Church History

Early Church

(RVS Notes)

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1. Controversies

Early Church

To the Council of Chalcedon

*"*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7)

The church of Christ in every age, beset by change, but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.
Then let the servant church arise, a caring church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice and clothed with Christ's humility. (Wareham)

I. Church in Pagan Society

A. Roman Empire—Historical Milieu

§1-101. In general—The study of the Church in the early centuries of our era provides a wonderful opportunity for considering the Church amid an unbelieving culture. As we in the American church move ever more into a postmodern, post-Christian culture, our forebears offer valuable lessons.

We will start our story with Roman Empire since that was the scene of most of the Christian growth and movement in the early centuries. Rome's relations with Christians were troubled due to suspicions that Christians were not loyal—to the state, its rulers, and its gods. The Christian obligation of complete allegiance to Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:10-11) implied that Christians must necessarily have a tenuous and complicated relationship with the Roman state and with the realms around them that made overreaching claims for loyalty. As the early Christians moved outward from Jerusalem into pagan environments, their allegiance marked them as different. They did not take part fully in civic life. By distancing themselves from worldly influences, they were considered aloof and peculiar. The result was suspicion which eventually became persecution which gave rise to the martyrs and the apologists. Out of these persecutions arose a debate about the nature of the Church because some believers recanted. Is the Church a society of saints or sinners? In addition to internal discipline, there were doctrinal and organizational issues to work through. Finally, this early period was formative for the development of Christian worship patterns and community norms.

§1-102. Jewish context—Roman practices toward the religion and customs of conquered peoples were tolerant. Roman law recognized various religions as legitimate, and Judaism was one of those. Initially, the early Christians fell under the Jewish umbrella and therefore as a sect of a legitimate faith. However, Rome's tolerance was tried by the perceived obstinacy of the Jews, who insisted on worshiping only their God and who threatened rebellion at what the Romans regarded as insignificant challenges to their faith.

Two events caused a disassociation of Christianity with Judaism:

- Great fire of Rome in 64 where Nero accursed the Christians of starting the fire. This led to a cruel local persecution in which Peter and Paul may have lost their lives.
- Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66. That revolt accentuated the emerging divide between Jews and Christians. Jewish rebelliousness continued with revolts against Rome in 115 and 132-135 (the Bar Kochba revolt) which grew out of messianic fervor. Christians believed that the Messiah had already come, which marked them as clearly different.

***Diaspora Judaism*—**The period under consideration postdates the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70. The Jewish presence in Palestine was receding and would virtually vanish after the Bar Kochba revolt in 135. Nevertheless, there were sizeable Jewish communities in every major city of the Roman Empire. Many Jews, though scattered everywhere, had strong emotional connections with the land of their ancestors. They are described as the Diaspora Judaism. Diaspora Judaism reflected the two fundamental tenets of all Jews: ethical monotheism and eschatological hope. Ethical monotheism meant that there is only one God, and that this God requires proper worship and proper relationships between people. Eschatological hope was the messianic hope, the firm belief that the day would come when God would intervene to restore Israel and fulfill the promise of a kingdom of peace and justice.

***Avenue of Christian expansion*—**Diaspora Judaism was one of the main avenues through which Christianity expanded throughout the Empire. Diaspora Judaism also unwittingly provided the Church with one of its most useful tools of missionary expansion, the Greek translation of the Jewish Old Testament. This translation, originating in Alexandria, is called the Septuagint, or the version of the seventy. Its name derives from the ancient account that seventy Jewish scholars were tasked with translating the Scriptures. The Septuagint is the version of the Old Testament quoted by most New Testament authors.

***Hellenism*—**In addition, Diaspora Judaism had to come to grips with Hellenism. Many early believers followed their Jewish forebears in this endeavor. Particularly in Alexandria, there was a movement that sought to show the compatibility between the ancient Jewish faith and the best of Hellenistic culture. The high point of this tradition was the work of Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus who sought to show that the best of pagan philosophy agreed with the Hebrew Scriptures. He claimed that the Hebrew prophets preceded the Greek philosophers, and that the latter drew from the wisdom of the former. He used an allegorical interpretation of Scripture to harmonize Old Testament teaching with Greek philosophy. Early Christian writers like Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen would follow in his train.

§1-103. Greco-Roman context—Roman law and Hellenistic culture comprised the context in which the early Church took shape. Roman political unity allowed Christians to travel without excessive fear of local bandits or wars. Well-paved roads ran throughout the Empire and the seas were free of pirates and brigands. Trade flourished and travel was constant, circumstances which favored the spread of Christianity.

***Syncretism and emperor worship*—**However, other aspects of this context constituted threats to the faith. To achieve greater unity, imperial policy sought religious conformity through two routes: syncretism and emperor worship. To the Roman pantheon of gods were added the gods of other lands. Traditions and beliefs mingled to the point where their original forms were almost unrecognizable. Syncretism was the fashion of the age, and Jews and Christians were seen as unbending fanatics insisting on the sole worship of the one, true God. The second element, emperor worship, eventually became the reason for persecution of the faith. Emperor worship was seen as a means of unity and a test of loyalty. To refuse to burn a pinch of incense before the emperor's image was a disrespectful lack of gratitude and loyalty, or perhaps even treasonous.

***Platonism and Stoicism*—**To communicate their faith amid a dominant Hellenistic culture, Christians found the philosophical traditions of Platonism and Stoicism as particularly attractive and helpful. Socrates, Plato, and other philosophers had criticized the ancient gods and spoke of a supreme being, perfect and immutable. Furthermore, both Socrates and Plato believed in the immortality of the soul and affirmed that, beyond this world of fleeting things, was a world of abiding truth. Christians found this backdrop useful in communicating their faith to the culture at large.

Stoicism held to high moral standards. The early Stoics were materialists and determinists, believing that reality was material and convinced that the best they could do was to live by the laws that ruled the natural world. However, by the time Christianity appeared on the scene, Stoicism had developed religious overtones. Stoic philosophers spoke of the possibility of using their wisdom proactively in framing public policy.

All Stoics believed that the purpose of philosophy was to understand the laws of nature and to obey and adjust to them. They were to attune themselves to the universal law of reason and to live into the ideal of *apatheia*, life without passion. The desired virtues were moral insight, courage, self-control, and justice. The Stoics were critical of pagan religions because the gods justified the desires of their worshipers rather than calling them to virtue. Christian apologists took up the Stoic idea of natural law as a guide to wisdom. In response to prejudice, ridicule, and even martyrdom, the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* called believers to steadfastness.

§1-104. Rome through the early centuries—

***First century*—**Some describe this as the Golden Age of Rome. Augustus Caesar created the Principate and inaugurated the Pax Romana. He and his descendants, the Julio-Claudians (Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero), ruled from 31 B.C. until Nero's death in 68. Vespasian prevailed in the civil war that followed, and the Flavian dynasty (Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, 69-96) succeeded to power. Despite the intrigues that plagued imperial politics and succession, the Roman world enjoyed a large measure of peace and prosperity during these years. Local persecutions of Christians occurred in the reigns of Nero (54-68) and Domitian (81-96).

***Second century*—**The Senate selected Nerva (96-98) to succeed to the imperial purple after the assassination of Domitian. This began the era of the adoptive emperors (Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius, also known as the Antonnines, 96-180), so called because of their practice of adopting their successor and heir. This was a long and prosperous period for the Roman world. This series of good rulers was broken when Marcus Aurelius chose his own son, Commodus (180-192) as his successor, a completely worthless ruler. Commodus' cruel and unstable reign ended with his assassination and the sale of the throne to the highest bidder.

***Third century*—**Severan dynasty (193-235) restored order to Rome but the Principate, with its benevolent notions of a shared rule between the emperor and the Senate, was waning. The new emperor, Septimius Severus (193-211) was clearly a military dictator and depended on the army for his power, as would his successors. When the last of his successors, Alexander Severus, was assassinated (235), Rome entered a fifty-year period of chaos, presided over by a series of "barracks emperors". From 235 to 284, the Empire experienced a full storm crisis—economic collapse, depopulation, civil wars (there were twenty-seven emperors in less than fifty years), unstable borders, and the emergence of powerful rivals. Amid these trials, a terrible general persecution of Christians was launched by Decius (249-251) and continued by Valerian (253-260).

***Early fourth century*—**Diocletian (284-305) stabilized the frontiers and put down numerous revolts. He initiated the tetrarchy—dividing the Empire into four parts for security purposes, each with its own Caesar. At the end of his reign, he launched the most violent and extensive of all the Roman persecutions of Christians. After his retirement in 305, civil war brought Constantine (306-337) to the throne, first in the West (312) and then over the entire Empire (324). Constantine converted to Christianity, around 312. He promptly promulgated the Edict of Milan in 313, which granted official toleration to the Christian faith and practice.

§1-105. Roman chronology in the early centuries

Emperors	**Bishops of Rome**	**Authors/documents**	**Events**
Augustus (27 BC-14 AD)		(Philo)	Jesus
Tiberius (14-37)			Jesus
Caligula (37-41)			
Claudius (54-68)			
4 emperors (68-69)			Civil war
Vespasian (69-79)			
Titus (79-81)			
Domitian (81-96)			
Nerva (96-98)			
Trajan (98-117)	Evaristus Alexander Sixtus	Ignatius	Persecution; Trajan-Pliny correspondence-Rome's early policy (111-112)

Hadrian (117-138)	Telesphorus Hyginius	Quadratus Aristides Papias (Epictetus) Didache (?) Hebrews-Gospel Pseudo-Barnabas	Persecution Gnosticism grows Marcion in Rome
Antoninus Pius (138-161)	Pius Ancietus	Basilides Hermas (150) Martyrdom of Polycarp Valentinus Peter-Gospel Muratorian fragment (160) Ascension of Isaiah (?) Odes of Solomon (?)	Montanism
Marcus Aurelius (161-180); Lucius Varus (161-169)	Justin (165) Soter Eleuterus (189)	Hegesippus (154-166) Lucian of Samosata Tatian 2 Enoch (?) Athenagorus	Martyrs in Gaul (177)
Commodus (180-192)	Theophilus of Antioch Victor (189-199)	Irenaeus (180) Pantenus Melito of Sardis (189)	Scillitan martyrs Date of Easter debate
193- several emperors			Civil war
Septimius Severus (193-211)	Zephyrinus (199-217)		Tertullian (195-220) Minucius Felix Perpetua & Felicitas Clement of Alexandria (200-215) Syncretistic policy--Roman state's policy hardens Persecution Tertullian as Montanist (207)
Caracalla (211-217)		Origen (215-253)	
Macrinus (217-218) Elagabalus (218-222)	Calixtus (217-222)	(Plotinus)	
Alexander Severus (222-235)	Urban (222-230) *Hippolytus (222-235)* Pontian (230-235)		Two bishops in Rome Origen in Palestine
Maximi (235-238	Anterus (235-236)		Civil war; Foreign invasions

	Fabian (236-250)		
238-multiple emperors	Sextus Julius Africanus		Civil war; Foreign invasions
Gordian III (238-244)	Methodius	Thomas-Gospel Manicheism founded	Civil war; Foreign invasions
Philip the Arabian (244-249	Heraclas		Civil war; Foreign invasions
Decius (249-251)		Cyprian	Intense persecution Civil war; Foreign invasions
Hostilian (251)			Civil war; Foreign invasions
Gallus (251-253)	Cornelius (251-253) *Novatian (251-258)*		Civil war; Foreign invasions
Aemilian (253)	Lucius (253-254)	Didascalia (?)	Civil war; Foreign invasions
Valerian (253-259)	Stephen (254-257) Sixtus II (257-258)		Persecution Civil war; Foreign invasions
Gallienus (259-268)	Dionysius (260-268) Felix (269-274)	Dionysius of Alexandria Lucian of Antioch Gregory the Wonderworker	Civil war; Foreign invasions Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch
Claudius II (268-270) Quintillus (270)		Gnostic papyri	Civil war; Foreign invasions
Aurelian (270-275)		Bartholomew-Gospel	Civil war; Foreign invasions
Tacitus (275-276)	Eutychian (275-283)		Civil war; Foreign invasions
Phobus (276-282)			Civil war; Foreign invasions
Carus (early 280s) Numerian (early 280s) Carinus (early 280s)	Caius (283-296)		Civil war; Foreign invasions
Tetrarachs: Diocletian (284-305) Maximian (285-305) Constantine Chlorus Galerius (292-311)	Marcellinus (296-304)		Great persecution
Tetrarachs: Galerius (292-311) Maximinius (305-13) Maxentius (306-312) Constantine (306-37) Licinius (307-323)	Marcellus (308-309) Eusebius (309-310) Miltiades (311-314)		Edict of Toleration (311) Milvian Bridge (312) Edict of Milan (313)

	Sylvester (314-335)		

§1-106. Historical context beyond the Roman Empire—Persia and India

Church in Persian society—In Parthian Persia in the early centuries, there was no state action taken against Christians. The quiet years of the Parthian rule provided a setting for Christianity to flourish for a variety of reasons—

- Parthian regime was benign and decentralized.
- Roman suspicion of the Christians bolstered the faith in the eyes of the Parthians. A type of reasoning that an enemy of my enemy is a friend.
- The official religion of Parthia, Zoroastrianism, was closer to Christian faith than the polytheism of Rome.

In 113-117, the Roman Emperor Trajan led an expedition against Parthia and encountered little resistance as he marched along the Euphrates all the way to the Persian Gulf. The military emergency and the poor Parthian response to it paved the way for a much more authoritarian and aggressive regime, the Sassanids, to gain popularity and eventually seize power in the third century. They would rule Persia from 224 to the arrival of the Arabs in 636.

Sassanid Persia—Three significant events bore on the Church in Persia from the third century on—

- Roman conquest of Edessa and the continual conflict between Rome and Parthia in the third and fourth centuries significantly affected believers in Persia. It caused the Persian Christians to move their center deeper into Persia to Nisibis between Edessa and Arbela. They were suspected to be disloyal after the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the official faith.
- As the Romans doubled down on the polytheism in the mid-third century, the Sassanids sought to nationalize Zoroastrianism religion as their official faith.
- The rise of Manichaeism, another form of dualism that directly competed with Zoroastrianism. Its alleged prophet, Mani, combined features of Zoroastrianism with Christian lingo. Manichaeism spread like wildfire in the third century. Christians were lumped with Manichaeans as archenemies of the state.

India—India was independent of the struggle between Rome and Persia that so affected the church in those regions. From the time of the ancient Vedic religions (prior to 1000 BC), Indian society was severely stratified. The two main groups of people were the Dravidians and the Sanskriti. The Sanskriti gained ascendency in most parts of India. There were four castes with Brahmans as the highest. Christians were viewed as foreigners and outsiders in the culture and subject to hostile attitudes.

§1-107. —Aksum (Nubia) and Ethiopia—In the early centuries of the Christian era, Aksum was an advanced kingdom that included modern Ethiopia and Nubia in Africa and Yemen in Arabia. It dominated eastern Africa for the majority of the first millennium A.D. and traded widely with the Mediterranean and Asian worlds. Ancient Aksum had a

strong Jewish presence, and an interesting legend has it that the Aksumites were descendants of Solomon and the queen of Sheba.

B. Formation; Numerical and Geographical Growth

§1-111. In general; Numerical growth—In the early centuries, Christianity experienced steady numerical growth and quickly expanded geographically beyond its Palestinian heartland. Numbers are estimates in the early centuries. There is limited evidence for mass conversions based on public preaching or wonder-working. Growth was largely by social networking, converts coming primarily among family members and friends. Another cause of growth was childbirth. Christians had sizable and solidly stable families to whom to pass on the faith. Early believers were staunch opponents of abortion and child exposure.

Our precise understanding of Christianity's growth is veiled. High estimates are that the Church grew by approximately forty percent per decade in the second and third centuries. Others think those numbers are inflated but grant that growth was significant and steady. Numerical growth gathered momentum in the third century as the Roman Empire experienced a sustained political, military, economic, and demographic crisis. This crisis spawned a new openness to faith in the general populace, particularly the Christian faith. At the end of the third century, Christians may have numbered anywhere from three to six million, approximately five to ten percent of the Empire's total population. In this era, the main centers of the faith were in the eastern portions of the Mediterranean.

Explosive numerical growth occurred in the 4th century, following the conversion and official favor of the Emperor Constantine. By that century's end, perhaps fifty percent of the residents of the Empire were at least nominally Christian.

§1-112. Geographical spread of the faith— By the end of the first century, the church extended as far north as the southern edge of the Black Sea, as far west as Rome, and as far south as Egypt and Libya. In the east, the gospel reached Parthian Persia. By 200, Christianity had grown out from the centers described in the New Testament, with its greatest strength in Asia Minor, in Achaia and Thessalonica in Greece, in Palestine, and in areas around Rome and Ravenna in Italy. By the beginning of the third century, the church reached Gaul, Spain, and Britain in the west, present day Tunisia and Algeria in Africa, and deeper into Persia in the east. By 311, Christianity had established itself in regions throughout the Empire, with its greatest strength in the East. The geographical spread was accompanied by the production of Christian literature in languages other than Greek and Latin.

Pause and ponder—Two things about stories of Christianity's geographical growth are troubling to moderns:

- The prevalence of miracle stories. The miracles recorded in the Bible are soberly recounted. The post-biblical accounts are exaggerated. However, the fact that they are exaggerated does not imply that they should all be dismissed. In both biblical and post-biblical writings, miracles served to authenticate the truthfulness of the

Christian message, especially when the apostles or others were preaching to new audiences.

- There seemed to be an advocacy for Christian virginity rather than marriage in the accounts of Christian growth. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Acts of Thomas* record examples of newly converted Christian women leaving their intended husbands at the altar out of dedication to Christ. There are other similar accounts. Paul himself seems to argue for the superiority of celibacy over marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. In this it is important for us to realize that Jesus lived in a culture that valued marriage highly and did not value singleness very much at all. Indeed, unflattering assumptions were made about single people. The Lord's followers had to come to terms with His celibacy and to fit that seemingly embarrassing fact into their view of societal structure. They promoted celibacy as an ideal lifestyle for believers.

Let us delineate this geographical movement in more particular terms.

§1-113. Northward movement in Asia—Initially, the church remained in Jerusalem and preached to Jewish audiences. To outsiders, Christianity was another sect in Judaism, devoted to a well-known rabble-rouser, Jesus, about whom spectacular claims were made. Acts 8 records the dispersing of the Jerusalem church due to a persecution led by Saul. Philip takes the gospel to Samaria, preaching, performing miracles, and winning a reception among the Samaritans. Acts 10 records the beginning of the Gentile mission and Acts 11 the gospel reaching Antioch in Syria. That church would be the supporting and sending church for the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas. In Acts 13 and 14, the record of those journeys begins with the first missionary journey through Cyprus and central Anatolia. Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch and then traveled to Jerusalem to testify before the apostles about the Gentile mission in Acts 15. Extrabiblical sources place other apostles in Anatolia in the first century as well, notably John, who had a long ministry in the city of Ephesus, and Philip and Bartholomew who also ministered in the area.

Other traditions record the early spread of the gospel into Scythia (Ukraine and southern Russia). A third century work has Matthias ministering in the Crimean Peninsula with Andrew rescuing him from cannibals. Eusebius, the fourth century church historian, claims that Andrew ministered in Ukraine, a story long attested to by Ukrainian Christians. The Black Sea area was the northern terminus of early church growth and remained so for several centuries beyond that.

In Palestine, churches were scattered throughout Galilee and Samaria. After 70 , Christian bishops were found in Jerusalem as well. In Syria, Antioch continued as a key center of the faith. Christians moved eastward from Antioch toward Edessa. Christians appear east of the Tigris River in Adiabene. In addition, Syrian Christians made their way to Persia.

In Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Christianity made substantial progress in penetrating the major urban centers of Hellenistic culture. There were numerous churches in Asia Minor from the mid-first century in cities such as Nicaea and Byzantium. The

rural areas and those areas less affected by Hellenistic culture were slower in adopting Christianity. Christian churches also appear on the islands of Cyprus and Crete.

§1-114. Westward movement into Europe—Acts 16-18 records the gospel entering Greece and Macedonia. These chapters record Paul's second missionary journey, dating to 49-52 AD. The third missionary journey from 53-57 AD records Paul's journey revisiting most of the places he had ministered to in Anatolia and Greece. Acts 21 and following records Paul's journey to Jerusalem on a relief mission, his arrest, and his subsequent imprisonment and trials. Acts concludes with Paul in Rome awaiting his trial before Nero. Both Paul and Peter lost their lives in a local persecution by Nero sometime between 64 and 68. Jerome, the scholar/monk and translator of the Latin Vulgate, reports that Peter was first in Rome during the second year of the reign of the Emperor Claudius (circa 42) to confront the teaching of Simon Magnus, who had plagued the church in Acts 8. Whether true or embellished (there is uncertainty as to Peter's movements between the 30s and 60s), there seemed to have been Christian communities in Rome by the 40s.

