

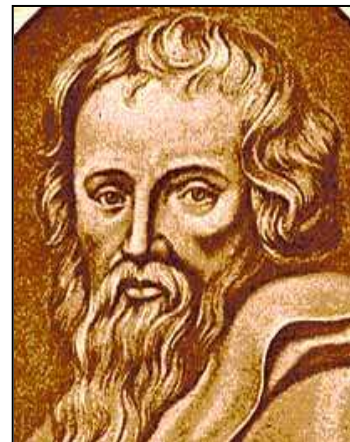
**Foreword**

George Santayana once famously said that those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it. The story of the church is glorious because God has always unfailingly led God's people through the peaks and valleys of human history. This history is also tragic because human weakness, sin, and the desire to dominate have obscured God's goodness and love. Since the advent of Jesus the Messiah to the present day, we live in an "in-between time" when the redemption of the world has begun, but is not yet complete. Church history bears out the witness of our Lord Jesus who said, "I am the same yesterday, today, and forever," but who also said, "Behold, I make all things new." The church always exists in that tension, and trusts God to lead the way. This class, Church History I, will cover the age of Jesus and the apostles up to the age of the Protestant Reformation. May the Spirit give us discernment to see the glorious power of God through the church's faithfulness and idolatries, triumphs as well as failures.

**The Age of Jesus and the Apostles (30-70 AD)**

Christianity began when a man named Jesus proclaimed the good news of God to an oppressed people in an obscure corner of the Mediterranean. This new faith called "the Way" spread from a handful of fishermen, tax collectors, and youthful troublemakers in Judea to every province of the Roman Empire and to the ends of the earth. Christians have always considered the age of Jesus and his apostles a kind of model for all subsequent ages. It gave to the church its faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ, and the hope of reconciliation with God through him. And the age demonstrated, in the life of Paul, that the gospel of grace recognizes no boundaries of nation, race, class, gender, or culture.

- 33AD** \*Jesus crucified (possibly 30 AD)
- 33** \*Pentecost: the birth of the church. Some 3,000 become Christians when the Holy Spirit descends upon them. They begin to spread the gospel across the Roman Empire (Acts 2:8).
- 35** Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr; believers scatter throughout Judea and Samaria; Paul converts to Christianity
- 41** Followers of Christ first called "Christians" at Antioch where the church was multicultural
- 48** \*Council of Jerusalem: the council affirms Paul's apostolic ministry and agrees with him that Gentile converts are not required to follow Jewish law.
- 64** Fire destroys Rome; Emperor Nero blames Christians, persecuting and killing thousands
- 67** Peter and Paul executed by Nero



*The Apostle Paul*

## The Early Church (70-312)

This was an age when the church struggled to consolidate its theological and ecclesiastical identity. The church fought constantly against heresies that threatened to undermine the teaching of the apostles. It was also a time when the Roman infrastructure of roads, aqueducts, safe sea-lanes, and a common language were used to spread Christianity throughout the empire. However, Christians had to worship in a very hostile environment, where a wave of imperial persecution could strike at any time. Christians served as an easy scapegoat for everything from fires to droughts to floods to earthquakes, so that the crowds delighted in seeing them torn by lions or executed in other creative ways. They were accused of godlessness, treason, cannibalism, and the occult. Christians acquired great respect because they were willing to die heroically as martyrs for their faith, witnesses to the world. As Tertullian observed, "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church."



- 70 \*Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Roman army; relations between rabbinic Judaism and Jesus movement strained
- 90 \*Council of Jamnia (Old Testament canon established)
- 96 Writing of the New Testament complete
- 135 Roman Empire crushes the Bar Kochba revolt; separation between synagogue and emerging church complete
- 172 Montanist heresy begins
- 250 Decius orders empire-wide persecution of Christians
- 303 \*Diocletian begins the "Great Persecution"
- 311 Donatist schism in North Africa over lapse during persecution

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### Diocletian Fiercely Persecutes Christians

Barbarians menaced the Roman Empire. Emperor Diocletian instituted a number of reforms aimed at saving the sprawling political entity. He reorganized the provinces and made the army more mobile while increasing its size. To battle inflation, he issued a new coinage, established a uniform system of taxation and implemented wage-price controls.

