

II. Growth of the Church – Secular Power versus Spiritual Power

1. Roman Persecutions of Early Christians:

- Augustus (Christmas story (27 BC – 14 AD)
 - Tiberius (Crucifixion) 14 – 37
 - Caligula 37 – 41
 - Claudius 41 – 54
 - Nero 54 – 68
 - 3 between 68 – 69
 - Vespasian 69 – 79 (Jerusalem destroyed)
 - Real & traumatic, but *not as massive* as Hollywood movies portray; not all Christians were crucified, burned, or fed to the lions!
 - mostly *local, sporadic, small-scale*: targeted individuals, esp. leaders; “The blood of the *martyrs* is seed for the Church”
 - “persecution” was not always execution; could be harassment, flogging, social ostracism, forced exile, etc.
 - *worst first-century persecution* under **Emperor Nero (64 AD)**:
 - Nero burns Rome, blames the Christians; has some burned or crucified, possibly including apostles Peter & Paul
 - Yet this episode was fairly short, limited mostly to the city of Rome, hardly affected Christians elsewhere in the empire
 - *massive empire-wide persecutions* only in **two short periods** in the mid- to late third century
 - **Emperor Decius (ca. 250)** – Christians required to get a “*libellus*,” certifying they had offered sacrifice to the Emperor, reason Decius wanted emperor cult was to stave the civil war, barbarian threats, plague, inflation, bad harvests and recession that threatened the empire. The Emperor Gallienus passed a law (216) tolerating Christianity and this lasted until Diocletian.
 - **Emperor Diocletian (ca. 300)** – targeted Church leaders, buildings, books; many arrests & executions in the West, one of his co-rulers, Constantius made sure it was very mild. His son, Constantine, became sole ruler of the West in 312.
7. **Why did the Church survive and flourish?** Basically, the life style of the Christians attracted those who had no status in Roman society such as the poor, slaves, and even women. “See how these Christians love one another.” Roman philosophy preached ethical conduct but didn’t practice it. Intellectuals began to convert, including senators.
8. **Emperor CONSTANTINE (306 – 337):**
- *Battle of Milvian Bridge (312)*: “*in hoc signo vinces*”; takes over as sole emperor in West (later also in East)
 - **Constantine’s Conversion (312)**: considers himself Christian, although he’s not baptized until just before his death; mother was St. Helena
 - *Edict of Milan (313)*: toleration of all religions, incl. Christianity, ends persecutions (but Xnty not the “state religion” until 380 by Theodosius); all pagan religions outlawed in 392
9. **Imperial Support of Christianity:**
- Production of *Bibles* & construction of *basilicas* (large church buildings), esp. in Rome, Jerusalem & Constantinople
 - *Roman structures* adopted by Church: professional “clergy” (clerical dress & titles); legal “courts”; administrative “dioceses”
 - *Number of Xns* grows rapidly: advantageous to join the Emperor’s new religion! Xn instruction for new “catechumens”
 - Legal restrictions on the way pagans could worship and forbade certain practices like use of magic and studying internal organs of animals or flight of birds. C’s son forbade animal sacrifices and closed most temples
 - Council of Nicaea (325): assembles bishops world-wide to settle theological disputes (esp. on Jesus’ divinity) – Arian controversy

- 325 – Sunday declared a holiday and day of rest; world began to move according to Christian calendar (Julian calendar versus Gregorian calendar of 1582)
 - Practices associated with paganism were outlawed such as killing unwanted babies, child abuse, gladiatorial fights; humanized treatment of slaves and prisoners; divorce was tightly regulated and a network of charitable institutions established
 - *Main Christian Centers: Jerusalem* (Israel), *Antioch* (Syria), *Alexandria* (Egypt), *Rome* (capital), *Constantinople* (new capital)
 - **380: Emperor Theodosius I declares Christianity the one & only official religion of the entire Roman Empire**
 - Some minuses: Constantine saw church as another department of the State; he was *pontifex maximus*, so head of Church; tried to exercise authority that belonged to bishops; interfered in internal affairs: successors followed same policy and therefore friction developed between Church and State. Temporary end in 467, but lasted longer in East (1453). This is known as **Caesaropapism**.
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2. The Early Church Defines Orthodox Christianity (AD 313-451)