Rome seems to have been the farthest west Christianity spread in the first century. Details of Christian growth beyond the church at Rome are sparse. However, by the time of the Decian persecution in the middle of the third century, there were approximately one hundred bishoprics on the Italian peninsula.

In Greece, Christian congregations were found in numerous Greek cities, especially cosmopolitan communities like Corinth. However, Greece delayed in becoming predominantly Christian. Athens, in particularly, remained defiant in its philosophical paganism.

Tradition records that the faith appeared in Spain in the days of the apostles. In Romans 15, Paul shares his desire and plans to take the gospel to Spain, but there is no evidence that he got there before he was martyred. However, the church was well established in southern Spain by the third century. Likewise, Gallic church grew steadily. Irenaeus, a bishop of Lyon in the late second century, was the first churchman from Gaul to achieve prominence. There is early evidence of Christian communities even as far as Britain.

§1-115. Southward movement into Africa—Acts 8 records Philip's ministry to an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official to Queen Candace of Ethiopia (at the time, Ethiopia referred to the kingdom of Nubia, modern Sudan, rather than to Aksum (northern Ethiopia). The eunuch was converted and baptized and returned to his native land. He was one of several converted Jews returning to Africa. Egypt is mentioned as one of the countries represented at Pentecost in Acts 2. Believers from Cyrene (modern Libya) are mentioned as present in Syrian Antioch in Acts 11. One of them, Lucius, played a leading role in the Antioch church (see Acts 13:1). In addition, Eusebius affirms that Mark carried the gospel to Alexandria in Egypt before the death of the noted Jewish scholar, Philo, in 50. Mark's alleged mission work would have come in the 40s. There are accounts of martyrdoms of African believers (in the *Acts of the Sicilian Martyrs*) early as the late second century. Tertullian would be active in the early third century and his ministry confirmed the robust presence of Christianity in Latin North Africa.

§1-116. Eastward movement into Persia and India—While stories of a first century presence of Christianity in the border kingdom of Edessa (in eastern Turkey), involving a correspondence between the Lord Jesus and King Abgar of Osrhoene seem far-fetched, the second century presence of the church in the region seems certain. Two events stand out—

- The emergence of significant Christian centers in Edessa and in Arbela. The Christian scholar Tatian, author of the *Diatessaron*, an early version of a harmony of the gospels as the work would be categorized today, was active in Arbela.
- The adoption of Christianity as the state religion in the tiny Persian kingdom of Osrhoene. This means there was a Christian state a century prior Armenia, Georgia, and Aksum (Ethiopia and Nubia).

India—Few take accounts of the early entry of Christianity in India (*Acts of Thomas* and claims by Eusebius and Jerome) at face value. Those claims relate that the apostle Thomas came to northwestern India by land and southern India by sea, spending more than two decades there. The apostle Bartholomew also allegedly worked in the area. A century later, the Alexandrian scholar, Pantaenus, ministered among the upper classes in southern India, preaching Christ to the Brahmans and philosophers.

What is more certain is that Christianity was present in India by 345. In that year, delegation of four hundred Jewish Christians from Persia arrived on the Malabar coast of India. They may have been fleeing Shapur's persecution in Persia. These believers had considerable business acumen and prospered greatly in Malabar and increased the prosperity of the society around them. Whether Christianity was present in India before this time or not, it certainly was established by the mid-4th century.

§1-117. Reasons for growth—The reason for growth was the power of the gospel energized by the Holy Spirit operative in the lives of dedicated Christians. God was drawing people to himself in a wide variety of circumstances and with a wide-ranging geographical reach. Some natural factors worked positively in this growth curve—

- Early Christian vitality—Christianity was the most inclusive and strongest of the voluntary associations in the Empire.
- The Gospel met the felt needs in the hearts of people—for worth and dignity, for meaning, for hope, for forgiveness, for acceptance.
- Practical expression of Christian love was recognized by pagans, such as the Christian practice of caring for their own poor, widows, orphans; burial of the less fortunate as practice of protecting human dignity; and adoptions of exposed infants.
- Examples of moral transformation in members—such as that of Tertullian and Augustine,
- Powerful examples of the martyrs and confessors.
- Familiarity of Christian teaching—there was kinship of Christian instruction with aspects of Judaism, Platonism, and Stoicism.

- Early believers adapted to Greco-Roman culture—they spoke/and wrote in the vernacular (Greek and Latin), made use of Greek philosophy and Roman law in apologetics, and early Christian art reflected classical themes.
- Effective leadership supplied by bishops.
- Social habits won respect and made community sense—Christians avoided birth control, abortion, child euthanasia, and practiced charity.
- With the disintegration of the Empire and society, particularly, in the chaotic third century, insecurity drove people to seek refuge in the faith.
- Conversion and endorsement of Constantine (4th century on).

§1-118. Early Christian demographics—By tradition, most early Christian converts came from the poorer and underprivileged elements of Roman society, largely from the urban underclass. A quote from Celsus, a second century pagan critic, highlights this reality: "Far from us, say the Christians, be any man possessed of any culture, or wisdom, or judgment; their aim is to convince only the worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor women, and children … These are the only ones whom they manage to turn into believers." The quote describes a harsh society that oppressed the common person. To a substantial measure, it was the early Christians' ability to live out their faith with wide arms to those who would join them that accounted for their early growth. There were no worthless people to them. Their demeanor was an affront to Roman arrogance but balm to the souls of countless converts.

While the underclass may have initially populated the ranks of the early believers, Christian congregations soon represented a broad spectrum of society. We know that there were converts among the most respected noble families of Rome. A close relative of the Emperor Domitian (81-96) was reputed to be one of these converts and paid for it with his life. By 270, Porphyry, another philosophical critic of the faith, spoke of noble women becoming Christians and this began to have serious civic consequences. According to the governing law of the day, the status of a couple was determined by the status of the husband. If prominent women were to marry men from a lower social class in a civil ceremony, there were adverse civil and social consequences. The solution adopted was to perform church marriages that had no official or civil sanction.

By 300, there were Christians among magistrates, provincial governors, and chamberlains in the imperial court. With the ascension of Constantine in the early fourth century, Christians began to populate the so-called elites. In fact, many counted imperial favor as no boon to the faith and questioned the sincerity of so-called Christian social climbers.

C. Organizational Growth and Need for Doctrinal Formulation

§1-121. In general—Two of the most striking features of the history of Christianity in the early centuries were the development of its organization and the intellectual formulation of its system of belief. The organization that emerged bore the impression of the highly stratified political framework in which it arose. In addition, while the doctrinal disputes were not always pretty and the participants did not always live up to Christian

ideals, they certainly displayed the great vitality and energy of the Christian faith in these centuries.

Expecting Christ's imminent return, the early believers felt little need to play the long game. As Christ's promised coming was delayed, the church needed to settle down into a longer-term obedience. This led to structural questions, namely how should the church be organized and conduct itself. This unfolded in the development of three structures:

- the episcopacy (the office of the bishop);
- the creeds (Christian professions of faith in God);
- the canon (the list of books considered authoritative Scripture).

1. Development of Christian Leadership and Organization

§1-122. In general; Growth in administration—In the apostolic Church, there seemed to be a wonderful liberty for every Christian to pray, teach, or exhort as gifted and led. Christ was the sole High Priest and there was no exclusive group of priests. The apostles were deeply respected, as were local leaders, but there was a ready embrace of the ministry of all believers.

Growth in numbers led to the need for greater organization. There was a need to coordinate tasks and administration at the local level, including organizing the house assemblies (their meeting places and times), establishing an order of worship, providing hospitality to delegates from other house assemblies, and carrying out the tasks of oversight. As the number of congregations grew and the geographical reach of the faith was extended so did the need for regular communication, sharing of resources, and larger level meetings. At the local level, tasks grew in number and complexity and leadership positions became infused with more religious significance. Elders had a supervisor (*episkopos* or bishop) at their head and others (deacons/deaconesses etc.) to do the practical chores. In terms of numbers, visibility, social standing, and ideological and institutional development, the Christian church was, by the beginning of the 4th century, no longer an insignificant sect.

§1-123. Rise of the monarchical bishop—The apparatus of episcopal governance and the words describing it are derived from the Greek *episkopos*, meaning overseer. Scripture mentions *episkopos*, *presbuteros*, and *diakonos*—our elders (teaching and ruling) and deacons. The New Testament seems to use *episkopos* and *prebuteros* interchangeably. However, by the early to mid-2nd century, bishop, priest or presbyter, and deacon were three separate offices.

A plurality of elders governed in local house churches, but one bishop or general overseer became central to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. At first, this was largely a liturgical leadership role. Then the role progressed from being a bishop of a local group to one who represented the churches of a particular city or community. In the late third century, large Roman provinces were divided into smaller units called dioceses (derived from the Greek word meaning “administration”). The church followed suit by giving its

bishops jurisdiction over the churches in given Roman dioceses. The church's episcopal structure followed that of the Empire's administrative structure.

Also, during the second and third centuries, the role of bishop expanded to include primacy in teaching and preaching as well as in liturgical leadership. The church had to deal with various inadequate understandings of Christian faith. One way to do this was to counter false claims by insisting that accurate Christian teaching came through the bishops.

Why this strong preference for hierarchy? The early Christians followed the direction of Jewish religious establishment and Roman governmental system, both hierarchical in structure. The more egalitarian form of Church leadership was not conducive to the growth of a unified institution, particularly in the culture of the day. The bishop was seen as the source of unity and, by custom, there was no true celebration of the sacraments without his participation or delegation. A series of compositions in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, known as the *Church Orders* (including the *Didache*, the *Apostolic Tradition*, and the *Apostolic Constitutions*) devoted themselves to the regulation of the common life of Christians and reveal that the roles of the clergy grew more specialized. The authority of the bishop became supreme within the churches of his region, and he was at the center of every activity, especially worship.

***Male leadership*—**By the end of the second century, official leadership of the Church was entirely masculine. There are indications that in earlier times women occupied positions of leadership in local churches. Philip had four daughters that prophesied (preached). Phoebe was a deaconess in Cenchraea. Junia is described as an *apostolos*. The early Church also had an extensive ministry to the widows in their midst and this ministry was combined with service functions performed by the widows.

Episcopacy in Persia—The hierarchical episcopal system grew more slowly in Persia and the regions east of the Roman Empire. At first, the city of Edessa was the hub for preachers/teachers and missionaries. It served as an ecclesial center from which the church grew. However, by the fourth century, the episcopal system centered on bishops in particular areas took root in the east as well.

§1-124. Development of the idea of apostolic succession—The idea of the authority of the episcopate began to develop in the late second century in response to the doctrinal challenges facing the Church at large. Certain Gnostic groups claimed secret traditions handed down to them by the apostles. This was an era when the last links with the apostles were dying out and an emphasis on apostolic teaching and practice was coming to fore. In response, the Church began to claim each bishop as a true successor to the apostle who founded the episcopal see and therefore the conservator of the truth the apostles taught. The bishops were authoritative teachers who preserved the apostolic teaching and were also the guardians of the apostolic Scriptures and the creed developed from them.

The idea was ably articulated by Irenaeus (circa 185) and was widely accepted by the time of Cyprian (circa 250). By the time of Cyprian, the emphasis changed from an open succession of teachers of the truth to bishops as personal successors of the apostles themselves. This theory of the basis of the authority of the bishops gained momentum through the late second and third centuries as synods and regional councils gathered to settle governance issues and to encourage cooperation among the bishops.

§1-125. Patriarchal or metropolitan sees—The bishops were increasingly coordinated in their efforts by bishops in major metropolitan sees (called patriarchs). Rome, as the imperial city, was the church which exercised the most influence, but that authority was far from absolute. However, Rome's influence was very real, not only as the imperial city, but as a congregation seen as founded by the apostles Peter and Paul. In addition, tradition has Rome as the scene of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.

By the fourth century, the great metropolitan sees were the primary bishops—Rome, Constantinople (the new imperial city), Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Rome and Constantinople were the most prestigious and vied for preeminence.

§1-126. Specialization and professionalization of the ministry—Distinctions between clergy and laity deepened into divisions over time. There was a professionalization of the ministry. Clergy was set apart from secular roles to focus on church order, life, worship, and leadership. By 3rd century, there were increasing numbers of full-time ministers and a growing consensus that they should be celibate. The clergy was a separate class by function and expectation.

***Lower clerical positions*—**A variety of lower clerical orders and groups emerge. Minor offices or quasi-offices arose in the Church, including the following:

- Subdeacons (ordained) served as helpers to deacons;
- Readers read Scripture and maintained books;
- Acolytes assisted the bishops with their duties;
- Exorcists exorcized demons and often assisted with baptism;
- Precentors led music in worship;
- Janitors (sextons) maintained the articles used in worship and later cared for church property;
- Catechists served as teaching assistants in larger assemblies;
- Qualifying widows supported by the churches were given various responsibilities. Eventually, the term "widow" broadened in its scope to include single women in general and responsibilities were tied to support. This practice was one of the precursors to female monasticism.

There were voices of protest to this trend. Tertullian railed against clericalism and called the Church to return to the implications of the priesthood of all believers and stop being "respecters of persons" with an increasing emphasis on institutional leadership.

The specialization and multiplication of functions grew as Christians increasingly disposed of property in this era. There was a need for elaboration in the items and places

of worship requiring attention by dedicated personnel. By 180, there are signs of Christian art in the form of biblical themes on sarcophagi and in the catacombs around Rome. By the 3rd century, communities were beginning to meet in houses that were intended to be churches from the time they were first constructed and not just residences adapted for worship. An example is the house-church as *Dura-Europos*, equipped with a separate baptistery and ornamented with frescoes, dating from around 250.

2. Early Doctrinal Challenges

§1-131. In general—Christianity began as a movement with scattered, diverse, and household groups, held together by certain convictions, practices, and experiences. It faced challenges from multiple directions as it grew in number and extent. Converts came into the early Church from a wide variety of backgrounds. That testified to the faith's universal appeal, but it also led to widely differing interpretations of the message. When does diversity become deviance? When are more definite creedal and behavioral boundaries required?

Challenges arose from the Greco-Roman culture and Judaism, but the strongest challenge came from within. The experience of spiritual power had always been a distinguishing feature of the faith, but now many were making extreme claims. In addition, with their growth in number and expanse, Christianity needed to secure a framework that would thrive and adapt to changing circumstances and cultures. It needed to figure out how to be a widespread, coherent faith community and not just a quirky movement.

Self-definition—Christianity was ill-defined and that was particularly dangerous because of the syncretism of the age. In response, Christians began the process of defining orthodoxy (from the Greek word meaning "right opinion") using a trio of filters as its instruments—canon of Scripture, and councils of bishops, certified interpreters though apostolic succession, and creeds. These early centuries were perhaps the most important stage of self-definition of Christianity in its history.

§1-132. Immediate challenges—The formulation of a rule of faith out of which the later creeds sprung was spurred on by early challenges to the faith from Gnosticism, Marcionism, and Montanism. Orthodoxy was determined by the Christian community responding to what was deemed to be error or at least dangerous dissenting opinion.

Dualistic vision of faith—Several powerful teachers in the 2nd century advocated strongly dualistic visions of Christian existence that posed a challenge to societal conventions and order. The geographical distribution of these teachers and their followers suggests popularity of this dualistic ideology among early believers. This dualistic ideology was exacerbated by the tendencies of the philosophical thought of the day. The Church at large primarily encountered this dualistic tendency in what we know as Gnosticism.

Need for a measuring rod and a regulatory rule—In addition, the challenges presented by Marcionism and Montanism lead to the recognition of the need for a measuring rod

for faith's sources (canon). Marcionism pressed the Church in the need to determine the authoritative New Testament books and in coming to an understanding of the position of the Old Testament in the Christian canon. Montanism underlined the need to do this as a regulatory rule of faith—a base line from which to judge "the winds of the Spirit" claimed to be authoritative by flamboyant and charismatic preachers.

§1-133. Gnosticism—Gnosticism is a catch-all term for sects that were based on a sharp distinction between the spiritual and the physical realms. The spiritual was good, the physical evil and unredeemable. There might have been some Gnostic tendencies in the first century, but it was in the second and third centuries that Gnosticism reached its greatest influence. Gnostic sects of significant influence were Valentinism and Marcionism.

***Secret knowledge*—**Gnosticism was a vast and amorphous movement existing within and without Christianity. Its name is derived from the Greek *gnosis*, which means knowledge. Gnostics asserted that they possessed a special, mystical knowledge, which was the secret key to salvation. Gnostics believed that all matter was evil, or at best unreal. Humans were part of eternal spirit that had somehow been imprisoned in bodies. The Gnostics' goal was to escape from the body and this material world to which we have been exiled. This world is not our true home, but rather an obstacle to the salvation of the spirit.

***Cosmology*—**Gnosticism believed that the world was an abortion of the spirit. The Supreme Being had no intention of creating a material world, only a spiritual one. Intermediary spiritual beings were created, standing before ultimate reality. One of these realities fell into error and created this material world. However, since this world was made by a spiritual being, there are still "sparks of the spirit" in it. These have been imprisoned in bodies and must be liberated by *gnosis* or knowledge. To achieve that liberation, a spiritual messenger must come to this world to awaken us from our spiritual confusion. This messenger brings knowledge and inspiration necessary for salvation. Beyond us are heavenly spheres, ruled by evil powers, aiming to impede our spiritual progress. To reach spiritual fullness (*pleroma*) we must break through these spheres by having secret knowledge that opens the way.

In so-called Christian Gnosticism, Christ is the teacher of this secret knowledge. Since body is evil, Gnostics denied that Christ had a body. Some said that he only appeared to have a body. Others distinguished the heavenly Christ from the earthly Jesus. Some said Jesus had a spiritual body, fundamentally different than the evil prisons we call bodies. These ideas are variations on a theme of denying Jesus' physicality called Docetism (from the Greek *dokeo* = to seem, to appear).

The enlightenment necessary for the salvation of the spirit came by imparting esoteric knowledge of secret initiation ceremonies known only to Gnostics. Gnostics divided humanity into three categories: the *hylic* (those lost in materiality), the *pneumatic* (those who are self-aware), and the *psychic* (those who can choose either way). The spiritual Gnostics saw themselves as superior to regular members of the Christian community, who were enmeshed in materiality (*hylic*). Gnostics emphasized the destiny of the

individual over the survival of the community. Their literature also exhibited hostility towards the institutional Church, which cultivated community but was lost in ignorance and materiality.

***Ethics*—**The Gnostic attitude towards the physical body led to two vastly different ethical responses. Most Gnostics declared that we must control our bodies and not surrender to their evil urges. However, there were others who taught that since the spirit is good and cannot be destroyed then we can leave the body to its own devices and let it follow the guidance of its own passions. Since matter doesn't matter, why not enjoy your matter. The mindset led to deplorable conduct and the complete disregard for Christian ethics in certain circles. Nevertheless, the spiritual ones claimed to be righteous, irrespective of their behavior.

***Inroads*—**The discovery of a collection of Coptic compositions at Nag Hammadi in Egypt confirmed reports of ecclesiastical writers referring to Gnostic teachers such as Valentinus in Rome (circa 135) and Basilides in Egypt (circa 135). Gnostics made inroads among the intellectual elites and among women. Women had the prominence in Gnostic circles that they lacked in society at large. This may have contributed to women's shrinking role in the second century Church compared to that of the first century.

Christian leaders vigorously opposed Gnosticism for they saw it denying crucial Christian tenets such as creation, the incarnation, the death of Jesus by crucifixion, and the resurrection to name just a few. The Creedal formulations of the 4th and 5th centuries took direct aim at Gnosticism. Those drawn to Gnosticism tended to find their way into Manichaeism. Versions of Gnosticism endured into the medieval period, most notably in the 13th century Albigensians.

Key elements of the system include:

- Dualistic—Good/evil antagonism fundamentally played out between spirit and matter.
- The soul is a fragment of the divine that has tragically been separated from its source and trapped in the darkness of the body where it forgets its origins and destiny and falls into the stupor of ignorance.
- Jesus is the revealer who comes from the light and announces to the soul its origins and identity. Saving knowledge (*gnosis*) is a form of self-realization—where one is from, who one truly is, and where one is destined to return.
- Secret wisdom was needed, which suggested that preaching, the administration of the sacraments, and the normal functioning of the Church was inadequate.
- The way back to the light is through liberation from the body and its physical entanglements.

§1-134—Valentinian Gnosticism—Valentinism was a school founded by Valentinus, an Egyptian who came to Rome in the 130s. According to Tertullian, he was a candidate to be bishop of Rome and founded the Gnostic sect named for him after he was defeated.