Influenced by his mother (a die-hard pagan), Galerius, one of the Empire's regional rulers, prodded the Emperor to persecute the Christians. With their strange customs, Christians were a threat to unity, he said; and their vast, well-knit organization was the largest non-governmental body ever seen. Christians could not be trusted since their loyalty was to King Jesus rather than to Caesar. Diocletian, who for eighteen years had never lifted a finger against the faith, was persuaded to follow this wicked advice.

The crackdown began on February 23, 303. Church leaders were dragged off and tortured to death. Christian books and scriptures were burnt. The rack, the scourge, slow fires, crucifixion and every other barbarity was employed against the leaders of the church. Many died deaths of great courage. Theodotus, for example, after many tortures said, "It is but just that Christians should suffer for Him who suffered for us all."

Timothy, a deacon in Mauritania, allowed his eyes to be put out with red-hot irons rather than give up the scriptures he had hidden. His wife of three weeks was then brought in and she attempted to persuade him to recant for love of her. He refused. Growing stouthearted, she joined him. After horrendous torture, both were crucified.

In the end, it was the church that won the showdown. All the powers of Rome could not crush its allegiance to Christ. Even Galerius eventually left off the persecution. In 311, when Constantine and Licinius were still rivals, Galerius joined them in issuing an agreement to the principle of religious liberty: "Liberty of worship shall not be denied to any, but ... the mind and will of every individual shall be free to manage divine affairs according to his own choice." Christians had outlasted the might of the empire. Their resistance to arbitrary power was instrumental in winning the right to follow their Christian faith.

## The Age of the Christian Empire (312-590)

The Imperial Age began in 312 when Constantine caught a vision of Christ before a critical battle. Before the fourth century closed, Christianity became the official religion of the sprawling Roman state. The church used to hide in catacombs. How will they worship now that they have become the “establishment”? Under Constantine’s tutelage, the church learned to serve the seats of power by formulating the faith for the masses; hence, the age of great councils. Those Christians who did not care to argue about orthodoxy and heresy in grand palaces headed for the wilderness in search of another way to grace. Revered hermits soon found themselves in the vanguard of a movement, monasticism.



Council of Nicea

- 312 Emperor Constantine the Great converts to Christianity
- 313 \*Edict of Milan (legalization of Christianity)
- 320 Arius claims that Jesus Christ is a created being and not God by his very nature. This position is influenced by Gnostic dualism.
- 325 \*Council of Nicea (first draft of Nicene Creed); Trinitarian debate; New Testament canon proposed
- 367 Athanasius’s Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter (NT canon confirmed)
- 381 Orthodoxy triumphs over Arianism at Council of Constantinople
- 391 Theodosius makes Christianity state religion of Roman Empire
- 395 Augustine begins to publish influential theological books
- 404 Jerome completes Latin translation of Bible, the *Vulgate*
- 410 Arian Visigoths sack Rome; beginning of decline of empire
- 431 Council of Ephesus condemns Nestorianism and Pelagianism
- 440 Leo the Great becomes pope; persuades Attila the Hun to spare a weakened Rome
- 451 Council of Chalcedon on nature of Christ (Christological debate)
- 476 Fall of western Roman Empire; marks beginning of Middle Ages

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### May 20, 325 • God or Man? • The Council of Nicea

Three hundred and twelve bishops were gathered. In the center of the room, on a throne, lay the four gospels. The emperor himself, dressed in a purple gown and with a silver diadem, opened the council. It was he who had called them together. "I rejoice to see you here, yet I should be more pleased to see unity and affection among you." The place was Nicea. It was on this day May 20, 325.

The next few days would be devoted primarily to one purpose: finding a way to describe exactly who Jesus was. Arius had preached that Christ was a creation of God, the first of all his creatures, to be sure, but a creation nonetheless. He was not of the substance or nature of God. "There was a time when the Son was not," he and his followers insisted. They even made up songs with catchy tunes to propagandize their ideas among the masses.

Bishop Alexander of Alexandria was horrified. Jesus, the Word, had co-existed eternally with God the Father he argued. If Christ were not God, then human beings could not be saved, for only the infinite and holy God could forgive sin. He deposed Arius, but Arius countered by gathering followers and continued to teach his pernicious doctrine. The factions rioted. The unity of the empire was shaken. Constantine was alarmed, and called the council.