- **Christological and Trinitarian Controversies:** Emphasis on the unity of God brought up Christological issues – some regarded Christ as merely a man, but born of the BVM and HS with *dynamis* operative. This outlook abandoned the divinity of Christ. Another proposed that God revealed himself in different ways, now as Father, now as Son. This could then bring about the conclusion that the father had suffered on the cross - Modalist/Patrippassians. Another threat from within was *Gnosticism*. From the Greek word for knowledge, this movement was influenced by teachings foreign to those of Jesus. From Greek philosophy, popular religion, magic and astrology, mixed with Judaism and the oriental cults, the ideas embraced distorted the faith. Denial that Jesus was human, denial of Virgin Birth, denial of Crucifixion, denial that God created the universe, denial of the value of the Old Testament, denial of baptism and Eucharist were all part of these teachings. There was no organized authority for the teachings but rather a claim that they came from private revelations by the Spirit or from secret teachings of Jesus. Church leaders refuted the teachings through 3 ways: New Testament, rule of faith, and apostolic succession.
- 1) Writings emerged to help believers understand their faith; some were genuinely teachings of Jesus as proclaimed by the apostles, some were not. To distinguish, leaders made a list of acceptable works, and by the end of the second century, the assembling of the NT was under way, although the canon was not set until the end of the 4th century. 2) Like the creed, the statement of what the Church believed was helpful in the struggle against Gnosticism. 3) By early 2nd century, bishops as leaders were established throughout the whole Church. These leaders could trace their authority back to the apostles. This guaranteed that the Church was passing on the true teachings of Jesus.
- **Early Christian Heresies:**
 - Gk. haeresis – “sect”; groups of Christians whose beliefs were eventually rejected by the majority of other Christians
 - Main heresies of the 2nd & 3rd Centuries: Adoptionists, Gnostics, Docetists
 - Main heresies of the 4th & 5th Centuries, addressed by the first four Ecumenical Councils:
 - Arians – Jesus is divine, but somehow “less” than the Father; slogan: “There was a time when he was not.”
 - Nestorians – Mary shouldn’t be called “Mother of God,” since she’s mother only of the human side of Jesus
 - Monophysites – Jesus really has only one nature, a divine nature, which supplanted his human nature
- **First Four Ecumenical Councils:**
 - **325: Nicaea** – influenced by Athanasius of Alexandria; opposed Arians; adopted the “Nicene Creed”
 - **381: Constantinople** – again opposed Arians; expanded the Creed, esp. more about the Holy Spirit – this is where trouble begins to brew between East and West

- **431: Ephesus** – opposed the Nestorians, *Theotokos* title for BVM
- **451: Chalcedon** – opposed the Monophysites – “in Leo, Peter has spoken.”
- **Trinitarian Faith and Creeds:**
 - Expressed in the *Nicene & Constantinopolitan Creeds*, still accepted and recited in most Christian Churches today.
 - **Trinity** = God is one divine “*nature*” but three divine “*persons*” (Father, Son, Spirit)
 - **Jesus** is “of the same nature” (homo-ousios) as the Father, not just “of similar nature” (homoiousios) as the Father (as Arians claimed) – what we call “consubstantial”
 - **Mary** is rightly called the “Mother of God” (Gk. *theotokos*; not just mother of the human part of Jesus, as Nestorians claimed)
 - **Jesus** is both *fully human* and *fully divine* (not half/half, nor having only a divine nature, as Monophysites claimed)

3. The Fall of Rome and the Rise of the Western Church (AD 370’s – 604)

- **Division of Roman Empire into Eastern & Western Halves** (see Gilles, p. 9 – map, and pp. 210-213 – timeline):
 - 286: empire *divided* by Emperor Diocletian into E & W halves, each with its own “Augustus” (#1) and “Caesar” (#2)
 - 324: empire *reunited* after **Constantine** defeats Licinius to become the sole ruler
 - 337 : empire *divided* again after Constantine’s death among several of his sons
 - 350: empire *reunited* under **Constantian II**, followed by Julian the Apostate, etc.
 - 364: empire *divided* again: West: Valentinian I & II: East: Valens & Theodosius I
 - 392: empire *reunited* under **Theodosius I**, but only for three years!
 - 395: empire *divided* yet again: *West*: Emperor Honorius, then Valentinian III; *East*: Theodosian Dynasty remains strong
- **The Fall of the Western Roman Empire (5th Century):**
 - Empire faced challenge along the two rivers, Rhine and Danube, which had formed the northern boundary. As legions could no longer be stationed there more tribes crossed these borders and took over sections of the empire, both in Europe and North Africa.
 - Gaul had been conquered by the *Franks*; Spain by the *Visigoths*; *Ostrogoths* were in Italy; In England, *Anglo-Saxons* from Holland and Denmark overtook the Brits, and *Vandals* conquered North Africa.
 - 410: Visigoths led by Alaric sacked Rome; various “*barbarian*” or “Germanic” tribes invade Western empire from many sides (word comes from “beard”)
 - 452: **Pope Leo the Great** saves Rome from attack by Attila the Hun; Western Roman “emperors” mostly puppets by now
 - **476**: last Western Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, deposed by Germanic chief Odoacer, who becomes “King of Italy”
 - 489-493: Ostrogoths under Theoderic the Great conquer Italy: other parts of West controlled by Visigoths, Lombards, Franks, etc.
- **Church/State Relationships in the East and West:**
 - **East**: close church-state cooperation overall, ever since Emperor Constantine built Constantinople as new imperial capital
 - emperors call ecumenical councils, approve appointment of bishops, strongly influence internal church issues
 - four main Christian Patriarchates in East: *Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople*
 - **West**: as the empire/emperors get weaker, the church/bishops provide stability and unity to society (esp. **Pope Leo**, 440-461)
 - After the fall of Rome, the Pope (*Bishop of Rome, Patriarch of the West*) becomes overarching leader of Western culture; assumed political leadership in vacuum;