All forms of Gnosticism start with a false cosmology. In the Valentinian sect, spiritual reality (*pleroma*=Greek for "fullness") emanates from the supreme God in various levels (eons), each becoming less and less spiritual the farther they get from the source, the supreme God. Valentinian sect affirmed thirty such eons, whereas others affirmed as many as 365 such eons. The lowest eon (*sophia*) fell away from source altogether and gave birth to an evil god, the Demiurge, who created the physical world. The Demiurge, the god of the Old Testament and of the physical world, is evil. The supreme God, the god of the New Testament and the spiritual world, is good. This cosmology precedes the biblical data. All sects of Gnosticism replace the one supreme God with a plethora of spiritual levels. The downward movement in this conception of things moved in the physical direction (Incarnation); the upper movement toward the supreme God was achieved through secret knowledge (*gnosis*). Salvation was gained through secret knowledge and was self-actualizing. Humanity was divided into rigid categories—*pneumatics, psychics, and hylics.* The Church fathers Irenaeus (second century) and Tertullian (third century) wrote primarily against the Valentinian form of Gnosticism.

§1-135. Marcionism—This "ism" is named after Marcion, a presbyter at Rome circa 140. He was the son of the bishop of Sinope, a town on the southern coast of the Black Sea. He grew up in the faith but developed an understanding of it that was both anti-Jewish and anti-material. He went to Rome and gathered a following before he was excommunicated in 144 because his teaching contradicted fundamental points of Christian faith. He returned to the Anatolia region in Turkey and developed a network of churches that lasted for several centuries.

Marcion believed that God and father of Jesus was not the same as Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. It was Yahweh that made this evil world and placed us in it. The Father's purpose was only a spiritual world. The Hebrew Scriptures are inspired by Yahweh, not the Supreme Father. Yahweh is an arbitrary god, choosing a particular people above all the rest. He is also vindictive and cruel in punishing those who disobey him and his arbitrary rules. The Father of Jesus and of true believers is not vindictive but loving. He is not a God of arbitrary rules that seeks slavish obedience, but one of love and compassion.

Marcion was vehemently anti-Semitic, rejected the Old Testament, and affirmed only a rump of the New Testament, consisting of the gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's epistles with most of the Old Testament references expunged. Jesus was an emissary of the true God (the Father) and only seemed to be a man (a form of Docetism). He was the revelation of the God of love and redemption, not the predicted Messiah of the Old Testament. Jesus was not really born of Mary since that would have made him subject to Yahweh. Rather, he appeared a grown man during the reign of Tiberius and his body was not made of material flesh. He only seemed to be material, suffer and die, and be raised from the dead. The good heavenly Father will not judge us since he is supremely loving and forgiving.

The original disciples had Judaized the message, so the God of love called Paul to restore the true gospel. However, Paul's epistles were interpolated by the Judaizing element, so

Marcion had to restore the true Pauline message. Marcion rejected the Old Testament and issued his own version of the New Testament. That consisted of ten of Paul's letters, excluding the Pastorals, and an edited version of Luke's Gospel.

Marcion shared similarities to Gnostics. However, he rejected their speculative wisdom, emphasized the organizational Church, and focused on accepted written revelation (his own) rather than secret ceremonies. In some ways, Marcion was a greater threat than Gnosticism because of his organizational abilities. He organized a church with its own bishops and its own scriptures. For many years, particularly in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, the Marcionite churches achieved a measure of success. His communities were strongly ascetical in behavior. Virginity and strict fasting regiments were deemed essential to the freedom of the spirit.

Key elements include:

- Marcion rejected God of the Old Testament. He taught there were two gods—one arbitrary, unjust, angry, barbaric, the god of the Old Testament, and the other good, kind, and loving—revealed by Christ.
- He was docetic, meaning that he believed Christ only appeared to have a human body.
- He believed in the material world and that humans are part of the material of it and not just spiritual strangers imprisoned in it. While he was certainly dualistic, it was a dualism somewhat different from other Gnostics.
- Marcion's canon, ten of Paul's letters and an edited version of Luke's gospel, was the impetus for the gradual development of the canon of Scripture.

§1-136. Montanism—The "New Prophecy" or Montanist movement was a version of radical Christianity that emphasized the manifest evidence of the Holy Spirit. It was part of the "signs and wonders" movement of the age. It began in either 156-157 or 172 and claimed the outpouring of the Spirit on its founder, Montanus, and his two assistants, Prisca and Maximilla, in the region of Phrygia in modern day Turkey. They claimed to be the mediums of a new era of divine revelation, delivered through their ecstatic prophesies.

They insisted that all Christian life should be focused and organized around the expectation of Christ's return. Their prophecies did not deviate from the church's teaching on God or salvation but were fundamentally ethical, focusing on how Christians should live as they awaited the near return of Christ. They attracted zealous believers (including Tertullian in 206-207) because of their strong morality, their dedication to prayer and fasting, and their fervent spirituality.

There were real concerns in the manner of their prophesying—

- They prophesied in the first person, blurring the line between the Holy Spirit and themselves. Montanus referred to himself as "the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit."
- They exercised authority because of their charisma without corresponding position in church structures. In places where the office of bishop was growing central, the Montanists were condemned. In places, where the bishop's authority

was not so central (North Africa), they were regarded more like a renewal grouping in the greater church.
- Their followers looked exclusively to them for guidance and circulated their prophecies widely. Members of the movement deemed themselves "pneumatics" (spiritual people) while outsiders were "psychics" (only natural people). The impulse towards ecstatic utterance extended a theme seen in Acts and in the epistles.

***Conventions challenged*—**The movement explicitly challenged conventional societal order by focusing on the prophetic power of celibate women that provided a radical alternative to the domestic roles expected of them at that time. Montanism was strongly ascetical. It forbade second marriages, imposed strict fasting rules, opposed lenient treatment (i.e. forgiveness) for moral failure of those within the Church, and advocated the willing acceptance of martyrdom rather than avoidance of it by flight. It was drawn to apocalyptic visions of the end times. The movement's prediction that the "New Jerusalem" would appear in a village in modern day Turkey at a particular time hastened its decline when the prediction was not realized.

Tertullian was the movement's most famous convert. He was drawn by the group's moral rigor. Tertullian justified the New Prophecy as an example of John 16:12-13: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." The Holy Spirit had further truth to bestow.

The Montanist movement was condemned by various Asian synods before 200 and by Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome, in 217. Medieval mystics (Joachim of Fiore and several female mystics) would make appeals to a new age of the Spirit akin to the Montanists.

Key elements include:
- Flamboyant preaching style appealed to age's emphasis on rhetoric.
- Imminent eschatology—Christ would soon return (Montanus even picked the area—Phrygia in modern-day Turkey).
- Advocated moral rigor for the purity of the Church, which turned harshly judgmental.
- New personal revelation in addition to the Scripture. The movement's emphasis on flamboyant prophecy implied a persistent addition to the truth with new prophecy.

D. Early Faith and Practice

§1-141. In general; Ways of "being religious"—The faith and practice of the early believers did not arise in a cultural void. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, there were four ways of "being religious" in the Greco-Roman and surrounding cultures which found equivalent expression in early Christianity: (1) way of participating in divine benefits; (2)

way of stabilizing the world; (3) way of transcending the world; and (4) the way of moral transformation.

The way of participating in divine benefits was by far the most common way of being religious among pagans. Christians who followed in this mode emphasized the presence of divine power in the empirical realm. These were the ancient "signs and wonders" people, emphasizing healings, prophecies, and even martyrdom.

The way of stabilizing the world expressed itself in festivals, feasts, and other ritual practices. Among the pagans, there were those like the philosopher Plutarch who insisted on a link between authentic religion and true civilization, a link between city "of gods and men." Orthodoxy champions like Irenaeus and Tertullian, who patrolled the boundaries of right belief and emphasized community and institutional practice, were Christian equivalents.

The way of transcending the world was found in the dualistic spiritual literature of the Greco-Roman world. Forms of dualism appear among such so-called Christian groups as Marcionism and Gnosticism, emphasizing individual enlightenment and despising material expressions of religion.

The way of moral transformation was exemplified by Greco-Roman moralists like the Stoics and the writer Epictetus. Epictetus did not despise manifestations of divine power in the material world but was more interested in how divine power transformed the dispositions and behavior of individuals. In early Christian circles, this way of being spiritual emphasized the connection between right thinking and right acting.

The early Church developed in this societal backdrop. The early Christians did not merely follow the cultural practice of the day. On the contrary, they displayed many counter-cultural tendencies. However, their cultural background affected their developing idea of what "being spiritual" meant.

1. Worship of the Early Church

§1-142. In general; Lord's day—The early church saw itself as forming a new kind of society within society in keeping with a complete allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jewish worship patterns based on the weekly Sabbath observance and the sacred calendar through the year were altered. The event that drove these alterations in worship was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, driving new concepts of sacred time, actions, words, and space.

The second century writing, the *Didache*, stressed the centrality of Sunday worship. Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 strongly suggest that this was the common practice and that the practice developed early. Christians shifted the day of worship, refocusing the weekly rhythm or worship on the resurrection rather than on God's provision in creation and the Exodus that framed Jewish practice. The *Didache* also enjoined regular weekly fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays and thrice daily prayer citing the Lord's prayer.

According to Pliny the Younger in his correspondence to the Emperor Trajan, the early believers met early in the morning to worship Christ and then assembled again later in the day to share a meal. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 indicates that the believers at Corinth met for a communal meal which included the observance of the Lord's Supper. It was not until the second century, that the common meal was set aside, perhaps out of fear of persecution, to quell rumors of "love feasts" with immoral overtones, or simply for logistical reasons.

§1-143. Elements of weekly worship—The purpose of worship was not so much to repent or be made aware of the magnitude of their sins, albeit that need was there, but to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of redemption, of which that resurrection was a seal. Easter, not Good Friday, was the focus. The dominant influences were the synagogue experience and the model of the Upper Room when Christ celebrated the Passover with his disciples. The Word preached, sacraments administered, and voices lifted in prayer and song were the focal elements of Christian worship from the beginning.

Order of worship services evolved over time. The following elements were typical:

- Entrance rites with singing of psalms. The early Christians sang from the Psalter and New Testament hymns relating to Christ's birth and life. One of the oldest composed hymns of which we know dates to Clement of Alexandria (202).
- Lessons from Scripture were interspersed with the singing of psalms. These readings were a primary source of hearing God's Word for the early believers. Set readings for a given Sunday date to the 4th century.
- Homilies or sermons were usually short expositions on the reading. At first, preaching was open to all who could speak. Then it gradually became restricted to the clergy. Only after the Protestant Reformation did the sermon become the centerpiece of worship.
- Confession of sin was a regular element of early worship.
- The Eucharist was celebrated regularly, possible at every service. Throughout its history, the Church has seen communion as its highest act of worship. The tone of the early Eucharistic observation was celebratory.
- Offerings were taken to cover expenses and to assist orphans, widows, and the poor.
- Prayers of offertory and doxology arose early. The typical public posture for prayer was standing with outstretched arms.
- The service concluded with a benediction and the kiss of peace.

***Fast days*—**By the early fourth century, believers prepared for weekly worship by observing regular days of fasting and prayer. Wednesdays and Fridays were common days set aside to remember Christ's suffering.

§1-144. Sacramental practice—Over time, the sacraments came to be understood as special means by which grace became available to people. The early Church focused on two sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist. These ancient rituals were celebrated from

the earliest days of the Christian community and were connected to entry into the community.

***Baptism*—**For the early Christians, Baptism was understood as the participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. In the early going (first to the third centuries), the most common mode of baptism was full immersion and was performed on adult converts. Infant baptism was practiced by the third century, for Tertullian of North Africa argued against it, while Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, described it in terms that seemed to suggest that it was growing relatively common.

A third century document, the *On the Apostolic Tradition* (ascribed to Hippolytus, bishop of Rome) described questions that would be put to the converts being baptized. Following baptism, the new baptized member was anointed with oil, symbolic of the reception of the Holy Spirit, and clothed in white garments. Baptism was to be a clear statement of identity with Christ in the life of the person baptized. However, as the centuries continued, believers understood baptism as washing away prior, but not subsequent sin. This belief caused numerous believers, including the Emperor Constantine, to delay baptism until late in life.

In the earliest days, many were baptized as soon as they were converted. One certainly observes that pattern in the book of Acts. This facilitated participation in the community's life since early Christians seem to have required a person to be baptized to receive communion. As the Church became increasingly Gentile, the early Church required a period of preparation and instruction before Baptism. By the fourth and fifth centuries, baptismal candidates received extended periods of pre-baptismal instruction. This was the "catechumenate", which in Augustine's case, lasted three years.

At the baptismal service itself, the candidates were asked to renounce all sin and confess their faith. The rite was typically done by three immersion or by having the new Christian kneel in water and pour water over his or her head. After the candidates were baptized, they went in procession to the place of meeting and joined the rest of the congregation and partook in communion for the first time. The service closed with thanksgiving, a benediction, and the kiss of peace. Baptism was typically observed at Easter, Pentecost, and other major feast days.

Eucharist—The Eucharist was the other great sacred action of the early church. The Greek word means "thanksgiving" and the ceremony drew on the Old Testament Passover deliverance of the Jewish people. Jesus celebrated this meal with His disciples the night He was betrayed. The church followed this pattern, following his command to "do this in remembrance of me."

In the early Eucharistic celebrations, the emphasis was on drawing people into a deeper and more spiritually nourishing union with Christ. The Eucharist was reserved for baptized believers and was celebrated every Sunday. The service itself included the kiss of peace, an offering, and the celebration of communion with singing of psalms, thanksgiving, and a benediction.

In the second and even into the third century, the Eucharist was a celebratory meal. Various early documents (the *Didache*, Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, and *On Apostolic Tradition*) chronicle Eucharistic patterns in the early centuries, often requiring that only baptized believers be allowed to participate, emphasizing the need to confess sin prior to the celebration, and envisioning the ceremonial offering of bread and cup as a distinct part of the celebratory meal. The celebratory meal fell away as part of the tradition, possibly for the sorts of abuses Paul described in 1 Corinthians 10. The Eucharist became a part of Sunday morning worship, rather than a celebratory evening meal.

The early believers emphasized what later Protestants described as the “real presence” of Christ in the elements of the Eucharist. The elements did not merely symbolize Christ's body and blood but were His body and blood. No attempt was made to spell out the meaning of this. Roman Catholics assert that their doctrine of transubstantiation, that at the epiclesis pronounced by the priest, the elements become the body and blood of Christ, was implied in the teachings of the early church. Protestants see a significant shift in the early church's ambiguous affirmation of the “real presence” and the medieval church's far more doctrinaire articulation of transubstantiation.

Pause and ponder—Protestants regard the preaching of the Word as the centerpiece of Christian worship for good reason. However, by the second century, the early church came to regard the Eucharist as a central aspect of worship. That centrality was unchallenged for over a millennium until the time of the Reformation. Protestants reacted against the medieval sacramental system as celebrated and symbolized by the Catholic Mass centered on an understanding of the Eucharist in transubstantiation which buttressed unquestioned ecclesiastical deference. Should we reflect again on the place of sacred action in modern worship? Have we unduly marginalized the celebration of the Lord's Supper? Further, in the increasing non-liturgical patterns of modern worship, can we grant that more formal worship and prayer may indeed be more than just going through the motions? May liturgical reflection enrich rather than enervate?

Later developments—In discussions of early Church sacramental practice, Roman Catholic commentators will speak of the idea of the sanctification of time and suggest that the lives of individual Christians were marked by the beginnings of a cradle to grave sacramental system. In this discussion, the most ancient rituals, Baptism and the Eucharist, were connected to entry into the Christian community. Confirmation marked a growth in maturity. Penance addressed the problem of sin during adult life. Ordination marked those serving in the priesthood and the lesser orders—porter, lector, acolyte, exorcist and the two major subordinate —deacon and subdeacon. The last sacraments to come into the scene of the sacramental system were Matrimony and Extreme Unction.

However, there is little or no evidence of the early development of this elaborate sacramental system. The early Church practice was much simpler. The elaboration of sacramental practice was a medieval phenomenon.

§1-145. Divided worship—With the development of the sacramental practice described above, the practice of divided services became common from the mid-2nd century until the end of the 5th century. The service began with all worshiping together. At a certain point before communion, catechumens and others not baptized and those under penitential discipline were required to depart from the service. The worship continued with the celebration of communion and the benediction. The divided service was phased out and abandoned by the 5th century with the ascendancy of the practice of infant baptism.

§1-146. Space, movement, and garb—Private homes were the usual places of worship in the first two centuries. Later, as congregations grew, larger houses were devoted exclusively to worship. Excavations at *Dura-Europos* in Syria, built around 250, indicate that this was a private dwelling that was converted into a church. It was not until Constantine's day that the Church regularly met outside private homes for services. In the fourth century, church building exploded.

In addition, a custom developed early on to gather at the tombs of believers. This was the function of the catacombs in the environs of Rome. Churches could not own property, but funeral societies were allowed. As churches grew, these societal holdings served as a venue of worship for the larger community. In addition, often the heroes of faith were buried in these graves. The Christians were inspired by their lives and even more, seeing themselves as joining together with Jesus in their midst but also with their ancestors in the faith.

Worship was fitted to these smaller spaces. With the establishment of the Christian religion by Constantine and his successors, imperial sponsorship and state construction of great basilicas for Christian worship profoundly affected how Christians worshiped. Christian liturgy in these large public spaces began to resemble Greco-Roman civic religion functions previously sponsored by wealthy patrons in the cities of the Empire.

Movement in worship became a prominent feature of imperial Christian worship. Processing in the large basilicas became common as did worship involving processions in stages (e.g. the stations of the cross). In Rome, "station churches" became stopping places for liturgical processions through the city. Pilgrimages to the tombs of the martyrs, to places of the desert fathers, and to the Holy Land became common.

Garments and adornment—An emphasis on the sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist came to the fore (with a corresponding loss of its sense as a fellowship meal) as well as the use of festivals, richly ornamented garments, open air processions, elaborate service rituals (bowing, genuflecting, kneeling, and various arm gestures), and the use of musical chants and formal prayers. Art and adornment began to populate Christian buildings focused on Christian themes. Statuary portraying biblical figures replaced that of pagan art portraying the gods and frescoes, mosaics, and funeral art displaying Christian themes replaced that portraying pagan mythological themes.

§1-147. Liturgical calendar—In the beginning, the Church calendar was simple, basically a weekly calendar. Sunday was the day of worship; Wednesday and Fridays were common days of fasting. Sunday became an imperial holiday in 321. The early church focused on weekly and to a lesser extent daily rhythms celebrating Christ's life and death around His first coming.

Seasonal rhythms through the year were slow to emerge. Christians celebrated the Jewish festival of Pentecost from early days because it coincided with the birth of the church. The Council of Nicaea in the fourth century (325) standardized the date for celebrating Easter which enhanced its celebration in the annual calendar along with times of reflection and repentance in the weeks leading up to it that we call "Lent" today. The earliest feast day in connection with Jesus' birth was January 6, Epiphany, the day of his manifestation. Later, particularly in the Latin West, December 25 began to take its place. That day was originally the pagan solstice, a popular pagan holiday established by the Emperor Aurelian in 274. After Constantine, this pagan holiday was preempted by the celebration of Christmas, the preparatory period of Advent, as well as the Christmas season extending to the feast of the Epiphany.

The liturgical calendar grew ever more elaborate, serving to bring the biblical past into the present by celebrating moments in salvation history as well as the life of Christ. In addition to Sunday, Easter and Lent, Christmas and Advent, the Church began to celebrate other significant occasions, including the lives of saints. "Saint" took on a quite different meaning than in the New Testament and was applied first the martyrs and then the confessors of the faith. A rhythm of "holy days" and "ordinary time" began to develop in the life of the Church.

§1-148. Marian devotion—Commonly held teachings of Mariology began with her function as the mother of God (*theotokos*) and have grown progressively more exalted through the centuries. Since she enabled the Savior to be born, she has a position more exalted than any other creature. Mariologists commonly refer to her as the Queen of Heaven. They also see her as essential to the final spiritual perfection of all creation and thus Mother of God's creatures. Her involvement in salvation makes her co-redemptrix with her Son. While Jesus offered his sinless person to atone for humanity's transgressions, Mary, whose will was harmonious with her Son's, offered her prayers. Her mediatorial intercession was involved in the atonement, even though Christ's sacrifice was primary and sufficient. Her mediatorial role continues with her present intercession for sinners.

Mary's exalted role has implications according to Mariologists. If she had ever been stained by sin, she would have been unfit to bear the Lord. Thus, she must have been "immaculate" from the instant she was conceived by her mother. In addition, she was immune from sin throughout her life and was perpetually a virgin. Finally, Mariologists teach that at her death, Mary was assumed bodily into heaven.