As the council progressed, the bishop of Nicomedia defended Arius's views, attempting to prove logically that Jesus, the Son of God, was a created being. Opposition bishops snatched his speech from his hand and flung it in shreds to the floor. They had suffered for Christ, some of them greatly, in the persecutions of Diocletian. They were not about to stand by and hear their Lord blasphemed. Otherwise, to what purpose had they borne their gouged eyes, scourged backs, hamstringed legs and scorched hands?

The issues of Nicea boil down to this: If Christ is not God, how can he overcome the infinite gap between God and man? If a created being could do it, there were angels aplenty with the power. Indeed, why could not any good person himself bridge the gap? On the other hand, Jesus had to be truly man, in order to represent humanity.

At some point the council decided their best course was to write a creed that testified to what they believed. The creed of Nicea became a document of fundamental importance to the church. That so many of the bishops who approved it had suffered greatly for Christ only added to its significance. The council itself was a forerunner to many more. Those councils that came after also grappled with issues of Christ's humanity and deity. Was he one person or two? Was he God while in his mother's womb? Did he have just one will? Which books belong in the Bible? The seventh ecumenical church council was also held at Nicea.

## The Christian Middle Ages (590-1517)

Most Christians, however, saw the hand of God in the union between church and state during this medieval age. In the East the marriage lasted some thousand years under the protection of Orthodox emperors until invading Muslim Turks sacked Constantinople and destroyed the Byzantine Empire in 1453. In the West, barbarians swept into the eternal city of Rome itself in 410. In Augustine's *City of God*, Christians found a vision for a new age. Their reasons lie in the role of the pope, who filled the political vacuum of the fallen empire in the West, and proceeded to build the medieval church upon Rome's bygone glory. Eventually, the Church of Rome baptized the whole European continent and called it Christendom. The crusades and scholastic philosophy were witnesses to this papal sovereignty. But as the church gained the world, it lost its soul, so the early reformers preached. The Waldensees, Franciscans, and Albigenesees were the forerunners of the Protestant Reformation.

- 590** Gregory the Great elected Pope of Rome
- 622** Islam is founded at Mohammed's hegira
- 711** Muslim Moors invade Spain and Portugal, their first foothold in Europe
- 800** Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III
- 829** Sweden is evangelized by Anskar, "Apostle of the North"
- 845** Nestorian Christians are persecuted in China
- 962** Otto I, the Great, founds the Holy Roman Empire (until 1806) as Pope John XII
- 988** Christianization of Russia
- 1054** \*East-West Schism (split) complete
- 1096** \*First Crusade launched by Pope Urban II /Council of Clermont to repel the Turks
- 1129** Knights Templar recognized as an order of monastic soldiers to protect pilgrims
- 1150** Universities of Paris and Oxford founded; also College of Cardinals established
- 1174** Frenchman Peter Valdes starts Waldensians, precursor to Protestantism
- 1187** Muslim general Saladin defeats Crusaders in Galilee and captures Jerusalem
- 1202** Fourth Crusaders defy Pope Innocent III and sack Constantinople
- 1209** Francis of Assisi renounces wealth for Christ's sake; birth of Franciscan Order
- 1215** Magna Carta ensured feudal rights, trial by jury, and freedom of religion
- 1216** Dominican Order established, dedicated to spiritual reform
- 1231** Papal Inquisition established; first "inquisitors" appointed by Gregory IX
- 1255** Thomas Aquinas writes the Western theological masterpiece *Summa Theologiae*
- 1266** Kublai Khan asks for 100 Xn teachers; pope sends 7; Mongols convert to Islam
- 1302** Papal supremacy over secular rulers proclaimed by *Unam Sanctam*
- 1348** Bubonic Plague (Black Death) kills 1/3 of Europe, or 40 million people, until 1351
- 1378** Great Papal Schism: Urban VI in Rome and Clement VII in Avignon, until 1417
- 1450** Renaissance begins in Europe
- 1453** Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire fall to Islam by Ottoman Turks
- 1456** Gutenberg produces the first printed Bible in the Latin Vulgate
- 1479** The Spanish Inquisition established; finally suppressed in 1820
- 1506** \*Work begins on St. Peter's Cathedral; money raised by selling indulgences



*The Children's Crusade of 1212*