church as it became known. This would set up a chain of events that would mold the entire culture of Europe and much of the world. All of Western Europe was organized into dioceses and parishes ruled over by the pope and the princes of the church. The entire population was born into the Roman Catholic church, baptized into the church as infants, married by the church, lived under the supervision and sacraments of the church and was buried by the church. For a thousand years Western Europe never knew anything else.



### ***Gregory I, the Great (540-604)***

Born to a wealthy family and experienced in the civil administration of Rome, Gregory gave up his future to become a monk in a monastery in order to glorify God, and spent his inherited fortune on seven monasteries. Pope Pelagius II sent him to Constantinople to



represent the Roman bishop before the emperor. In 590 he was elected bishop of Rome.

With little imperial power in Italy, Gregory had to raise an army to fight the Lombards, appoint commanders, conduct a war effort, care for refugees and conclude a peace accord with the Lombards in 592-593. This was not all for the sake of Italy since Roman Catholic Church owned vast estates throughout the country from which she collected taxes and other benefits. Following the war he organized the relief effort for the poor and elsewhere. He became the virtual ruler of Italy and his administration ability established the Papal States. Vos declares him to be one of the most important popes in Roman Catholic history.

His theology molds the church to this day. He put tradition on an equal basis with Scripture in determining dogma. Though he accepted the Augustinian view of original sin, he held that baptism washes it away and implants faith in the individual to do the works of God. All sins committed after baptism must be paid for by penance. He expanded the concept of purgatory, converted the Eucharist from a sacrament into a perpetual sacrifice for redemption, having value for the living and the dead, that is, masses could be said for the dead to minimize their stay in purgatory. He officially approved the prayers to saints and martyrs and the use of relics and amulets to reduce temporal punishments for sins. Gregory sent forty monks to England in 596 in a missionary effort to convert the Christians and pagans to Roman Christianity. This group was led by **Augustine** (not the Augustine of 160 earlier from N. Africa). They were very successful in the are of Canterbury.

### **Conflict between Celtic (Irish) and Roman Christianity (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century)**

**Patrick of Ireland** had been trained in Britain and seems to have been biblical and evangelical in his preaching. The churches he founded were independent of Rome. As bishop of Ireland he was instrumental in the conversion of thousands and the ordination and training of clergy to serve them. **Finnian of Clonard** (about 30 mi. NW of Dublin) built a model monastery that was duplicated all over Ireland. As they rose in number and prestige the bishop lost administrative function and the Irish church had become a church of monks. Though they valued missionary activity Vos suspects that it may have been a form of “self-imposed penitential exile” as the main motivation for going to pagan lands.



**Patrick of Ireland**

**Key Historical events that mark the first era of the Church**

- 115 Ignatius of Antioch coins the term “catholic” (universal) description of the church.
- 177 Irenaeus introduced oral tradition into the Church in contradiction to Holy Scripture.
- 198 Victor of Rome angrers all of Christendom by excommunicating the bishop of Ephesus for celebrating Easter on a different day than he did.
- 255 Stephen of Rome invokes Matthew 16:18 to claim supremacy over other bishops.
- 270 Aurelian gives bishop of Rome power to appoint other bishops in Roman Empire.
- 320 Constantine converts the Roman Empire to Christianity.
- 325 Constantine’s Lateran Palace is given to the Roman bishop.
- 406 Roman legions abandon Britain to Celtic a warlord, which results in chaos. By 432 Roman Britain collapses, followed by the Algllo-Saxon invasions from N. Europe begin.
- 408 Western Roman emperor Honorius executes the first non-Christians in Gaul for failing to convert.
- 409 Arian Visigoths overran the Iberian Peninsula.
- 410 The alphabet and Bible translation completed in Armenian and also in Georgian by Mashtotz, who later became the patriarch of Armenia.
- 410 The number of bishops across N. Africa, including Egypt, numbers 1,200 bishops and Honoratus trains a succession of notable missionary bishops at Lerins Abbey in Gaul [France], who are sent to numerous countries to being the churches. Tradition says that Patrick of Ireland studied here.
- 410 Yemeni merchant Hayan meets a group of Nestorians near the Euphrates river and is converted to Christ. He then returns to Yemen to evangelize the Arabs.
- 416 The Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II excludes non-Christians from all public functions; In 418, the emperor commanded all non-Christian books and writings to be burnt.
- 417 Pope Zosimus declares infallibility of the Roman See.
- 431 Council of Ephesus (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ecumenical Council) met to condemn Nestorius (390-451), patriarch of Constantinople as a heretic, primarily for refusing to call Mary the “mother of God,” preferring to use the term “mother of Christ,” referring to His humanity. Ephesus was chosen because a special veneration of Mary was already popular and Nestorius’ position would not find sympathy. He was condemned for teaching that Christ had two natures (divine and human), instead of one, a charge that he denied. However, the veneration of Mary was the real issue. The Nestorian or Assyrian {also Chaldean} Church of the East (primarily in the Persian Empire) churches split off from the Byzantine churches and spread the gospel across Asia to China by 635, later Mongolia and Korea.
- 434 Attila the Hun’s 19-year reign of terror, known as the “Scourge of God,” destroys cities and towns and almost destroys the Western empire. He is finally defeated in Gaul and dies in 453.
- 445 Emperor Valentian decrees all Western bishops must submit to the bishop of Rome as “lord and master” or face secular persecution.