Critique—Evangelical Protestants demur at almost all of this. Scripture does not mention her immaculate conception or her bodily assumption. The Gospel accounts do not present

Mary as sinless and as continuously in accord with Christ's will. Her perpetual virginity is challenged by references to Jesus' siblings (Mark 3:31; 6:3; Jn. 2:12; 7:1-10; Acts 1:14; Gal. 1:19). Protestants argue that the excesses of Marian devotion—her roles as Mother of God's creatures, co-redemptrix, intercessor for the people of God, her immaculate conception, her sinless "fullness of grace," and her Assumption, arise from an overestimation of the human role in redemption.

***Historicity*—**History becomes something of a battleground in recounting the rise of Marian devotion. Mariological extrapolations have occurred over the centuries, and it is difficult to understand precisely the degree of devotion accorded to Mary by the early Church. However, aspects of Marian devotion did begin early in the Church's history. The term mother of God (*theotokos*) was used in reference to her in 320, shortly after Constantine's ascension to the throne, and was formally approved by the Council of Ephesus in 431. Ireneaus, a second century Church father, seems to imply a role for Mary in redemption when he contrasted Eve's disobedience, which brought humanity's downfall, with Mary's obedience which "became the cause of salvation both for herself and the human race." Her perpetual virginity was accepted by Augustine's time in the fifth century.

§1-149. Veneration of the saints—Veneration of the saints began as recognition of early martyrs at whose graves Christians conducted memorial services to honor the deceased. By the fourth century, Christians similarly honored those who suffered persecution short of death, called confessors. Gradually, the term "saint" moved from referring to any believer to references to martyrs, confessors, and others regarded as particularly holy people. The honor accorded these people grew from respectful memory and imitation of their virtues to a devotion which included the use of images and relics, the belief that relics connected with saints could perform miracles, processions and pilgrimages in their honor, dedication of certain days to individual saints, and the belief that these saints could intercede for living believers. Later, the idea that the saints contributed to a treasury of surplus merit that could be drawn on for those coming after them became commonly believed. That served as the conceptual basis for the penitential practices that prompted the Reformation.

This veneration grew over time and is difficult to date with any certainty. The earliest Christians honored their dead based on general repute. After the third century, bishops began to supervise the cult of the saints within their dioceses. It was not until the Middle Ages, that central ecclesiastical authorities (the papacy in Roman Catholicism and synods in Orthodoxy) assumed the power to designate particular people as saints. That process also grew more elaborate over time and evolved into two general stages: (1) beatification, which confirms the deceased person reigns with Christ and merits local devotion, and (2) canonization, which confers "sainthood" and prescribes veneration by all the faithful.

***Critique and response*—**Evangelicals criticize this practice as biblically unwarranted, as mimicking pagan practices, and as potentially blasphemous, extending the worship due solely to God to human beings. Defenders have distinguished between veneration of the saints and worship of God, following Augustine's original distinction between *dulia* and

latria. *Latria* (worship) belongs to deity alone (Mt. 4:10). *Dulia* (honor or veneration) may be merited by people due to their piety and deeds. In venerating the pious, so the argument goes, one is glorifying God's grace on display in the person's life and work.

2. Other Practices

§1-151. In general—The early Christians were mostly composed of humble folk for whom the fact of their adoption as heirs of the King of kings was a source of boundless joy. Their daily life was a grind and a drab routine common to the poor in every society. However, they rejoiced in the hope of a new light which would destroy the dark injustice and idolatry of their society. Their instruction and community practices highlighted this hope and were intended to solidify their faith.

§1-152. Instruction in the faith—In the early Church, what was written addressed concrete problems or specific issues or needs. This was true of early teaching. In the late first and early second centuries, Christian leaders, in letters very much akin to Paul's epistles, addressed issues and concerns of the day to Christian communities. Examples include the *First Letter of Clement* (of Rome, circa 95) and Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* (circa 130). *The Shepherd of Hermas*, written by a brother of the bishop of Rome in the middle of the second century, deals with the issue of the forgiveness of sins after Baptism.

***Instructional manuals*—**Soon instruction began to be more systematic, albeit geared to practical concerns. There appeared Church manuals designed for the instruction of Church members in common practices and beliefs. One of the earliest works is the *Didache* or the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,* a teaching manual in use in Syria in the early 2nd century. This was not written by the apostles but by an anonymous author or authors and provides guidelines for Christian living and worship, including baptismal and Eucharistic practice, fasting and prayer, and general instruction in the faith (see Richardson, 174-176).

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, which dates to the 3rd century, provided more elaborate instruction. There are guidelines for the laity concerning the comportment of spouses in terms of clothing and ornamentation and general direction about books to read or to avoid. There are sections instructing the clergy concerning education, money and worldliness, and food and clothing. Throughout there is counsel urging simplicity of lifestyle. There is instruction to those baptizing and being baptized, guidance for life in the community, for the treatment of orphans, for parental responsibilities and the discipline of children. Ordination rites include specific instructions and prayers that are utilized during the ceremonies.

***Practical emphasis*—**These early writings did not seek to expound on the totality of Christian doctrine but addressed pressing and practical needs. However, as the second century ended and the third century opened, the speculations of heresy required the Church to respond more systematically. This response can be seen in the works of apologists and early Christian writers (see §1-191 et seq.).

§1-153. Discipline and penitential practices—Discipline matters were taken seriously and passages such as Matthew 18 were rigorously applied. Purposes were twofold: preservation of Church unity and the restoration to spiritual health of fallen Christians. The ultimate sanction was excommunication from the Church and that was dire indeed. Cyprian, an influential 3rd century bishop of Carthage, echoed the sentiments of many when he said that there was no salvation outside of the Church.

***Penance*—**Means of restoration was the practice of penance, a practice that over time evolved into a sacrament. The early stages of the process included weepers, hearers, kneelers, and standers. These stages were quite formal. The service of reconciliation involved a public confession after suitable penitential sorrow and satisfaction followed by a reception back into the Church and the celebration of the Eucharist.

There were clashing perspectives about this in the early Church. The Montanists, Novatians, and Donatists were the hard-liners, and they initiated heated controversies over disciplinary matters. Most believers were moderates and a more forgiving culture became the emerging mainstream.

§1-154. Evangelism and missions—There was significant growth in the first centuries of the early Church. Evangelism did not take place in church services. The early Church knew nothing of evangelistic outreach and revival meetings. Their worship met in smaller places (individual homes) and centered on communion. Only baptized believers were admitted to this celebration. Evangelism took place in the kitchens of homes and in the shops and markets of communities. There were famous teachers, like Justin Martyr and Origen, who attracted and converted members of the pagan intelligensia, but most converts were won by ordinary, anonymous Christians who led others to the faith.

***Miracle workers*—**Some early Christians were reputed to be "miracle workers," who won some converts attracted by their notoriety. The most famous of these was *Gregory Thaumaturgus*. He was bishop of Neo-Caesarea in the Pontus, who substituted Christian festivals for old pagan ones and made sure Christian celebrations outdid the others. Miracle-working was a major part of this.

***Urban growth*—**It is noteworthy that Christian witness in these early centuries spread principally in the cities. The faith penetrated the rural areas of the Empire slowly and with considerable difficulty. By 100, perhaps two-thirds of the port cities of the Empire had a church, as did a quarter of inland cities. By 180, those numbers increased to almost ninety percent and two-thirds, respectively.

§1-155. Architecture, music, and art—Christian art began to develop as soon as the Christians had their own cemeteries (the catacombs) and their own church buildings. The earliest art was simple frescoes on walls of buildings and carved sarcophagi (stone coffins) where wealthier Christians were buried. Communion was the central act of worship and scenes and symbols referring to communion are most common. The shepherd and sheep are favorite symbols. Fish appear both in reference to one of Jesus'

most famous miracles and because the Greek word for fish (*ichthus*--ἰχθύς) was used as an acrostic for the faith:

- Ἰ ησόύς = Jesus
- χ ριστός = Christ
- θ εός = God
- ύ ἱός = Son
- [ς] ωτήρ = Savior

Christian art in the early centuries also referred to various biblical episodes. The art was quite simple, alluding to symbols and themes more than realistically portraying them.

With the advent of Constantine and imperial favor, church building exploded, and churches grew larger and more ornate. Most church buildings followed the basic rectangular plan of the basilica. These were public buildings whose main part was a great room divided lengthwise into naves by two or more rows of columns. Christian basilicas had three main parts: the atrium or entryway usually with a fountain in the middle, the naves which constituted the main part of the building, and the sanctuary at the end of the main nave. In the middle of the sanctuary was an altar and near it was space reserved for choirs or other singers. The back wall of the sanctuary was often semi-circular forming the apse, a concave space behind the altar.

The most characteristic form of Christian art in this period was the mosaic. Walls were covered with pictures made of small pieces of glass, stone, or porcelain. Near the basilica was the baptistery, a separate building large enough to accommodate dozens people. The main feature was at the center, a baptismal pool, into which one descending by a series of steps. It was here that baptisms, normally by immersion, were celebrated.

§1-156. Signs and wonders—In the early centuries, there were martyrs, confessors, apologists, and more. The deeply experiential character of the Christian faith manifested itself in extreme forms, which resembled Greco-Roman religion and threatened the good order within Christianity itself. Early Christians were drawn to apocryphal gospels and acts of outstanding believers focusing on miracles and even miracle contests. These phenomena emphasized an element found in the Gospels and in Acts—divine power working in visible ways. Pseudo-gospel narratives and pseudonymous acts of various apostles appear which highlight this tendency. The infancy gospels of Thomas and James focus exclusively on the birth and childhood of Jesus and emphasize wonder-working and the physical purity of the body. James emphasizes Mary's perpetual virginity while Thomas records how the child Jesus was the source of cure and blessing to family and neighbors. The Acts of Paul, Andrew, John, Peter, and Thomas (all composed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries) focus on miracles performed by the apostles.

These narratives convey a sense of Christianity as a movement that exercises supernatural power and poses a radical threat to conventional mores. Household order is threatened by demands of purity focused on virginity and singleness. The Empire's order seemed threatened by aggressive assertions of God's sovereignty. Many believers were assured that there was an unavoidable clash between the goals of the Roman Empire and the

divine purpose, regardless of the arguments of the apologists. More cultured and philosophical believers tended to spiritualize Christian hope, but the radical element held to a vision of the Kingdom that would supplant this present order and would do it soon.

The radical phenomena continued to insist on a key element of early Christianity, personal religious experience of various kinds. They also challenged the unity of the Church. The Church would eventually act, exposing some radical manifestations (Gnosticism) and domesticating others (miracle-working and glorying in martyrdom).

E. Rise of Opposition and Persecution

§1-161. In general; Antecedents to persecution—There were social, political, and religious issues involved in the development of a persecuting mindset. The Roman Empire was concerned with good order upon which the stability and prosperity of the Empire depended. The worship of the gods was as an inherent and necessary part of such world maintenance. Everyone's participation in the "city of gods and men" was a fundamental premise of ancient politics. A denial of the gods and a withdrawal from political involvement represented a challenge to good order and a threat to society. Participation in the Empire's benefits required at least the tacit recognition of the Empire's gods.

***Subversive*—**Cults that refused to do this most rudimentary obligation were dangerously subversive. Even cults which enjoyed the Empire's official recognition could be the target of local resentment and harassment. Ancients, like moderns, were prone to fear and resent that which to them was strange. Two common examples of this were the Jews and the philosophers. Although Judaism was granted imperial recognition—and reciprocated by offering sacrifices and prayers for the emperor—there were instances of local persecution. Philo reports of instances of anti-Semitic riots in Alexandria requiring appeals to the emperor for assistance. Likewise, pagan philosophers who withdrew from religious practices, such as the Epicureans, were suspected of subversion.

***Latent dangers*—**From the perspective of Christianity's eventual triumph, it is difficult for moderns to assess how problematic and dangerous life was for the early believers. They were an intentional community that drew members from both Jews and Gentiles while at odds with the customs of both larger groups and without any institutional source of support. Christians withdrew from participation in the cultic practices (festivals, processions, meals) regarded as essential for citizenship. After the Jewish revolt (66-70), Christian community could no longer claim the protective umbrella of being a Jewish sect. Christians lacked legitimacy, approval, or any status. Although formal state persecutions were sporadic and interspersed with extended periods of neglect, there were direct attempts to suppress the Christian movement. The uncertainty of these sporadic outbreaks was a factor in the tensions Christians felt in these early centuries. Martyrdoms were not the whole story. Oppression included social ostracism, the taking of property, economic marginalization, and exile.

§1-162. Reasons for persecution

***Tertullian*:** "If the Tiber floods, or if the Nile refuses to rise, or if the sky withholds its rain, if there is an earthquake, a famine, a pestilence, at once the city is raised: 'Christians to the lion'."

Rome was tolerant of the religions of the peoples under her rule. The governing concern was for loyalty to the state and the avoidance of disorder of any kind. From the composition of book of Acts and following, Christian writers and apologists underlined that the faith was no danger to the functioning of the Roman state and that the believers were peaceable and orderly members of society.

***Opponents*—**Earnest Jews were the earliest opponents of Christianity as reflected in the book of Acts. The Judaizers dogged Paul's steps throughout his missionary journeys. However, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70, the chief opposition to the faith shifted to cultivated pagans. The cultured pagans claimed that Christianity was intellectually wanting, a foolish and self-contradictory faith. Celsus, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), wrote a refutation of the faith called *The True Word*, in which he claimed only the naïve and ignorant people of the time were becoming Christians. Cornelius Fronto joined him in describing the Christians as lacking in education and culture and as crude and ignorant. Clearly there was class prejudice here. The cultured pagan could not conceive of the possibility that this Christian rabble could know truth that was hidden from them.

***More than cultured prejudice*—**The persecutions arose over time were due to more than just cultured prejudice. Times of adversity prompted fear among the general populace and this, combined with misperceptions of Christian behavior and beliefs, led to accusations. Early Christians were particularly vulnerable to ancient suspicions. Christian understanding of holiness demanded opposition to pagan practices. Its more egalitarian ideals threatened the stratified system of pagan patronage. The typical lines of attack included:

***Disloyalty*—**At the heart of Roman-Christian relations was the question of religious exclusivity. The Romans, with their polytheistic and pragmatic bent, saw allegiance to the emperor as a just requirement. People could worship in any way they wanted if they went along with the sacrifices and rites prescribed by the state. Pinch an inch of incense and offer it to the emperor was hardly an overwhelming requirement in their eyes. It was a test of loyalty, that was all.

The Christians' refusal to worship the emperor's genus was the straw that broke the camel's back. Christians saw it as a matter of loyalty to Christ and the avoidance of idolatry. The Christians' refusal to comply with what the pagans saw as easy conditions drew their ire at what they characterized as Christian obstinacy. Emperor Marcus Aurelius found this galling. The earliest Roman sources (Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger) considered the early Christians as superstitious and unusually stubborn.

***Religious and social threats*—**Christians were perceived as religious and social threats. Their distinctive lifestyle rejected pagan gods and all that was routinely associated with them—temple feasts, idol meats, games, and practices that devalued human life—gladiator contests, slavery, and exposing infants. Christians remained aloof and pagans escalated this to the charge that they were "haters of mankind". The claim was that the worship of the Christian God destroyed the very fiber of society because those following the Christian faith abstained from most social activities, claiming that participation in them was tantamount to worshiping false gods. As for Jesus himself, it was claimed that he was a common criminal crucified on a cross and that he was illegitimate. He was not the Son of God, but the bastard son of a Roman soldier. Finally, to the Greek and Roman mind, the claims of the Resurrection and Christians themselves being resurrected on judgment day was the epitome of silly nonsense. Pointed and mocking questions of how this was to come about was standard pagan ridicule.

***Atheism*—**Christians were accused of atheism because they did not worship state gods and, at this point in their history, largely avoided images in worship. This misunderstanding opened believers to the accusation that they were bringing the displeasure of the gods on society at large. Their lack of concern with placating the vengeful loyal deities angered their pagan neighbors.

***Slanderous charges*—**They were accused of cannibalism because of wild rumors about the Eucharist. "Eating Christ's body" and "drinking his blood" gave rise to gruesome tales. Incest and sexual debauchery were rumored to be linked with their gatherings. Christians gathered weekly for "love feasts," called one another "brother" and "sister," and welcomed each other with the "kiss of peace." Pagans gossiped about orgiastic celebrations with Christians eating and drinking to excess and then engaging in debauchery.

***Economic threat*—**They were perceived as economic threats to the system of pagan idolatry and its underpinning of local economies. This accusation was first recorded in Acts 19 with the riots at Ephesus and the arguments of Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths.

***Proselytizing put-off*—**The proselytizing activities of the Christians put the pagan society off. Christians saw themselves as bearers of the true message and the faith tended to obliterate pagan practice. Paganism was false, not just another way to worship. This mindset put a syncretistic pagan society on the defensive.

§1-163. Number and extent of persecutions—Precise details of persecution between the 1st and 4th centuries are difficult to nail down. First, all the sources are Christian, which tend to maximize state opposition and oppression. It is also difficult to sort out local or regional opposition and persecution from systemic state efforts. However, the pattern that emerges is that Christians were persecuted by state authority when a larger political concern for the security of the imperial order was at stake. Official fear was commonly behind official savagery.

***Local and sporadic*—**Most persecutions of these were not general persecutions but scattered and sporadic ones. Local leaders and mobs took out their frustrations and imagined grievances on believers. While loss of life in these persecutions was not great by our modern experience, there were significant legal impediments to believers in various areas of life. Specifically, the emperors' edicts tended to hound Christian clergy and handicapped Christians in government and in regulated occupations.

Of the local actions taken against Christians prior to 249, four are particularly worthy of note—

- Nero's scapegoating of Christians in the aftermath of the great fire of Rome in 64.
- A local persecution by the Emperor Domitian in Anatolia in modern-day Turkey in the 90s.
- A significant and brutal persecution in Gaul by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius in 177.
- A persecution in north Africa by the Emperor Septimius Severus in 202-203.

***Severe persecutions*—**Severe and Empire-wide persecutions occurred in the third century under Decius in 249-251 and continued by Valerian (253-260). The most severe general persecution occurred in the fourth century under Diocletian and Galerius (303-311). Both Decius and Galerius were from Thrace (in the Balkans), as was Maximinus Thrax, a notable Christian opponent in the 230s. This was one of the most rural and thoroughly pagan areas of the Empire. Decius was acclaimed for his embodiment of the virtues of the old Roman stock and may have believed, as many did in that turbulent century, that the abandonment of the old Greco-Roman gods, as evidenced by the growth of Christianity, was responsible for the sad decline of the Empire.

§1-164. First century—Early persecutions of Christians were local and connected to emperors Nero (54-68) and Domitian (81-96). In 64, there was a great fire in Rome and local gossip laid the blame for the blaze at the emperor's doorstep. Nero blamed the Christians as a way of deflecting blame from himself. The persecution was particularly intense and savage but local and short-lived. Domitian took the claims of the emperor cult very seriously and, over the course of his reign, grew increasingly paranoid for his own safety and thus open to all sorts of accusations and suspicions. Persecutions were limited to the environs of Rome and halted with Domitian's assassination by members of his own household in 96.

§1-165. Second century—The second century affords us a clearer view of the issues involved in the persecution of Christians, the attitudes of Christians to martyrdom, and the attitudes of Roman authorities toward the new faith. This last point is illustrated by the correspondence between Emperor Trajan and Pliny the Younger.

Pliny the Younger was governor of Bithynia on the northern shore of modern-day Turkey. Pagan temple business was down, and the governor received a list of names of Christians, at this point an illegal religion in the Empire. Pliny released the Christians who offered incense before the image of the emperor. He offered the recalcitrant three opportunities to recant and if still unyielding, threatened them with execution. Considering himself a just

man, he inquired into the crimes of individual Christians other than obstinacy and not offering incense to the emperor's image. He did not find anything of substance. The question he posed to Emperor Trajan was whether Christians should be punished for concrete crimes or whether being Christian was itself a crime.

Trajan waffled and the initial imperial policy towards Christians reflected that. In essence, the imperial policy was not to seek out Christians, but to punish them if they were accused by known witnesses and brought before the authorities and refused to worship the emperor.

Marcus Aurelius (161-180) was one of the most enlightened men of his day with lofty ideals and yet ordered persecutions of believers. He saw them as clinging to their faith not of reason, but of obstinacy. Early in Aurelius' reign there invasions, floods, epidemics, and other disasters. Among the pagans, the Christians were blamed for bringing the wrath of the gods upon the Empire. Whether Aurelius was of this mind is hard to say, but he did support the persecutions and favored the revival of the old pagan faith.

The most famous incident occurred in Lyons in Gaul. Christians were denied the right to visit public sites. One day a mob followed some Christians about their business, shouting and pelting them with objects. The Christians were arrested, tried, and those who refused to recant the faith, were tortured and executed.

***In summary*—**Christians were in a precarious position throughout the second century. Trajan outlined the general policy of the Empire—Christians were not to be sought out, but if brought before the authorities, they must recant or be punished. This put believers at the mercy of the good will of their pagan neighbors. The task of the apologists of the age (see §1-191 et seq.) became ever more important in maintaining the good opinion of the pagan masses.