- Church remains “Roman” (foundational culture), but also becomes more “Catholic” (universal, adapts to new barbarian cultures) – so what external forces shaped the Church during the 1st three centuries? 1) persecutions 2) invasions 3) conversions of pagans
 - Confuse unity with conformity? Same question as faced before – does one have to be Jewish to be Christian? Now becomes “Does one have to be Roman to be Christian?”
 - Barbarians brought ancestor worship which became cult of the saints, relics, etc.
 - Ambrose: elected 374 to Milan; struggled with church versus state
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4. Concluding the Age of the Church Fathers (AD 95 - 636)

- **“Church Fathers”** – the most influential **theologians & writers** of the Church from about the 2nd to 7th centuries:
 - a.k.a. **“Patristics”** < pater = “father” (both Greek & Latin), mostly bishops; their writings fill hundreds of thick volumes.
 - *Four great Eastern/Greek Church Fathers*: Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom.
 - *Four great Western/Latin Church Fathers*: Ambrose of Milan, **Augustine of Hippo**, Jerome of Jerusalem, Gregory the Great.
 - Some *women* also very important (Augustine’s mother **Monica**, Benedict’s sister **Scholastica**), but unfortunately wrote little or nothing.
- **Theological Influence of Augustine** (born 354; bishop of Hippo, North Africa, 395-430 – for 35 years!) *vs. Donatists*, on the validity of sacraments administered by sinful ministers, esp. those who had lapsed under persecution (see pp. 26 & 31). *Ex opera operandi*...can’t judge the spiritual condition of the priest Augustine argued that the sacraments were available because it was God’s will and did not depend on the state of the soul of the minister...this was objective versus subjective standards, because if the minister had valid ordination and was in good standing, he was objectively able to confer the sacraments. In reaction against the Donatists, Augustine developed a distinction between the “regularity” and “validity” of the sacraments. Regular sacraments are performed by clergy of the Catholic (that is, the legitimate) church while sacraments performed by schismatics are considered irregular. Nevertheless, the validity of the sacraments do not depend upon the holiness of the priests who perform them; therefore, irregular sacraments are still accepted as valid provided they are done in the name of Christ and in the manner prescribed by the church. On this point Augustine departs from the earlier teaching of Cyprian, who taught that converts from schismatic movements must be re-baptised
- *vs. Pelagians*, on the priority of God’s grace over free will; on human nature created good, but corrupted by sin (see pp. 31-31, 38). Pelagius taught that first impulse toward salvation came from individual himself; had a natural ability to move toward salvation with God’s grace. He also taught that baptism was just a blessing and not necessary for salvation. Augustine’s response brought forth predestination. *If it is up to God who gets saved and who doesn’t, then are we free to choose salvation or reject it? Are we free to do good or to do evil?* Augustine said we have free will, but it can only function in the direction of good in a soul that has been graced toward salvation. This was not the same as Calvin’s later teaching that God wants some people to be damned and some to be saved. God gives all people the capacity to be saved, but it is only God who can enable people to develop this capacity through grace, a free gift.
- Augustine taught that Original Sin was transmitted by concupiscence (roughly, lust), weakening the will and making humanity a *massa damnata* (mass of perdition, condemned crowd). In the struggle against Pelagianism, Augustine’s teaching was confirmed by many councils, especially the Second Council of Orange. The identification of concupiscence and Original Sin, however, was challenged by Anselm and condemned in 1567 by Pope Pius V.
- Augustine’s formulation of the doctrine of original sin has substantially influenced both Catholic and Reformed (that is, Calvinist) theology. His understanding of sin and grace was developed against that of

Pelagius. Expositions on the topics are found in his works *On Original Sin*, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, *On the Gift of Perseverance* and *On Nature and Grace*.

- Original sin, according to Augustine, consists of the guilt of Adam which all human beings inherit. As sinners, human beings are utterly depraved in nature, lack the freedom to do good, and cannot respond to the will of God without divine grace. Grace is irresistible, results in conversion, and leads to perseverance. Augustine's idea of predestination rests on the assertion that God has foreordained, from eternity, those who will be saved. The number of the elect is fixed. God has chosen the elect certainly and gratuitously, without any previous merit (*ante merita*) on their part. Against the Pelagians Augustine strongly stressed the importance of infant baptism. He believed that no one would be saved unless he or she had received baptism in order to be cleansed from original sin. He also maintained that unbaptized children would go hell. It was not until the 12th century that Pope Innocent III accepted the doctrine of limbo as promulgated by Peter Abelard. It was the place where the unbaptized went and suffered no pain, but as the Church maintained, being still in a state of original sin, they did not deserve Paradise; therefore they did not know happiness either. The Church of England disavowed the state of original sin in the 16th century. Non-conformist religions such as the Unitarians and the Quakers never held to the concept.
- The Roman Catholic Church considers Augustine's teaching to be consistent with free will. He often said that any one can be saved if they wish. While God knows who will be saved and who won't, with no possibility that one destined to be lost will be saved, this knowledge represents God's perfect knowledge of how humans will freely choose their destinies.