- 449 The Monophysites <sup>6</sup>were powerful in the Eastern Church gaining the support of the Emperor, where this position is declared to be orthodox doctrine. This became the position of the Coptic (Egyptian) church, the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) church, the Jacobite (Syrian) church the Armenian church and the Syro-Malankar (Indian) church.
- 450 The Anglo-Saxon invaders, who wipe out the Celts and Celtic church, destroying Christianity and Roman civilization on the islands for the next 30 years, occupy 450 England.
- 451 Council of Chalcedon (4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council) met to define the meaning of faith against Apollinarianism, <sup>7</sup>Nestorianism and Eutychianism. <sup>8</sup>
- 460 After the Council of Chalcedon every major political power center in Europe has become Arian with numerous violent Arian reaction throughout the Roman Empire.
- 476 Sacking of Rome (Western Empire) by Barbarians under Odoacer (433-493), ends the Roman Empire in the west. The Eastern Empire remains intact). This is largely due to the demographic pressure of overpopulation. Odoacer becomes the king of Italy.
- 480 The unity of Christendom is broken into four parts: (1) the Church of the West (Rome and Byzantium, allegiance to a Chalcedon faith); (2) Church of the East (Persia, allegiance to a Nestorian faith); (3) and the Church of Africa (Egypt and Ethiopia, allegiance to a Monophysite faith); (4) Churches of the barbarian North (North and Western Europe, allegiance to an Arian faith).
- 486 The Assyrian or Persian church declares itself as Nestorian and separates from the Western church and the rest of Christendom. Likewise the Armenian Church adopts Monophysitism and secedes from the Byzantium and Roman Church.
- 490 Christianity wins at least 80% of the Roman Empire to Christianity.
- 496 King of the Franks, Clovis (466-511) converts to Roman Catholicism (rather than Arianism, which was common among Germanic peoples at the time, Visigoths and Vandals) and is baptized with 3,000 warriors at Rheims. He had married a Christian Burgundian princess Clotilde (493), who undoubtedly taught him the Trinitarian Catholic faith. His dynasty would rule the Franks for two centuries.
- 499 The task of translating Jesus' message into most all of the Greek and Latin cultures is virtually completed after 16 generations.
- 500 Greek begins to replace Latin as the official language in the Eastern Empire and church.

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<sup>6</sup> Monophysitism holds that Christ had only one nature (divine) as opposed to the Chalcedonian position that Christ has two natures, one divine and one human.

<sup>7</sup> Apollinarianism holds that Christ has a human body and human "living principle," but the divine Logos had taken the place of the *nous*, or "thinking principle," similar but not identical to what might be called a "mind."

<sup>8</sup> Eutychianism holds that the human and divine natures of Christ were fused into one new single (mono) nature.

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**Personal Applications:**

1. What if we lived in a high risk environment, how bold would be your witness for Christ? A pretty good indication would be your faithfulness to witness now. Do you feel uncomfortable that others call you “Christian,” “spiritual,” or some other religious term, in a derogatory manner? Or do they?
2. If you had to explain or defend your Christian belief before an antagonistic audience, how effective would you be today? What are you going to do about it?