§1-166. Third century—The chief reason for Roman wariness of Christians was the perceived need to defend the integrity of the state which became increasingly fragile in the third century. Trajan's policy that Christians were to be punished only if accused and they refused to worship the emperor and the gods, in practice meant that persecutions were local and sporadic. That ended in the third century, first during the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211), but most intensely in the reigns of Decius Trajan (249-251), and Valerian (253-260).

***Under Septimius Severus*—**Severus came to the throne after a lengthy civil war that weakened the Empire. The barbarians beyond the borders were a constant threat as were the dissident groups within the Empire. In addition, the possibility of yet more civil strife between Romans and new challengers to the throne was ever present. Severus felt the need for religious harmony within his territories. He proposed a plan to unite his subjects together in the worship of the "all conquering Sun." All gods were accepted, with the Sun as supreme. The Christians and the Jews refused to yield to this syncretism. Severus decided to stop the spread of these two faiths by outlawing conversions to them,

legislation in addition to Trajan's old principle. The edict went out in 202 and local persecutions ensued.

***Under Decius and Valerian*—**The rise of the Goths on the northern border of the Empire along the Danube in the 230s and beyond threatened Rome's safety. The Goths were to be a menace through the third and fourth centuries and would sack Rome itself in 410. The neglect of the gods was often assigned as the reason for the crisis. There came a new claim of loyalty from the old pantheon of classical paganism. The Emperor Decius (249-251) initiated a persecution that was intense and Empire-wide, but short-lived. Decius died in battle just two years into his reign in 251. A subsequent emperor, Valerian, picked up the persecution baton in 257, requiring Christian leaders to offer sacrifice to Roman gods and forbidding Christians to assemble in buildings or in cemeteries. In 258, the death penalty was added to the prescribed consequences of not obeying. Christian bishops, including Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus of Rome, lost their lives.

***Confessors*—**Decius' persecution was quite different than the earlier ones. His purpose was to create apostates, not martyrs. The exemplary deaths of Christians in the earlier years drew people to the faith. Decius wanted to force Christians to recant while depriving them of the opportunity for heroic witness as martyrs. He issued a decree that everyone had to offer sacrifice to the gods and burn incense before a statue of the emperor. Christians had a period of relative calm since the time of Severus forty years earlier and were unprepared for this new tact. This systematic oppression resulted in few deaths but caused many to recant the faith through a mixture of torture, physical and economic threats and punishments, and bogus promises. Out of this, a new title of honor appeared within the Church, that of "confessor."

§1-167. Early fourth century—Diocletian (284-305) reorganized the Empire and brought a new sense of security and prosperity. The cycle of civil war ceased as did large scale incursions of the barbarians into the Empire. Diocletian's wife (Prisca) and daughter (Valeria) were allegedly Christians. The peace of the Church seemed assured.

The first difficulties arose in the army. Most Church leaders and believers at the time thought that Christians should not be soldiers. In 295, a Christians were condemned for refusing to join the army and others for trying to leave it. Galerius convinced Diocletian that all Christians should be dismissed from the army on suspicion of disloyalty. In some places, there were attempts to force Christian soldiers to deny their faith. There were many executions, all of them in the army of the Danube under Galerius.

Diocletian, urged on by Galerius, decided to make traditional Greco-Roman religion secure and uniform throughout the Empire to help establish political unity and stability. He began in 297, by issuing decrees against the dualistic sect of the Manichaeans. In 303 and 304, he issued four decrees against Christians, attacking Christian worship, banning Christian literature, arresting Christian leaders, and requiring sacrifice offerings to the Greco-Roman gods upon pain of deportation or death. There were many executions and many attempts to encourage Christians to abandon their faith.

***Imperial successors*—**In 305, Diocletian and his fellow Augustus, Maximilian, abdicated, and Galerius and Constantius Chlorus took the title of Augustus. Two of Galerius' underlings, Severus and Maximius Daia, were appointed Caesars. However, the sons of the former Augusti, Constantine and Maxentius, were extremely popular among the legions. When Constantius died, his troops declared Constantine as their Augustus. Meanwhile, Maxentius took Rome from Severus and Galerius was unable to quell the revolt. Diocletian refused to return but did lead the negotiations for a new arrangement among the rivals. The final arrangement was unstable and included the appointment of a new Augustus, Licinius.

Amid this political chaos new persecutions ensued. Constantine and Maxentius in the west did not enforce the imperial decrees against the Christians while Galerius and Maximius Daia in the east did. Finally, Galerius fell ill in 311 and, convinced that the illness was punishment from God for persecuting Christians, he grudgingly decided to change his policy.

***Edict of Milan*—**When Galerius died, the Empire was divided between Licinius, Maximius Daia, Constantine, and Maxentius. Constantine defeated Maxentius at the battle of Milvian Bridge outside Rome and became sole emperor of the West. On the eve of the battle, Constantine, in a dream, received a command to place a Christian symbol on the shields of his soldiers and a vision appeared in the sky "in this you shall conquer." After the battle, Constantine met Licinius in Milan, concluded an alliance with him part of which was the agreement that the persecution of Christians stop, and their buildings, cemeteries, and other property be returned to them. This agreement, commonly known as the Edict of Milan (313), marks the end of the early centuries of the Church and the beginning of the imperial
Church.

§1-168. Responses to and effects of persecution—Persecution generated a variety of short-term responses from Christians—

- The celebration of martyrdom as perfect discipleship.
- The writing of apologetic literature in defense of the faith.
- Some sought secrecy and avoidance of trouble by withdrawing from society. That secrecy had a downside. It helped fuel popular rumors.
- Some probably offered the prescribed worship the Roman officials demanded, justifying this in their minds as an expression of loyalty to both Caesar and Christ.

The long-term effects were problematic. Like an abused child where early trauma continues to define later behavior, Christians tended to bear a sense of being aggrieved and to become abusive towards pagans when they later came to power. Imperial Christianity turned state instruments of persecution toward Jews, pagans, and those considered to be heretical in their teaching.

§1-169. Martyrs and confessors

Tertullian: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"

The term “martyr” comes from a word meaning witness. The ideal of witnessing to one’s convictions even to the point of death found its perfect realization in the innocent suffering and death of Jesus. The tradition of martyrdom began with the apostles, especially Peter and Paul dying in Nero’s persecution, and Stephen who was put to death by stoning in Acts 7. In the second century, several highly visible Christian leaders bore witness in a way that glorified martyrdom. Martyrdom came to be regarded by many believers as the perfect form of discipleship. It was conforming to the pattern of suffering for others in witness to God’s truth that was established by Jesus. Those who confessed Christ in the face of persecution, torture, and the threat of death but did not die were accorded a second rank of honor as witnesses and came to be known as “confessors.”

§1-170. Outstanding examples

Polycarp: “For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no evil. How could I curse my king, who saved me?”

Ignatius of Antioch (107) was condemned as a recalcitrant Christian and sentenced to death in Rome. On his way to the capital, he wrote seven letters to various churches. There was no general persecution of Christians at this time, but those accused by known witnesses and refusing to worship the emperor were subject to punishment, including capital punishment. In his letters to the churches (particularly to Smyrna), Ignatius wrote of his impending martyrdom. His goal was to be with his Lord and Savior and his purpose was to be an imitator of the passion of his Lord. A death met with divinely sustained courage would be a witness to the Lord of glory.

Polycarp (155)—While little is known of the actual martyrdom of Ignatius, much is known of his younger colleague, Polycarp, martyred in 155. Again, Trajan’s policy was still in effect. Christians were not to be sought out, but if accused and they refused to worship the emperor and the gods, they must be punished (by death). Repeatedly, the Roman proconsul attempted to persuade Polycarp to avoid martyrdom by worshiping the gods. Polycarp made a reply for the ages: “For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no evil. How could I curse my king, who saved me?” Those early Christians did not think that martyrdom was something one chose, but something for which one was chosen by God. Those so chosen were strengthened by Christ who suffered with them and for that reason they were able to stand firm.

Justin Martyr (circa 165)—Justin was perhaps the best-known Christian scholar of the time and a founder of a school at Rome. He was martyred during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

Felicitas (203)—Felicitas was a consecrated widow who devoted all her time to Church work and was supported by the Church. She and her seven sons were accused by pagan priests of being Christians. They stood firm and were executed in the persecution of Septimius Severus.

Origen's father (early 200s)—The death of the father of Origen, was part of a persecution under Septimius Severus, which was particularly severe in North Africa and Egypt. Origen, the famous Alexandrian theologian and writer, then in his teens, was prevented from identifying himself as an earnest Christian to the searching authorities by his resourceful mother, who hid all his clothes. Origen decided that mooning everyone for Jesus was less than an optimal testimony. Later, Origen wrote *Exhortation to Martyrdom,* which made the case that the death of the martyr is the closest possible conformity to the witness of Christ.

Cyprian (258)—The influential bishop of Carthage was beheaded in 258 during the persecution under Valerian.

§1-171. Legacy of martyrs and confessors—Martyrs and confessors were the heroes of the age of persecution. Their memory was honored, and believers treasured the stories of their heroism. The courage of the martyrs and confessors was noted by friend and foe alike. A theology of martyrdom and a cult practice of venerating martyrs arose. There was the sense of a special grace involved and that martyrs participated in the suffering of Christ (Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10).

Pause and Ponder—The example of the martyrs causes us to rethink our notions of discipleship. Faithful service is wonderful, but faithful unto death? Would I follow Him then? Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words in *The Cost of Discipleship* are apropos: "Jesus Christ invites His disciple to come and die." That statement may play out metaphorically or literally in the lives of disciples. Thousands died in the Roman persecutions. Today, hundreds of thousands die each year for their faith.

F. Problem of the Lapsed

§1-181. In general—This was a time when Christians were under the persistent threat of persecution. The focus of the early Montanists on advocating the willing acceptance of martyrdom rather than avoidance of it by flight and on opposing the lenient treatment (i.e. forgiveness) for moral failure of those within the Church, highlights one of the great questions before the Church in that day. What was the Church to do with those who had weakened in one way or another during the persecution? In what manner should they be readmitted to the Church, or should they be readmitted at all? Should the purity of the body be the primary concern or should forgiving love be the characteristic note of the body of Christ? If you do forgive, how do you know that repentance is genuine and who forgives on behalf of the Church?

Key corollaries—There were key doctrinal corollaries that arose out of persecution and how to manage the question of the lapsed:

- The essential nature of the Church—is it a society of saints or one of sinners?
- The unity of the Church became an issue as well as the essential nature of that unity. Was unity organizational or organic? It was in the context of divisions growing out of the question of the lapsed that Cyprian, the influential third century bishop of Carthage, asserted that the unity of the Church was essentially

ecclesiastical (organizational) and not theological (organic or doctrinal). The true oneness of the Church was in the unity of the college of bishops. It was in this backdrop that Stephen, bishop of Rome at the time, first made the claim of Roman primacy.

- It was in dealing with the lapsed without expelling them that penance arose as the option for those desiring a mixture of discipline and compassion.

§1-182. Montanists as forerunners—The Montanists were the forerunners of the advocates for moral rigor of the Church in the third and fourth centuries. In the late second century, they took the Church to task for slipping morally. This group had lofty standards but were harshly judgmental. They opposed the lenient treatment (i.e. forgiveness) for moral failure of those within the Church and advocated the willing acceptance of martyrdom rather than avoidance of it by flight.

Montanism flourished in an era before the general persecutions of the Church. What to do with those who recanted during times of oppression was a local matter rather than a more general concern of the Church. However, the attitudes of this group foreshadowed those of the Novatians and Donatists.

§1-183. Cyprian and Novatian—The Decian persecution began in 250. Fabian, bishop of Rome, was one of the first arrested and died in prison. The loss of his firm hand at the helm, led to Roman believers giving in to the emperor's demands to make sacrifice to the pagan gods and to other aspects of the official edicts. After Decius' death, the church was confronted with how to manage the lapsed who sought forgiveness and readmission into the church. The new Roman bishop allowed readmission with lenient conditions, seeing the church as a hospital and a school for sinners. Novatian and a group of like-minded presbyters viewed the church as a society of saints and thought that the lapsed should be treated sternly. Indeed, they thought the lapsed should remain in a lifelong state of repentance without reinstatement to the assembly. The acrimony was intense. Novatian was excommunicated and his followers installed him as a rival bishop of Rome.

***Key roles*—**During the debate on this question, Cyprian and Novatian played key roles. Cyprian had become a Christian around the age of forty and shortly thereafter was elected bishop of Carthage. He was an accomplished author and speaker. Decius' persecution arose shortly after he became a bishop. Cyprian fled to a secure location with other leaders of the church at Carthage and continued his ministry with extensive correspondence. This was viewed as an act of cowardice. Cyprian insisted that he did this for the good of the Church. He would prove his courage within the decade with his martyrdom in the persecution of Valerian. At the onset of the controversy, his authority was challenged, with many considering that the martyrs and confessors of the Church at Carthage held greater authority than he did.

Cyprian's maturing views—Cyprian published a work *On the Unity of the Catholic Church,* arguing that splitting the church was far worse a sin than lapsing in a period of persecution. In his mind, the church was a visible, united body and was essential for

salvation. His famous quote came to represent this position: “He cannot have God as his Father who does not have the Church as his mother.”

However, Cyprian argued that the lapsed should be reinstated only after suitable repentance. Many confessors and others wanted to readmit the lapsed directly without further disciplinary measures in proof of repentance. Cyprian did not want to treat restoration lightly. A community of flawed saints, the Church undoubtedly was, but not one of unrepentant idolaters and apostates. The sacramental idea of Penance arose in this context.

The Emperor Valerian doubled down on persecution in the period between 257 and his death in 260, Cyprian, Novatian, and others lost their lives. The followers of Novatian remained unreconciled with the larger church and became even more rigorist. In their minds other sins warranted being separated from the church, including murder, adultery, idolatry, and even divorce. They described themselves as *katharoi*, the pure ones. They continued as a separate group until the 5th century, at which time they were absorbed into the Donatists, another schismatic group.

***Synod at Carthage*—**Cyprian called a synod to determine the question of readmission of the lapsed into the communion of the Church. This met at Carthage in 251 adopted a compromise position between the hard-liners and those who saw ready forgiveness as more in line with the faith. This position led to a more formal penitential practice in connection with the remission of serious sin after Baptism. It was around this time, Tertullian and others began to distinguish between mortal and venial sin to determine when, and to what degree, penance was required of those who committed serious sin prior to readmission to full communion with the Church.

***Church as institution promoted*—**In addition to the question of penitential practice, this controversy raised the issue of who should administer this practice. Cyprian insisted that the institutional Church, namely the communion of bishops, should regulate this in attending to the unity of the body. He was a strong advocate of the primacy of the bishop. The question of the lapsed had caused schism in the church at Rome and Cyprian took a dim view of counter-churches who announced themselves as the “true” Church when they disagreed on an issue. It was in this context, that Cyprian famously said, “there is only one Church and there is no salvation outside the Church.”

This tension between purity and forgiving love repeatedly divided the western Church in the upcoming centuries. It was out of this concern that the penitential practice of western Catholicism arose. Centuries later, the Protestants would protest this penitential practice and its many extrapolations.

***Pause and ponder*—**Let us reflect on the problematic legacy of the Novatian schism. In the West, structural church authority, in and of itself, as reflected by Cyprian's famous quote, was becoming the norm. This represented a significant move to understanding the church in institutional terms rather than in organic or ontological terms. It was viewed more as a building, built of certain people (Christ as the cornerstone and the bishops as

building stones) than as an organic body. The concept of the church as structure carried with it the idea that one could only be saved if one was within the structure. In addition, the church moved away from the idea of purity as a defining mark and replaced it with unity. It welcomed the whole of society with minimum requirements for admission. When Constantine changed the dynamic between church and state, it meant that the church was soon to be awash with nominal, opportunistic members. Furthermore, in the west, the church became increasingly occupied with itself as an institution. The Novatian controversy of the third century and the Donatist controversy of the fourth and fifth centuries led directly to medieval Roman Catholicism.

§1-184. Donatus and the Donatist schism—The Donatist controversy was another instance in which people disagreed on how to treat those who lapsed in a time of persecution. The Novatian controversy had wrangled over this issue in the third century. Donatists were a fourth century version of it. What changed was the context of the Church in the respective eras. In the third century, the Church was still suspect and always in danger of oppression. Being a Christian was far from fashionable. After Constantine's ascension as sole emperor in 324, the Church was favored and being a Christian was increasingly a ticket to climb the institutional ladders of the day.

Episcopal succession—During the final great persecution under Diocletian and Galerius (303-311), many recanted under extreme pressure. The Donatist dispute arose over the election of the bishop of Carthage in 311, which occurred in this contextual backdrop. The candidate advocating the purity of the Church claimed that his rival was "unworthy" of the office of bishop. The majority party elected the rival as bishop. The minority elected a counter-bishop who had a vigorous advocate in Donatus. Donatus later succeeded this man. The minority position was an extreme sectarian one—the Church and its decisions are authentic only when uncompromised. The validity of the Church's sacraments and ordination of its priests and bishops depended on the personal holiness of the minister. Constantine summoned a council at Arles in Gaul in 314, which decided for the majority's position. Donatus rejected the council's decision and started his own church in North Africa.

The theological issue was how to deal with the lapsed and the corollary concern of whether acts performed by an "unworthy" bishop were valid. Believing the sanctity of the Church depended on the loyalty and morality of its members, the Donatists opposed leniency to those who had fallen away in persecutions. Donatus went on to claim that his followers were the true, pure Church and that the sacraments performed by fallen bishops were not valid.

Others, whose primary spokesman was Augustine, thought the Donatists were morally unrealistic and outwardly proud. Augustine pointed to the parable of the wheat and the tares (Mt. 13:24-30) and insisted that the judgment of worthiness be left to the Lord. He saw the Church as a mixed multitude and believed that the sacraments were effective despite the moral stance of the bishop or cleric administering them. The issue is whether the Church is composed of sinners or not. Are the sacraments valid only when performed

by those who are personally holy (*ex opera operantis*) or are they valid when performed by any legitimate minister in a proper manner (*ex opera operato*)?

***Constantine and the Donatists*—**Constantine decided against the schismatic church (the Donatists) and criticized the accusations against the bishop selected by the majority. The Dontists saw these actions as reinforcing their perception that the larger church was not the church at all. It was impure and bastardized. There were about two hundred fifty Donatist bishops in North Africa alone and the two entities, the larger church and the Donatists, settled into an extended period of suspicious and unneighborly co-existence. By the end of the fourth century, the Donatists may have outnumbered the "larger" church in North Africa.

§1-185. Additional twists to the Donatist controversy—The Donatist controversy also reflected economic, social, and geographical divides in the North African Church. In many respects, it was at its core a class conflict. The Donatists represented elements of the native Punic population of North Africa who lived in the countryside and saw Rome as a foreign and oppressive force. The more urban and Romanized faction was wealthier and latinized.

***Circumcellions revolt*—**With the ascension of Constantine, elements which the lower classes had always hated seemed to have taken control of the Church. Around 340, there appeared among the Donatists a militant faction called the *circumcellions*, a name taken from their practice of locating their headquarters in the tombs of the martyrs. The *circumcellions* lead an armed revolt or guerilla war against the Romanized elite. The Romans felt they had no recourse but to use force.

In 403, the Emperor Honarius demanded that the Donatists rejoin the larger church, forbade rebaptism, and excluded Manichaeans and Donatists from holding positions at court. Augustine joined in on this stance using Luke 14:23 to legitimize using governmental coercion to enforce religious conformity. This proved to be a most unfortunate precedent for Western Christianity. A regional council in 411 sided with the larger church and spurred Honarius on to using ever harsher measures against the Donatists.

The measures of the larger church to eradicate the Donatists were ineffective because of the great political changes occurring at the time. Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410. The Vandals occupied North Africa in 429, besieging Hippo in 430 as Augustine lay dying. They captured Carthage in 439. Augustine composed his famous *City of God* in this time interval. The Donatists steadfastly refused to join the larger church and maintained an active presence in North Africa until around 700 when Carthage was taken by Muslim armies.

***Pause and ponder*—**

- Augustine strengthened the tie between being in the right church and the efficacy of the sacraments and loosened the bond between the sacraments and the worthiness of the priests that performed them. This gave rise to the impression

that the sacrament in and of itself possessed spiritual power. The western church began moving in a direction the Reformers wanted to reverse—an excessive focus on the church as institution, an unhealthy view of the sacraments focused on outward performance by proper authorities, and too much attention to the formal authority of priests.

- We (Protestants) strongly disagree with the idea that to be saved one must be in the "right" institutional church. We see the church in organic terms, the universal, invisible church. For Protestants, "heresy" is a mistake or inadequacy of doctrine/belief on an issue so central to the faith that if the heretic was right, salvation would be impossible. Thus, heresy is a major misunderstanding concerning God, or Christ, or our state of being before almighty God. Schism is a church split that may or may not be heretical. If it is over an issue not central to salvation, the group is understood as schismatic but still orthodox.
- Roman Catholics think differently on this. They do not make a definite distinction between schism and heresy. Prior to Vatican II, being saved depended on being in the right group (the Roman Catholic Church) and affirming the central truths about the true God who saves. Even after Vatican II, the legacy of prior history lives on.
- Modern Protestants often find themselves on the horns of this schismatic debate, thinking of the church as a society of saints, pure people bearing witness to the redeeming power of the gospel, yet valuing being a welcoming church and decrying rigorous standards as often judgmental and unworthy of the name of Christ.
- Modern Protestants do not view schism as seriously as the early believers. We have learned to live with church splits for both significant and trivial reasons. Perhaps we need to be less accepting of them.

G. Apologists and Early Christian Writers

§1-191. In general—With the rise of persecution, Christians felt the need to refute rumors and misconceptions regarding their beliefs and practices. A group of writers arose to respond to pagan criticism and slander in defense of the faith. History knows them as the apologists, from the Greek *apologia*, meaning the making of a defense. Jewish authors, such as Philo and Josephus, foreshadowed this apologetic. They responded to anti-Semitic charges with histories and philosophic treatises that demonstrated that the Jewish law and manner of life were philanthropic and beneficial. In the New Testament, the book of Acts displays elements of apologetic literature. "The Way" is portrayed as benevolent and unthreatening to the social order.

The early apologists in the second and third century wrote in Greek. Their writing shared certain features, including addressing the emperor, attacking idolatry, and making the case for the legal innocence of Christians and the injustice of persecuting them. They wrote in response to specific attacks by pagan writers like Celsus, Galen, Epictetus, Porphyry, and Marcus Aurelius.

The earliest apologists were Quadratus, *Letter to Diognetus*, and Aristides who wrote an apology about 138. Justin Martyr was the most famous second-century apologist. He wrote an apology and a *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jewish rabbi. Justin's student Tatian wrote an *Address to the Greeks* and Athenagoras composed *A Plea for the Christians* and a treatise entitled *On the Resurrection of the Dead.* Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, wrote three books entitled *To Autolycus*, which dealt with the doctrine of God, the interpretation of Scripture, and the practical Christian life. Origen wrote a masterful refutation *Against Celsus* in the early part of the third century. The Latin writers included Minucius Felix (*Octavius*) and Tertullian (*Apology*).

§1-192. Arguments of the apologists—The apologists labored to refute basic claims made by the pagans:

Atheism—Christians were accused of being atheists because they had no visible gods. Christian apologists replied that the greatest pagan philosophers and poets were atheists in a like manner. They quoted from pagan sources that asserted the pagan gods were human inventions. Some, like Athenagoras, claimed that such invented gods gave full rein to human vice. They asked how a god made by human hands could be above humans.

Resurrection of the body—This was anathema to Greek thought in the day. The apologists responded to their mockery by recourse to divine omnipotence. If God made bodies out of nothing, why is it so unthinkable that the same God can create them anew, even after they are dead and scattered?

Immorality—To the claim that the Christians were immoral, the apologists bluntly denied it and charged the pagans of the day with rank immorality.

Subversive—To the charge that the Christians were subversive and destroying the very fabric of society in refusing to worship the emperor and the gods and to withdraw from many social functions, the apologists replied by affirming that the Christians refused to worship false gods and any other creature, but that despite this they were loyal subjects of the Empire. Christians were obedient subjects and faithfully lifted the emperor and the Empire up to the one true God in prayer.

Christian faith and pagan culture—Accused of being uncultured barbarians and "haters of mankind" because they absented themselves from various social functions, Christians needed to take up the issue of the relationship of their faith with pagan culture. Pagan civil ceremonies frequently included sacrifices and vows made to the pagan gods. Christians saw participation in these as tantamount of idolatry. Likewise, many Christians adopted a pacifist stance concluding that they could not be soldiers not only from Jesus' teaching about treatment of enemies but also because soldiers were required to offer sacrifices to the emperor and the gods. Others argued against the study of classical literature because the gods played an important part in these works and all sorts of immorality was ascribed to them.

***Disagreements*—**There was general agreement that Christians must abstain from idolatry, but not about abstaining from the pagan classics. Many argued that to reject Plato, Aristotle, and various Stoic thinkers was to reject the highest achievements of human wisdom. The Alexandrian circle was particularly of this mind. Others went in the opposite direction. Tertullian insisted on a radical opposition between Christian faith and pagan culture. "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What does the Academy have to do with the Church? he asked. He was convinced that most of the heresies that circulated in his time were the result of attempts to combine pagan philosophy with Christian doctrine. Others gloried in the "barbaric" origins of Christianity over against the "cultured pagans." Tatian's *Address to the Greeks* was a frontal attack on what the Greeks considered valuable.

Those interested in reading some samples of early Christian writings should consider:

- Ignatius—Richardson 100
- 2 Clement—Richardson 193
- Justin Martyr—Richardson 248 et seq.
- Athenagoras—Richardson 308-309
- Irenaeus—Richardson 370, 374-375

§1-193. Beginnings of Christian philosophy—Apologetic literature contributed to the development of a sense within Christianity of having a place in the wider world and created a reasoned case for the Christian religious movement. It marked the emergence of Christian intellectual self-consciousness. With the apologists of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, Christianity took its first steps toward claiming a place within the Greco-Roman culture on its own terms.

***Self-definition*—**The second century has been called "the century of Christian self-definition." The apologists drew the basic line regarding the Greco-Roman culture, accepting its rhetoric and philosophy (especially Plato), but rejecting all pagan religion (deemed as fictional, fraudulent, confused, and even demonic). The ancient philosophical conviction that right morals derived from right opinion reinforced the emphasis on doctrine within the Christian tradition. Equally, the heritage of philosophy as a "way of being religious as moral transformation" found expression in later forms of monasticism. There was considerable difference toward the use of Greek philosophy in defining the Christian tradition. Some believers wished to wed philosophy and Christianity, others to divorce the two. Those in the East were inclined to seek accommodation; those in the West to point out distinctions.

§1-194. Justin Martyr—Justin Martyr (100-165) marks the birth of Christian philosophy. Justin was an apologist to Emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161). His *Apology* expanded upon a defense of the faith from a negative assessment of pagan religion to a positive one of Platonism. He represented Christianity as the best of all the philosophies, summing up the best aspects of Gentile and Jewish wisdom. He used Greek philosophy extensively and pictured Christ as the divine *Logos*. His writing marked the beginning of a cultural dialogue with Hellenism and a semi-alliance with philosophy.

***Background*—**Justin was born a pagan in Samaria and wandered through various philosophical schools before his conversion. He lived through an extended spiritual journey, going from school to school, until he found in Christianity what he called the "true philosophy". When he came to faith, he took upon himself the task of doing Christian philosophy. A major part of this task was to explain the connection between Christianity and classical wisdom. He claimed that there were several points of contact between Christianity and classical pagan philosophy. The best pagan philosophers spoke of a supreme being from which other beings derive their existence. Socrates and Plato both affirmed life after physical death. Plato posited a reality beyond the present world, a world of eternal realities, which was the basis for knowing things in this present world. Justin may not have agreed which all the details of their claims, but he insisted that the philosophers had glimpses of truth and that could not be explained as mere coincidence.

***Logos*—**Justin found the reason for this coincidence in the doctrine of the *Logos*. Greek philosophy asserted that the human mind could understand reality because it shared in the *Logos* or universal reason that undergirded all reality. Justin noted that John's gospel affirms that in Jesus, the *Logos* or Word was made flesh. According to Justin, what happened in the Incarnation was that the underlying reason behind the universe had become flesh. This *Logos* was the true light enlightening everyone. Pagan philosophers knew this remotely. In a way, Plato and other sages of the ages were "Christians" to the extent that the *Logos* had enlightened them in their thinking. The philosophers of old knew the *Logos* in part, while Christians who had seen him in his incarnation knew him fully. Thus, Justin opened the way for Christians to claim whatever good they found in classical culture, despite its paganism.

***Jewish dialogue*—**Justin attempted to dialogue with Judaism and to keep that dialogue civil in tone. His *Dialogue with Typhro* reports a fictional conversation between Jewish and Christian philosophers centering on which version of the Scripture was accurate (Hebrew or Greek Septuagint) and on whether Christ fulfilled biblical prophecy. Justin developed the standard Christian reply to Jewish charges. Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies concerning his suffering in his first coming and will fulfill the triumphal Messianic prophecies in his second coming.

§1-195. Clement of Alexandria—Clement of Alexandria (150-215) was the first significant representative of the Alexandrian theological tradition. Born to pagan parents in Athens, the citadel of philosophical speculation in the Roman Empire, Clement came to faith as a young man and undertook a search for a teacher who could give him deeper instruction in the Christian faith. He found that teacher in Pantaenus of Alexandria, of whom we know little. He succeeded his teacher as head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria. He and his student and successor, Origen, tried to blend into Christianity all that was best of the Hellenistic world, especially Platonic and Stoic philosophies.

***Pagan intelligentsia*—**Clement desired to be an apostle (a sent one) to the Hellenistic intellectual world. Clement was not so much a pastor, but a thinker and a searcher of truth. His goal was not so much to expound the traditional faith of the Church as a

shepherd but to convince pagan intellectuals that Christianity was not an absurd superstition. Clement's project proceeded in three stages:

- The *Protrepticus* (Exhortator) was a classic call to conversion. He attacked pagan errors and argued for the truth of Christianity.
- The *Paidoggogos* (Instructor) offered an extensive instructive catalogue of Christian moral behavior.
- The *Didaskalos* (Teacher) was a learned treatise on Christianity's use of Scripture and its relation to philosophy.

Clement attempted to demonstrate to pagan readers that a good part of Christian doctrine was supported by Plato's philosophy. Clement was convinced that there is only one truth, and that therefore any truth to be found in Plato could be none other than the truth that has been revealed in Jesus Christ and in the Scripture. Philosophy was given to the Greeks in the same manner as the Law was given to the Hebrews. The philosophers were to the Greeks, what the prophets were to the Hebrews.

***Use of allegory*—**How could Clement arrive as such a conclusion? How did he harmonize Scripture and the philosophers? Clement believed that the scriptures were written allegorically. The sacred text has more than one meaning. The literal sense ought not be set aside. But there was deeper truth beyond the literal sense. He found five possible meanings to a given passage of Scripture:

- Literal or historical sense (e.g. taking the story at its face value).
- Doctrinal sense (e.g. mining the obvious moral, religious, and theological teachings of the passage).
- Prophetical sense (including predictive prophecy and typology).
- Philosophical sense (which allowed for believers to follow Platonic and Stoical cosmic and psychological meanings).
- Mystical sense (e.g. "deeper" spiritual and religious truth symbolized by otherwise mundane events and persons).

Although Clement saw himself as an interpreter of Scripture, his allegorical exegesis allowed him to find in the sacred text ideas and doctrines that were Platonic in inspiration.

***Logos*—**Clement identifies the Word or *Logos* with the Ineffable One of Neoplatonic thought. This Ineffable One, about which one could only speak in metaphors or in negative assertions, had become incarnate in Jesus. He follows the direction earlier set by Justin Martyr in making the *Logos* the linchpin of Christian-pagan dialogue. For Clement, Christianity is the true and final philosophy. Jesus was the *Logos*, the source of all wisdom and truth, and a teacher, one way or another, of all peoples everywhere. In this he went beyond Justin Martyr. Justin used the *Logos* to show pagans the truth of Christianity. Clement uses the *Logos* to call Christians to be open to the truth in pagan philosophy. Clement's enduring importance was that his thought became characteristic of the atmosphere and tradition that developed in Alexandria. That reality would be of great significance for the subsequent course of theology.

§1-196. Origen—Origen (185-254) was the greatest theologian of the early Greek Church, famous for his fusion of Greek thought and biblical exposition. The son of Christian parents, he was a student of Clement of Alexandria at the famed Catechetical School. He became the head of that academy at age eighteen when Clement was forced to flee Alexandria because of the persecution in which Origen's own father died.

After training catechumens for several years, Origen entrusted that task to his best disciples and devoted himself to running a school of Christian philosophy (very similar to the great classical schools of philosophy). Enlightened pagans were drawn due to Origen's increasing fame, including the mother of the emperor and the governor of Arabia. Origen stayed at Alexandria from 202 to 230 until a conflict with Bishop Demetrius (for several reasons, not the least of which was jealousy) grew to the point that he left Alexandria and settled in Caesarea. He continued to write and lecture there for the next twenty years. In the persecution of Decius, Origen was severely tortured and, shortly after his release, died at age 70.

Literary works—Origen's output was enormous. He compiled the *Hexapla*, an edition of the Old Testament in six columns: a Hebrew text, a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, and four different Greek translations of the text. This came complete with an entire system of symbols indicating variants, omissions, and additions. He wrote commentaries on the books of the Bible, an apologetic work entitled *Against Celsus*, and the first truly systematic theology text entitled *De Principiis* (On First Principles). This was Bible-focused work but made extensive use of allegory in interpretation. These works were just the tip of the iceberg. He kept numerous secretaries busy taking down his dictation.

Origen linked philosophy and faith—Origen's work was Christian thought worked out in response to Platonism and Gnosticism. He thought there could be no genuine piety in one who despised philosophy, and that true philosophy focused eventually on revelation—attracted to its beauty and wisdom. Origen saw philosophy as more than a collection of ideas, but a way to forge the character of a person. Origen's work was particularly important in its day—it appealed to intellectual people to believe the Bible to be a worthwhile standard and guide.

Origen's theology was like his teacher, Clement, and very representative of the Alexandrian school. He attempted to relate Christian faith to the Platonic philosophical tradition current in the Alexandria of his day. Aware of the danger of favoring the teachings of the philosophers he declared that "nothing which is at variance with the tradition of the apostles and of the Church is to be accepted as true." That tradition included:

- There was only one God, creator, and ruler of the universe, and Gnostic speculations regarding the origin of the world were to be rejected.
- Jesus is the Son of God, begotten before all creation, and that his incarnation is such that, while becoming human, he remained divine.
- The Holy Spirit's glory is no less than that of the Father and the Son.
- At a future time, the soul will be rewarded or punished according to life in this world.

***Speculation*—**Beyond these points, Origen felt free to rise in great speculative flights. For example, he took the accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 as accounts of two creations, the first purely spiritual devoted to the contemplation of the divine. When some strayed from this, God made a second creation of material, and it serves as a shelter or temporary home for fallen spirits. This implies that human souls existed as "pure spirits or intellects before being born into the world and the reason we are here is because we sinned in that prior purely spiritual existence." Although Origen claims this is based on the Bible, it is clearly derived from the Platonic traditions of the day.

Origen understood that in this present world, Satan and his demons have us captive and that Jesus Christ came to break the power of Satan and to show us the path to our spiritual home. Moreover, since the devil is a spirit and since God is love, in the end, even Satan will be saved and the entire creation will return to its original state, where everything is pure spirit. However, since spirits will still be free, there is nothing to guarantee that there will not be a new fall, a new material world, a new history, and that the cycle of fall, restoration, and fall will not go on forever.

Origen proposed this, not as truth to be accepted or as superseding Church doctrine, but as his own tentative speculations. Nevertheless, in many ways, Origen is more Platonist than Christian. While he rejects Marcion and the Gnostics in seeing the created world as inferior, he concludes that the physical world and all history is the result of sin. When it comes to the pre-existence of the soul and the eternal cycle of fall and restoration, Origen strays from Christianity as normally taught.

***Second Constantinople (553)*—**Centuries later, he was later attacked for lack of a literal exegesis, for denying the reality of hell, and for holding that the *Logos* was eternally generated by the Father. Origen was declared a heretic at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, almost three hundred years after his death, for being out of step with the decisions of the Council of Nicaea, decided seventy-five years after his death.

§1-197. Irenaeus—Irenaeus (130-202) was a native of Asia Minor and a disciple of Polycarp. He migrated to Lyons in Gaul and became a presbyter in the church there. He was on a mission to Rome when persecution under Marcus Aurelius broke out in Lyons and Vienne. When he returned to Lyons, he was elected bishop and served faithfully until he himself was martyred in 202.

Irenaeus was a pastor and not particularly interested in philosophical speculation. Only two of his works survive: *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* and *Against Heresies*. The first is instruction on points of doctrine and the second is a refutation of Gnosticism. His writings are not grand flights of thought, but feet on the ground instruction of believers. Christian truth is not a matter of personal or individual experience but of communal teaching (orthodoxy) and moral behavior (orthopraxy). Christianity is inherently social and institutional in nature.

History is purposeful—Irenaeus saw himself as a shepherd and saw God as a shepherd as well. The entirety of history is a process whereby the divine shepherd leads his good creation to its final goal. Human beings are not a mistake or an accident but free and responsible beings who can grow in communion with the divine. Humanity is instructed by the "two hands of God: Word and Spirit." The purpose of this instruction is an increasingly close communion with God. The goal is what Irenaeus called "divinization"—God's purpose is making us ever more like Himself. This vision does not mean that humans are lost in the divine or that we will ever be the same as God. No matter how much we grow in divine likeness we shall always have a long way to go.

The incarnation of God in Christ is not merely a response to sin. God's initial purpose included being united with humanity. The future incarnate Word was the model that God followed in creating humanity in his own image. The great drama of redemption was no afterthought. Israel had an important role in that drama—the Old Testament is not the revelation of a God alien to Christian faith. At the proper time, the Word was incarnate in Jesus Christ, and in his life, death, and resurrection a new humanity has been created. Jesus has corrected what was twisted because of sin. He has defeated the enemy and enabled us to live in renewed freedom. The Kingdom grows in his body the Church, but even at the end when the Kingdom is fully unveiled, God's task as a shepherd will continue. Redeemed humanity will continue growing into greater communion with the divine. The process of "divinization" will go on eternally, taking us ever closer to God.

What we find in Irenaeus is a grand vision of history. The focal point of history is the incarnation, not only because through it God's word straightened the twisted history of humanity, but because from the very beginning the union of the divine with humanity was the goal. God's purpose is to be joined to humanity, and this has taken place in a unique way in Jesus Christ.

Heresy warrior—Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies*, deployed the basic approaches the Church would adopt in defining Christian orthodoxy:

- Canon of Scripture—the texts and traditions to be relied upon;
- Creed as the rule of faith; and
- Council—that is, the authority of the bishops properly assembled to address matters of doctrine and practice.

Because of the proliferation of so-called "revealed" literature, it was necessary to establish a canon (true measure) of the compositions that could be used to define Christian teaching and practice. In rebutting Gnostics, Irenaeus named his sources from the Old and New Testament, indicating which were authoritative. To provide a doctrinal framework for Christian faith, Irenaeus drew on the developing tradition of the rule of faith (or creed). His rule of faith was like the Apostle's Creed. In addition, to canon and creed, Irenaeus asserts the historical priority of apostolic succession of bishops.

With Irenaeus, we see the definitive emergence of what constitutes Christian orthodoxy. Christianity is not first a matter of private experience, but of public and communal identity. It is emphatically material, with a positive view of body, time, and institution in

contrast with Gnosticism and the wonder-working exponents. In facing future challenges to Christian identity and faith, the path forward would be for bishops to meet in councils and, based on canonical texts, interpret the meaning of the creed or rule of faith.

§1-198. Tertullian—As a young man, Tertullian (160-225) went to Rome to study law and fell into a licentious lifestyle. He converted to Christianity in 197, returned to Carthage in North Africa, and gave himself to the defense of the gospel. He spoke to the educated pagans of his day by emphasizing the difference between Christian faith and current philosophies. He was particularly apt at pithy sayings ("The blood of the Christians is the seed of the Church") and the concise formulation of ideas.

He was a moral rigorist (perhaps because of his own libertine past) and later in life became a Montanist. He emphasized practical application over speculative thought and separation from the world over cultural adaptation. His ideas on the emerging practice of penance (just one time after baptism) seem stark and severe. He placed great emphasis on the purity of the Church and was not particularly tactful as an apologetic writer. His polemic *Against the Jews* lacked the civility that characterized Justin Martyr's earlier dialogues with Jewish writers. Tertullian stressed that the Church completely superseded Israel. Because the Jews rejected the son of God, they have lost their status as God's people.

***Apologist*—**Tertullian wrote several apologies in defense of the faith. They make a plea for Christianity's legal recognition because of its fundamentally philanthropic character. However, his call for freedom of religion and toleration was just for Christians. In this, he mirrored attitudes that prevailed in later centuries.

In his other writings, he argued vigorously against heretics, including Marcion and Valentinus. In his *Prescription Against the Heretics*, his aim is to show that not only are the heretics wrong but that they do not even have the right to dispute with the Church. He claimed that the Scriptures belong to the Church and the heretics had no right to use the Bible. The Scriptures are the writings of the apostles to the apostolic Churches who agree on their use and interpretation. The rightful owner of the Scripture (the Church) is the only one with the right to interpret it. This argument against heretics has been used against various dissidents throughout the ages. It was one of the main arguments made by apologists against Protestants in the 16th century and has been used by Catholic authorities to buttress the magisterial claims of the Roman Church.

Tertullian's rigidity goes beyond the contours of an argument like the one above. He thought that once a person found the truth of Christianity, they should abandon any further search for truth. The accepted body of Christian doctrine should suffice, and any quest for truth that goes beyond this body of doctrine is dangerous. Tertullian, in essence, condemned all speculation. It was just risky curiosity.

***Doctrinal works*—**Tertullian made numerous theological contributions. Among these include first clear formula for the Trinity, clarification on the God-man Jesus and the Incarnation, and a vigorous refutation of monarchicalism and Gnosticism. In his battle

against doctrinal error, Tertullian coined formulas that were to be of great importance in later Trinitarian and Christological debates. In *Against Praxeas* (probably another name for Calixtus, then bishop of Rome), Tertullian framed an argument against the understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as simply three modes in which God appeared. History knows this understanding as *patripassianism* (the Father suffered the passion) or *monarchical modalism* (various persons of the Trinity are simply modes in which God appears). The correct understanding according to Tertullian was "one substance in three persons." Likewise, when he discussed the God-man Jesus, he spoke of "one person" and "two substances" or "two natures". In this, Tertullian anticipated the formulas that would eventually become the hallmarks of orthodoxy.

***Ironic career*—**In 207, this untiring advocate of Church authority joined the Montanist movement. Tertullian was drawn to the Montanists by their moral rigor. He was disenchanted by the continuing sin of Christians, and it helped his exacting mind to see it as an intermediate stage that was superseded by the age of the Spirit that Montanus foretold. Tertullian later became disappointed with Montanism and toward the end of his life founded his own sect.

Tertullian's career is ironic. A fiery champion of orthodoxy against every sort of heresy and yet, in the end, he joined a movement that the Church at large considered heretical, or at best, dangerously out of the mainstream. However, even after this move, he produced writings and theological formulas that were very influential in the future course of theology. He wrote in Latin and his formulations became part of the theological lexicon of Latin Christendom in the following centuries. Many regard him as the first western theologian.

II. Church in Christian Kingdoms and Beyond

A. Roman Empire—Historical Milieu

§1-201. In general—Christianity's journey from persecution under Diocletian (284-305) to toleration under Constantine (306-337) is much more than the inclinations of great men. Beneath the surface, powerful social forces were at work. The Roman Empire, having left its republican roots, had become increasingly autocratic. In becoming a patron of Christianity, it found itself backing a religion with an ambiguous stance towards the use of power. Christianity had flourished as a religious movement during centuries of oppression and persecution. It was a faith committed to peace, nonviolence, and other countercultural values. Now it found itself as the pillar and support of the world's mightiest military and political power.

***Christian "conquest"*—**The 4th and 5th centuries saw the Christian "conquest" of the Empire. The 4th century opened with the Christianity outlawed and hunted and ended with the Christian Emperor Theodosius making Christianity the official religion and outlawing paganism. Christianity became a player in the larger arena with a strong internal organization, an empire-wide system of communication, and an increasing

confidence in its moral and intellectual superiority. The late 3rd to the early 5th centuries tells the story of how a persecuted faith became the established religion of the Empire.

Significant developments for the faith included:

- Competing forms of Christianity, Gnostics, Montanists, Manichaeans, Marcionites, Arians, Nestorians, and the Monophysites, made the definition of orthodoxy a priority.
- The Church continued to grow as a hierarchical organization. The idea of the Church as a visible, hierarchal organization was rapidly replacing the idea of the Church as the mystical body of Christ. The power of the monarchial bishop continued to grow and there was a clear rise of the patriarchal sees—Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem.
- The canon was defined as the source and the measuring stick of the faith.
- Councils answered questions concerning the nature of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.
- Significant Church fathers arose in these conflicts—Cappadocians in the East, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine in the West.

§1-202. Fourth century—Christianity moved from a position of being politically downtrodden and persecuted to one of influence, preference, and power. However, the fortunes of the faith were closely wed to the precarious position of a crumbling empire. After a respite for several decades, the Germanic migrations resumed. Emperor Valens was crushed by the Goths at Adrianople in 378. This began the final death agony of the Roman Empire as antiquity knew it, stretching out for a century.

§1-203. Fifth century—The Western Empire was overrun by Germanic peoples. The Ostrogoths seized Italy, the Visigoths took Spain, the Franks settled in Gaul, the Burgundians in the Rhone Valley, the Vandals sacked Rome before overrunning North Africa. Many of these Germanic groups had great regard for Roman civilization and institutions and the century saw a cultural blending of Germanic and Latin customs that continued to play out in the early Middle Ages.

§1-204. Roman chronology

Emperors	Bishops of Rome	Authors/documents	Events
Constantine (306-337)	Sylvester (314-335) Marcus (335-336)		Edict of Milan (313) Arian controversy Pachomius' first monastery (324) Council of Nicea (325) Constantinople founded (330)
Constantine II (337-340)	Julius (337-352)		Arianism dominant

Constantius II (337-361) and Constans (337-350)	Liberius (352-366)		
Julian (361-363)			Pagan reaction
Jovian (363-364)			
Valentinian I (364-392)			Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius die (373)
Valens (364-378)	Damasus (366-383)		Defeat at Adrianople (378)
Gratian (375-383)			Basil of Caesarea dies (379) Council of Constantinople (381)
Valentinian II (375-392)	Siricius (384-399)		Gregory of Nazianus (389), Gregory of Nyssa (395), Martin of Tours (397) and Ambrose (397) die
Theodosius (379-395)			
Maximus (383-388)			
Eugenius (392-394)			
Arcadius (395-408)	Anastasius (399-401)		
Honorius (395-423)			Rome sacked (410)
Theodosius II (408-450)	Zosimus (417-418)		Jerome (420) and Augustine (430) die.

B. Ascendancy of the Faith in an Era of Change

1. Constantine and the Transition to a New Order

§1-211. Diocletian and the reshaping of the Empire—Two key events set the stage for this:

- the worst persecution of Christians Rome ever engaged in;
- the unexpected conversion to Christianity of a Roman emperor.

Great Roman persecution—After Valerian died in 260, Christians enjoyed several decades free of persecution. However, when Diocletian ascended the throne in 284, the atmosphere at court changed. After his coronation as emperor in 284, Diocletian's first act was to leap from the Senate tribunal upon a rival and run him through with a dagger. This no-nonsense soldier turned back the Roman Empire from the abyss of chaos that threatened its utter disintegration.

Diocletian thought that the glory of Rome derived from its faithful worship of pagan gods. He was occupied with foreign wars during the first part of his reign. However, things began to change rapidly. In 299, Christians were expelled from the army. In 302, he began a persecution of the Manichaeans, a heretical sect, and then followed that with a general, Empire-wide persecution of Christians in 303. In this he was egged on by his assistant ruler, Galerius. This persecution was particularly severe in the East.

Imperial politics in Late Empire— Diocletian brought a new shape to imperial politics. In the 3rd century, the Empire suffered severe internal and external threats, particularly between 235 and 284, when it was almost reduced to anarchy. These decades saw continuous contests for imperial power that placed the Empire in a constant state of civil war. There were twenty-seven "regular" emperors during this half century, only one of whom died a natural death. Seventeen were killed by their own troops, two were compelled to commit suicide, and the rest were killed in battle. Ascension to the imperial purple became a death sentence, often a gruesome one. On the borders of the Empire, the Sassanid Empire brought the Persian/Parthian threat in the east to new heights. It reached as far west as Syria in the 250s. The Germanic tribes on the Rhine and Danube began a series of migrations, which brought increasing pressure on the Empire's northern boundaries. Splinter empires existed for a time in the middle of the third century. Finances were in terrible shape. The spoils of war from new conquests had dried up and the Empire suffered through periods of famine, plague, and monetary inflation.

Diocletian saved Rome by centralizing authority and instituting rigid social and price controls throughout the Empire. The problem of succession, the cause of the incessant, empire-wrecking civil wars, was addressed with the tetrarchy. This was a system of four rulers, two senior Augusti and two junior Caesars, the latter the Augusti's designated heirs. He established a complex bureaucracy to impose control, greatly increased the size of the army, expanded the use of mercenaries and thus breaking the tradition of the citizen army, and raised taxes significantly to pay the immense bill of all these changes. The cult of the emperor and the imperial family was emphasized as the essential religious glue of the Empire. He brought to his rule the ancient premise that unity of religious observance, albeit minimal, was the basis for political unity and stability.

Persecution—Near the end of his reign, he and his fellow emperor Galerius undertook the most violent persecution of Christians (303-311) in antiquity. However, this persecution failed to obliterate the faith and instead garnered sympathy among the pagan populace. It was finally rescinded by Galerius on his deathbed when he issued the Edict of Toleration in 311.

The Dominate—Historians describe the Roman imperial rule in the early Empire as the "principate". The system established by Augustus, though concentrating real power in the emperor, gave the impression of sharing power in numerous ways and administratively relied on private actors. Not so with Diocletian's system. The emperor became an Oriental potentate, and the state bureaucracy developed was quite elaborate. Historians describe his system as the "dominate", a telling moniker for the later Empire.

§1-212. Constantine's rise to power and subsequent career—Son of Constantius Chlorus, a Caesar of the western portion of the Empire, Constantine's rise to absolute power was a slow and deliberate process. Upon the death of his father in 306, Constantine was acclaimed by his troops at York in England as his father's successor. By 308, he had consolidated control over Gaul and Britain. By 309, he added Spain and modern Morocco. In 312, at an opportune time, he attacked and defeated Maxentius and added Italy and North Africa around Carthage. Now Augustus of the West, he was biding his time to claim the sole rule of the Empire. In 314, he seized territory in the Balkans from his co-Augustus and brother-in-law, Licinius. Finally, he defeated Licinius and became sole emperor in 324.

The remaining thirteen years of his reign was a period of prosperity, albeit a mixed one. He fought successfully against the Franks along the Rhine and the Goths on the Danube. He made military reforms of questionable value, often criticized for over-relying on German *cofederati* troops. He stabilized the currency and issued new solid gold coinage, the solidus, which was widely accepted as the commercial coinage of choice for centuries after his death. However, this was made possible by the pillaging of pagan temples, appropriating and melting down the treasures that generations of people had donated to their gods over the centuries. This despoliation was on a scale akin to that of Henry VIII's seizure of the wealth of the English monasteries in the 1530s.

In founding Constantinople as a "new Rome", probably meaning it to be a complementary eastern capital of the Empire, he showed great foresight. He chose the ancient site of Byzantium, a superb defensive position on the Bosporus Strait. It occupied an area joining Europe and Asia, with easy access by land and water for trade and for military movements. Constantinople prospered tremendously and became a monumental and almost impregnable Christian citadel for the next millennium.

Dressed in the nakedness of the empire—From the outset, Constantine set out to make the city grand, not only in size, but also in grandeur. Jerome would later say that Constantinople was dressed in the nakedness of the rest of the Empire. He engaged in great public works, including the hippodrome, public baths, a grand palace, and replicas of mansions for noble families who agreed to move to Constantinople. To populate the new city, Constantine granted all sorts of breaks, exemptions from taxation, military service, as well as free distributions of food and necessities. The city grew in an incredible manner, so much so that when Emperor Theodosius II undertook to enhance the city's defenses against barbarian inroads in the early fifth century, he had to expand the original walls, which in Constantine's day, seemed ludicrously ambitious.

Builder—Constantine was also an avid builder beyond Constantinople. He built large Christian basilicas through the Empire. His largesse included the old capital of Rome as well. His triumphal arch and magnificent imperial baths graced the city as did several grand palaces. Legend has it that Constantine gave Sylvester I of Rome land and money, which enabled the construction of the first cathedral of St. Peter. All of this was costly, as was the expense of Constantine's court and military needs. The taxes imposed to cover

the expense were quite onerous. The effects of Constantine's policies have often been blamed as contributing to the continuing economic contraction of the Empire.

Christianity perhaps changed more dramatically because of Constantine's rise to power than at any other point in history. Constantine's new capital, Constantinople, soon became the epicenter of the Christian world as well as the administrative center of the Roman Empire. Imperial money flowed to the churches, great architectural works and churches were begun, Sunday was given holiday status, Christians were favored in the growing bureaucracy. Being a Christian went from a taboo or worse to a quasi-necessary condition for career advancement. The imperial army now enforced church decisions, which not only allowed believers to flip the script of pagan persecutions but greatly complicated Church-state relations as well as believers' relations with those they disagreed with.

Concluding Reflections—

- ***Sellout of the church to paganism***—Pagans poured into the church en masse in the fourth century, many of whom remained pagan at heart, converting only superficially to Christianity. This was a problem confronting Christian leaders in the fourth century in each of the so called new Christian kingdoms. However, assertions that the church ceases to be the church when it is supported by the state are just as naive and unhelpful as blanket assertions that church has triumphed when the state affirms it.
- ***Flowering of Christian thought and writing as well as Christian architecture and art.***
- ***Very different impacts outside the Christian kingdoms than inside them***—This was particularly true for believers in Persia and countries east of Rome. The peaceful existence of the Persian church would be shattered not long after Rome's conversion, precisely because of Rome's conversion. The Persian church's situation would change as dramatically as the Roman church's situation, only in the opposite direction.

§1-213. Constantine's conversion and sponsorship of Christianity—Constantine's greatest fame was as the first Christian Roman emperor. Born a pagan and probably a follower of the unconquered Sun in his early years, he appeared to have converted to the Christian faith upon his ascension as Augustus in the West in 312. Legend has it that before the decisive battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine had a dream that he would conquer using a particular symbol. The labarum, which superimposed the Greek letters chi [**χ**] and rho [**ρ**], the first Greek letters of the name of Christ (χρϊστος), over one another, was placed on his soldiers' shields.

Protector and benefactor—After his victory, he and his co-Augustus Licinius, issued the Edict of Milan (313) allowing freedom of worship to the Christians. Constantine immediately began using his authority to become the protector and benefactor of Christianity. He released Christian prisoners, and brought back banished exiles, and returned seized property. He did more than merely remove impediments. He exempted clergy from taxation, put Christian symbols on coinage, recognized decision by Church

officials as valid and binding on Christian communities, allowed the Church to legally inherit and bequeath property, and began the practice of donating pagan temples as Christian sanctuaries. Constantine decisively placed imperial power behind the Church with the clear expectation that the Church would fully support a "Christian" imperial power.

Opportunist or genuine convert?—Constantine's conversion was markedly different than the typical conversions of the day. New Christians at that time were subjected to a long process of discipline and instruction before they were baptized. While there were Christian teachers and ecclesiastics in his entourage, Constantine determined his own religious practices from the outset. He deemed himself a "bishop of external affairs" and even the "thirteenth apostle". He was not baptized until near death and throughout his reign took part in pagan rites as high priest of paganism.

In the campaign against Licinius in 324 to consolidate his sole rule, Constantine posed as the champion of Christianity. He called the Council of Nicaea in 325 to address the Arian controversy and played a significant role at the Council. He put imperial posts at the disposal of traveling bishops. The founding of Constantinople appeared as the creation of a new Christian Rome, a clear attempt to diminish the power of the ancient aristocratic families in Rome, who were pagan stalwarts. The seeds of later religious distress were sown by Constantine's political decisions.

Many have argued that Constantine was a mere opportunist and used the faith as a new religious glue for the Empire. That he was a shrewd politician who saw Christianity as a tool of policy is undeniable. However, he seems to have been a sincere, if immature, believer with a ready mixture of faith and superstition. Constantine's religious development followed a long, slow process which responded to both the demands of political realities and his own inner development. His reign's movement from ending the persecution of Christians and returning their confiscated property to favoring them in numerous ways both in policy decisions and in bureaucratic representation seems to track the gradual growth of his own faith.

§1-214. Constantine's successors: From the sponsorship of Christianity to its establishment—Below is a diagram of three generations of Constantine's family, key people in the early years of Christian ascendancy.

Helena—----------Constantius Chlorus----------Theodora

Minervina-----Constantine-----Fausta Gala-----Constantius-----Basalina

Crispus Constantine II Gallus Julian
Constantius II
Constans

Resistance to the Christianization—Imperial favor did not mean the Empire immediately embraced Christianity as its official faith. The Arian controversy raged throughout the

fourth century and was a political and ecclesiastical quagmire during the reigns of Constantine's sons. In addition, many Romans were dedicated to the old practices, mindsets, and ideals (see §1-306 et seq.). People in rural areas and the intellectual classes were slow to convert to Christianity. This resistance endured for some time. This can be seen in the difficulties Constantine's successors had in imposing Christianity on the populace. The pagan reaction reached its high point in its restoration during the reign of Julian the Apostate (see §1-307).

Establishment of the faith—Succeeding emperors quickly and decisively restored Christian privileges after Julian's reign and continued to chip away at the pagan traditions. The Emperor Gratian (375-383) rejected emperor worship, removed the altar of victory from the Roman forum, discontinued state subsidy for pagan worship, and confiscated temple funds. The final establishment of Christianity as the official state religion occurred under Theodosius I (379-395). In 380, his edict "*On the Catholic Faith*" imposed Christianity on all inhabitants of the Empire. He closed all pagan temples. In 391, he forbade pagan worship. In 392, he declared sacrifice to the pagan gods as high treason, punishable by death. Things had come full circle and the persecuted had become the persecutor.

2. Growth of the Church in a Period of Ascendancy

§1-221. Impact of state sponsorship on the Church—The immediate events after Constantine's victory at Milvian Bridge in 312 signaled a significant change in the Church's public stature. Constantine held a grand feast at state expense for Christian bishops. It was a poignant scene as these suffering saints with their mangled bodies gathered around imperial tables piled high with delicacies of food and drink. The Constantinian era was a dynamic change from its outset.

End of persecution—The persecution of Diocletian and Galerius failed to obliterate the faith and was finally rescinded by Galerius on his deathbed in 311. Constantine's victory at Milvian Bridge and his conversion in 312 brought Christianity into official toleration, declared in the Edict of Milan (313).

Official favor—As time passed, Constantine's stance moved from toleration to favor. He granted to Christian clergy the freedom from taxation that had been the historical privilege of the priests of the old Greco-Roman gods. He ordered that the Christian Sunday should be placed in the same legal position as that of significant pagan feasts. He had his children instructed in the faith, kept bishops in his entourage, and enlarged and built many Christian churches. Christians enjoyed access to influential people, financial support, and buildings from which to operate built by the state at public expense. Many saw these years as the Millennium. The Church had come into its own. It was building basilicas, exercising power, holding councils, and determining policy.

Such favor came at a price. Constantine took an active part in the affairs of the Church and expected the state to control the Church. He saw himself as "bishop of external affairs", having oversight of the Christian Church in same manner that pagan emperors

had over the pagan cults. Constantine and his successors treated Christian bishops and clerics like civil servants, the Church grew increasingly paganized with lukewarm or bogus conversions, and Christian leaders openly complained of power politics in the Church.

Growth in numbers and preeminence—Christianity grew from about five to ten percent of the population of the Empire at the beginning of the 4th century to almost fifty percent at the century's end. Constantinople was founded in 330 as a new capital for the now Christian Empire. In 380, Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Empire and outlawed the various sects of paganism.

Impact on worship—Christian worship came out from the underground and was influenced by imperial protocol. Christian minsters dressed in ornate vestments, and incense, originally a sign of respect for the emperor, was increasingly used in worship. An imperial decree ordered the first day of the week to be devoted to worship. Communion tables became altars, the gestures used in worship multiplied, and grand processionals became common. People began to have increased interest in relics. Reverence for martyrs grew and their graves became the destination of pilgrimages.

Impact on instruction and Church membership—People flocked to the Church and the preparatory apparatus was overwhelmed. Training and instruction were dramatically shortened. Many new converts were not entirely sincere and brought with them beliefs that the earlier Church would have considered unacceptable. Syncretism and superstition climbed dramatically as it became fashionable to become a Christian.

§1-222. Emergence of patriarchal centers—Christian ecclesiastical structure tended to mimic the patterns of imperial administration. Roman administration promoted the growth of "first cities" in the various provinces. Power over the vast geographical expanse of the Empire was exercised by governors in the safe provinces and by military procurators and prefects in the dangerous ones. Certain cities grew in administrative importance based on a variety of factors, including governmental presence, military or commercial significance, and historical importance. Thus, Ephesus was the first city of Asia Minor and Lyons the first city of Gaul. In turn, these first cities exercised influence over the other cities of the region. Truly large metropolises exercised cultural and political influence over larger areas of the Empire.

Dioceses and praefecturates—Rome was the first city of the Empire, but Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria grew to considerable prominence. Under Diocletian (284-305), the Empire was divided into dioceses, each with a chief city, and these dioceses were gathered into praefecturates, each with a chief city. Christian ecclesiastical organization after Constantine followed this pattern. Chief cities became the seats of bishops and the praefecturate cities became patriarchal seats. These patriarchal seats entered a period of rivalry over several centuries for primacy within what might be called imperial Christianity as a whole.

§1-223. Primacy of Rome—In the early centuries of our era, the primacy of the bishop of Rome was widely recognized. This primacy was an honorary one and did not yet have a sense of administrative authority.

Peter and Paul—The key support to this primacy was the position ascribed to Peter and Peter's connection with Rome. Peter was understood to be the chief spokesman of the original apostles, the first to recognize Jesus' identity and confess that to others, and a primary witness of the resurrection. In Galatians, Paul recognizes Peter as one of the "pillars' of the Church. Tradition asserts that Peter in his later years was the first bishop of Rome and that quickly solidified the symbolic importance of the Roman church. The apocryphal Acts of Peter locate the scene of Peter's martyrdom in Rome. Both Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome link Peter and Paul together as martyrs in Rome.

Rome's influence grew throughout these early centuries. Irenaeus of Lyons responds to Gnostic claims of secret teaching by tracing the "apostolic succession" of bishops to whom he ascribes authoritative teaching. He uses the bishops of Rome as his example and links them back one by one from his own day (the late second century) to Peter (mid-first century). Rome's early moral and persuasive authority grew especially in pontificates of Damasus I (366-384) and Leo I (440-461). That influence can be seen in the Council of Carthage in 397 when that council declared that its decisions needed to be checked with "the church across the sea", namely Rome, and by the weight given to Pope Leo's *Tome* at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In the great doctrinal controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries, Rome was something of a moderating referee.

Real limits—However, there were real limits to that influence as seen in the rash effort by Victor I in 190 to excommunicate several Asian churches over the dispute concerning the proper date to celebrate Easter. He clearly overstepped his persuasive authority, and the Asian churches just ignored his ecclesiastical thunderbolt.

§1-224. Antioch and Alexandria as theological and ecclesiastical rivals—These two patriarchal centers repeatedly competed without directly challenging the primacy of Rome. They were the faith's intellectual centers, and their rivalry played a key role in the theological controversies that divided Christians in the 4th and 5th centuries. Both Alexandria and Antioch were all too willing to curry imperial favor to advance their respective theological positions and, not coincidentally, their ecclesiastical prominence.

Antioch was the church that sponsored the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). It was the church where the issue of Gentile inclusion in the Church without demanding the observance of the Mosaic Law was vigorously raised and debated. Key figures of this church include Bishop Ignatius who wrote letters of instruction and exhortation to churches across Asia as he traveled to his martyrdom at Rome in 107, Paul of Samosata (260-268), and Lucian, who was martyred in 312.

The school arising in connection with Antioch was Aristotelian in style, meaning that it placed its emphasis on empirical fact and historical roots and avoided the allegorical style of its rival, Alexandria. Antioch's understanding of the humanity of Jesus tended toward

adoptionism. In its benign form, this means that the school emphasized the realness of Jesus' humanity. In its extreme (and erroneous) form, this position diminished the divine character of Christ, seeing it as something bestowed on him by God, rather than his "by nature".

Alexandria was the other great intellectual center. It was the main source of Hellenistic Jewish literature, above all that of Philo, who was deeply influenced by Plato. The Alexandrian see used the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture.

While little is known of how Christianity came to Alexandria, its didactic importance was established early. A catechetical school was founded by Pantaenus, a convert from Stoicism, in Alexandria circa 190. The school's most famous teachers were Clement and Origen, both prominent apologists and writers. Alexandria emphasized Jesus' divinity more than his humanity, tending toward Monophysitism. In its benign form, this emphasis recognized the fact that in Christ, God was at work for the salvation of humanity. In its extreme (and erroneous) form, it denied the real humanity of Jesus and saw the divine as simply making use of a human body.

§1-225. Growing influence of Constantinople—The last ecclesiastical titan to appear on the scene was the Patriarch of Constantinople. Constantinople claimed to be founded by the "thirteenth" apostle, the Emperor Constantine. It was never a pagan center, unlike the other patriarchal cities, but was founded in 330 as a Christian city and the "new Rome". Although it would later be a center of Greek learning with the world's first true university, in the 4th and 5th centuries, Constantinople was not intellectually on the same par as Antioch and Alexandria. Its claims to ecclesiastical power came from its status as the new imperial city. From the very beginning the bishop of Constantinople wanted equality with the bishop of Rome. As the power of old Rome faded, those claims broadened to seek primacy.

§1-226. Legacy and ongoing concerns of Christian establishment— Establishment was a mixed blessing for the faith. Security from danger, deprivation, and persecution were obvious benefits. There were political/ecclesiastical benefits as well—magnificent places of worship constructed at state expense, the right to own and develop land for ministry purposes, special privileges to the clergy which freed them to concentration on their ministries, and a favored status for placement and advancement in the state bureaucratic establishment. With the termination of official state sponsorship of pagan rites and practices, there was the opportunity to expand the faith's agenda and work toward a genuinely Christian culture.

There were other concerns with Christian establishment that were less obvious to believers in that day.

Imperial domination—First, as "bishop of external affairs", the emperors increasingly involved themselves in religious matters with political motives. From the earliest days of state sponsorship, the lines of what came to be called "caesaropapism", the subservience of ecclesiastical to political authority, were being established.

The overriding concern for the emperors was the unity of the Empire. Religious divisiveness had to be resolved at all costs to secure political stability. Constantine's role at the Council of Arles (314), responding to the Donatists, and at the Council of Nicaea (325), deciding the Arian controversy, demonstrates this. Subsequent emperors aligned themselves with one party or another in theological disputes and used the power of the state to enforce their wills.

Bishops proved all too willing to seek imperial support to impose their wills. The kind of decision-making displayed at the Council of Jerusalem (50) was lost in the slam bang of power politics within the Church. For example, during the ongoing Arian controversy of the 4th century, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, champion of Nicene orthodoxy, was repeatedly exiled and restored according to the doctrinal allegiances of Constantine II and Constantius.

At first, State favor and money seemed like a great boon. But when there are disputes, who should call the shots? Do you resist the temptation to call out the State hound on religious dissenters? Is it true religion that we are after or Christian hegemony? If the Church is to be the conscience of the state, then should it be entangled in the policy debates that drive state action? On the other hand, if the Church is to affect society positively for Christ, can it afford to be politically detached? We wrestle with those same questions today.

Stress of being "political" glue—The challenge of being a state religion put severe stress on Christianity. It was ill-prepared for the task of being glue for a society coming apart. Early Christianity had a countercultural disposition and an eschatological orientation. This fallen world is not permanent nor is it the ultimate reality. Much of early Christianity's culture argued against the way power was used to maintain the unity and stability of the Empire. The canonical writings of Christianity did not provide detailed directions for a civilization to organize itself.

Cultural captivity—Especially in the east, where imperial rule remained more stable, the precedents of pagan culture, suffused with biblical data, continued to provide much of the form for Greek *paideia*. The basic instruction was in logic, philosophy, rhetoric, and the liberal arts set in a backdrop largely framed by the values of classical paganism. As an imperial religion, Christianity increasingly displayed a Greco-Roman form, with only vestigial connections with Judaism. Even the Scriptures were in Greek and were interpreted through the categories of Greek philosophy and rhetoric. The Church went from a counterculture to the accepted culture almost overnight. Biblical counterculture may not be physically safe, but cultural captivity is not spiritually safe.

In the west, the instability of the Empire would force Christianity to engage new cultural realities, very foreign to the precepts of the faith, and to forge a distinctively Christian culture as an instrument of civilization among the barbarians.

Rise of religious complacency—The Church grew rapidly and becoming a Christian was the thing to do. This attracted career climbers and insincere people who wanted to get ahead.

From martyrs to inquisitors—The Edict of Milan began as religious freedom but started in motion a path to religious domination. Christians who had been subject to persecution and censorship soon turned the tables on the pagans. The troubling assumption arose, from the age of Constantine forward, that whenever the Church possessed the means (e.g. an obliging State authority), it had the right to exercise public power to enforce its religious demands and to further its work of salvation at the edge of the sword.

C. Growth Beyond the Empire

§1-231. In general—The way religion in the world normally worked was this—as the ruler went, so went the kingdom. Early Christianity was something of an aberration, growing and spreading without the aid of royal conversions. However, during the early part of the fourth century, the situation changed radically. Armenia, Georgia, and Ethiopia became Christian kingdoms, and the Roman Empire became a Christian state.

With the advent of Constantine and his successors, Christianity became a public political religion in a fashion like the Greco-Roman polytheism that preceded it. Conversion became an instrument of statecraft and a primary means of geographically extending Christianity. The now official state religion expanded spatially and temporally to meet its new cultural obligations.

New character of evangelism—Evangelism and missionary work took on a new character when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. It was more intentional and more centrally organized. Prior to its establishment, converts to Christianity were made through networks of association and personal influence. Evangelism was conducted on a small scale. After establishment, imperial authority often commissioned missionaries to work both with the leadership and populace of other nations and tribes. Often, the king of a client state would convert the people by converting himself and then declaring Christianity to be the official religion of the realm.

Noteworthy characteristics—There are several aspects of this geographical and demographical expansion that are worth noting:

- The Bible was translated into new languages (Ethiopian, Georgian, Armenian, Gothic) as a key element of Christianizing new lands and peoples.
- Christianity became more inclusive as it embraced new populations. The various forms of Christian expression from North Africa to East Asia testify to the faith's remarkable cultural adaptability.
- Conversions were often very superficial, with elements of indigenous paganism remaining.
- Cults and other faith variants thrived in these new areas and with new people—Nestorians in Persia, Monophysites in Ethiopia and Armenia, and Arians among

> newly converted Germanic tribes. The Empire's heartland was orthodox while its fringe areas tended to become a refuge for heretical or questionable versions of the faith.

Missionary activity in the east started early, involved doctrinal debates, and led to cultural identity awareness through Bible translations into new languages. In the west and north, Christianity won adherents among the Germanic peoples, but strong tribal structures, a warrior mentality, and syncretistic native pagan religions presented thorny issues for the progress of a vibrant faith.

While it was within the Empire that Christianity attained its most notable successes, by the time the Western Empire collapsed, there were Christians as far east as India, as far south as Ethiopia, and as far north as Ireland. The sections that follow provide a thumbnail guide to missionary activities in areas beyond the Empire into which Christianity expanded.

§1-232. Edessa, Armenia, and Georgia

Edessa—At an early date, Christianity spread east along the paths of Syriac language and culture. Its most notable success was in the city of Edessa, which came as early as the latter part of the second century. Legend fast-forwarded this expansion to within the lifetime of Jesus, alleging that the king of Edessa sent a letter to Jesus asking him to come and cure his leprosy. A nearby community of believers also arose in the region of Abiabene in the second century. There are believers today who trace their origins to these early churches.

The Syriac language was the common tongue for trade in the east, and it served as a channel for expansion of the faith. A Syriac translation of the Old and New Testament appeared and came to be known as the *Peshitta* (meaning "simple"). Portions appeared as early as the second century and the translation was completed by the fourth century. Tatian, an apologist who was a disciple of Justin Martyr, edited a gospel harmony known as the *diatessaron* ("according to the four") which became a subject of much controversy among Syriac Christians.

Armenia—After Edessa, Armenia was the next state to embrace Christianity. Armenia was a buffer state between Persia and Rome. Persia wanted it in her empire, while Rome preferred to keep Armenia as a client state. When Tiridates III converted in 301 under the influence of Gregory Lusavorich (the Illuminator), the kingdom followed suit. Gregory was at Caesarea while in exile in the Roman Empire. He returned to his native land, converted and baptized the king, and had a highly successful ministry there. What emerged in Armenia in the beginning of the fourth century was a nation with an allegiance to Christianity with a close link between crown and episcopacy. Near the end of the fourth century a linguist named Mesrop Mashots was instrumental in developing and Armenian alphabet, specifically for the purpose of Bible translation.

By the 5th century, a school of Christian literature was established and an Armenian translation of the Bible based on Greek was produced. The Armenian Church became Monophysite in doctrine, emphasizing the deity of Christ and downplaying his humanity. From the 6th century onwards, the Armenian Church developed separately from the Church of the Empire.

Georgia, a former Roman province, became officially Christian between 317 and 327 when Mirian III converted. A Cappadocian slave woman named Nina figured significantly in the conversion of the king. She impressed her captors with her piety, modesty, and her faithful life. Legend credits her with several significant healings and miraculous interventions on behalf of the royal family. A Georgian bishop attended the Council of Nicaea in 325. Tradition has it that the apostle Andrew first preached the gospel in Georgia and claims that the apostle Matthias ministered in the southwestern part of the territory as well.

Tradition credits Mashots with developing a Georgian alphabet as well as the Armenian one. In the sixth century, a group of monks from Persia came to Georgia to strengthen the Georgian religious life. The Georgian church was the only non-Greek speaking church in the eastern Christian world to embrace the Christological decrees of the Council of Chalcedon.

§1-233. Ethiopia, Libya, and Nubia—In the early centuries of the Christian era, Aksum was an advanced kingdom that included modern Ethiopia and Eritrea in Africa and Yemen in Arabia. It dominated eastern Africa for most of the first millennium of our era and traded widely with the Mediterranean and Asian worlds. Aksum had a strong Jewish presence. An ancient legend has it that the Aksumites were descendants of Solomon and the queen of Sheba, linking the Aksumites to Judeo-Christian history much earlier than to Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Christianity gained a sustained presence in this area via the trade routes up the Red Sea. In Constantine's time, a philosopher from Tyre was captured by a raiding party along with two of his young students. These two students became fixtures in the king's household, one as the cupbearer and the other as an accountant. When the king died, the queen begged the two to stay and help her rule. The accountant, Frumentius, used his position to extend to Roman merchants trading with Aksum the right to sponsor the building of Christian churches, Later, Frumentius traveled to Alexandria to urge the bishop, Athanasius, to commission a bishop for the fledgling church in Aksum. Athanasius chose Frumentius himself (circa 330), who was instrumental in spreading the faith in Aksum. Refusing Emperor Constantius' urging to convert to Arianism, the Ethiopian Church came under the influence of those at Alexandria emphasizing the Monophysite doctrine. Ethiopian believers rejected the decisions of the Council of Constantinople in 381, embraced Monophysitism, and remain to this day the largest of the Monophysite churches. In the 5th and 6th centuries, the Bible was translated into Ethiopian, and the Church was engaged in evangelizing the Nubians (north Ethiopia) and the Nabataeans. There is a Nubian translation of the Bible that dates from the 8th century.

Given the strong Jewish presence in Aksum, the Christian church incorporated more Jewish features in their faith practice than elsewhere in Christendom. These practices

included circumcision, the Old Testament dietary restrictions, and regarding Saturday as well as Sunday as holy days.

§1-234. Persia and Mesopotamia—Christianity also crossed the border into Mesopotamia and Persia at an early date, carried there by Syriac-speaking merchants and traders. The Parthian dynasty practiced a measure of religious toleration and Christianity seems to have grown rapidly. In 224, the Sassanids came to power in Persia and most of its rulers persecuted Christians as a foreign religion. Nevertheless, there was an important theological school at Nisibis on the Euphrates and the earliest church building archeologists have found was built in the area at Dura-Europos in the mid-3rd century.

The 4th and 5th centuries were times of intermittent persecution under the Sassanid kings, forty years under Shapur II, a time of royal favor from 399 to 420, and more persecution from 420 to 450. Christianity's status as the official religion of the Roman Empire meant that the Sassanid kings tended to view Christians were as traitors or at least Roman sympathizers. With the rise of a stricter and more zealous Zoroastrianism in Sassanid Persia and the conversion of Constantine in the West, the tables were turned on the fortunes of Christians in the east. They were subjected to a persecution that was far more severe than anything the Romans had unleashed on believers.

The key personality in this persecutory mindset was Shapur II (309-379). On the positive side, Shapur steeled ethe Persians to regain their possessions during his long reign. On the negative side, Constantine's artless diplomacy spawned a terrible result. In 315, Constantine wrote a letter to Shapur, urging the six-year old, to accept Christianity and gain favor with the true God. Shapur and his advisers saw this as a heavy-handed gesture from an aggressive ruler of a long-time enemy state who was consolidating his power to take advantage of the young ruler. Several decades after this, Constantine readied an assault on Persia, allegedly to rescue Christians from persecution. He died before the campaign began, but that served as a signal to the Persian king. In 339, Shapur attacked Rome in the east and began a fierce persecution of Christians. For the next twenty years this persecution raged. Shapur defeated and killed Julian the Apostate in battle in 363 and annexed Nisibis, a noted Christian center. It was not until 409 that a Persian shah issued a decree of toleration like the Edict of Milan in 313 which brought the Persian national church officially into existence. However, this decree brought no lasting favor to the Christians in the east unlike the Edict of Milan to Christians in the west.

The irony of this was that for centuries Rome had been the enemy of Persia and antagonistic toward Christianity. This led to eastern church to seek refuge ever deeper into Persian territory. Then suddenly, Persia was the fierce Christian enemy and Rome their stalwart defender.

Persian Christians rejected the edicts of the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) and followed Monophysite doctrine. Others were followers of Nestorius, who emphasized the distinction between the human and divine natures of Christ. Indeed, Nestorian Christianity became the national Church in Persia and the source of missionary activity along the trade routes to East Asia.

Concluding reflections—Persia had little influence on Rome's persecution of Christians in the first three centuries of our era or in the conversion of the Roman emperor and the tremendous changes that followed that conversion. However, the move of the Roman Empire in becoming a Christian state was a decisive factor in changing Persia's posture toward the faith from benign tolerance to severe hostility and persecution. Persian Christians, fleeing Shapur's persecution, founded Indian Christianity and brought it into significant contact with the eastern church. Persian Christians found themselves in radically different situations at various stages of their lives. The borders between friendly Rome and hostile Persia were constantly changing in this era. Their situation defied easy labels of "the church under siege" or the "church triumphant." They had to make their way through a world of great uncertainty about the attitude toward Christian faith of the government and the larger society of which they were apart.

§1-235. Arabia—Christianity penetrated Arabia by the second century. We know of contacts with believers in Alexandria dating to that time. Arabia became a point of contact for slightly different versions of the faith, one from the Greek-speaking parts of the Eastern Empire and the other from Persia and Ethiopia. There also existed an ancient Gnostic sect called the Elkanites. This mixture was the confused and muddled picture of Christianity that Mohammed came to know and reject in the 7th century.

Constantius II, an imperial sponsor of Arianism, sent Bishop Theophilus to the Sabean tribal people of Yemen in the 4th century. An Arabic translation of the New Testament appeared there in the 7th century shortly before Yemen was overrun by Islam. The remaining Christians after the Islamic conquest were Nestorian in their outlook.

§1-236. India—It is difficult to ascertain when Christianity first came to India. There is a tradition that claims that the apostle Thomas founded the Church in India. Another tradition relates that Pantanenus, a Clement's teacher in Alexandria, went to India in 180. In addition, one of the participants at the Council of Nicaea in 325 was "John the Persian, of all Persia and great India."

According to tradition that bears more rigorous historicity, a delegation of Jewish Christians from Persia arrived in the Malabar region of India in 345 and were welcomed by the Indian ruler. The newcomers proved to be gifted with business acumen, prospered greatly in Malabar, and brought considerable prosperity to the region. Whether there was a Christian presence in India prior to this is uncertain. There certainly was one, and a favored one, by the fourth century. Indian Christianity was firmly in the Persian orbit. Syriac became the language of the liturgy. There are two significant ironies in all this:

- It is surprising that a faith from a region where Christians were experiencing severe persecution would become so influential in a land with such a different culture.
- It is surprising that Christianity could gain a privileged position in a society without official approval by the ruler. The Christians were favored because of their business acumen, but that favor failed to bring many conversions.

§1-237. England, Scotland, and Ireland

***England*—**Christianity also extended north to embrace the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons. Rome conquered Britain in the 1st century. The island was evangelized in the 2nd century but the faith there developed in "distinctive" ways because of pagan influences. In other words, early Christianity in Britain was a syncretistic mush. In 590, Pope Gregory I dispatched Augustine (not the theologian) and a group of Benedictine monks to Britain, leading to the establishment of Catholic Christianity on the island.

***Scotland*—**Southern Scotland was evangelized at the end of the 4th century through the missionary work of Ninian. Northern Scotland was evangelized by the Irish Abbot Columba (died in 597) over a period of almost thirty-five years.

***Ireland*—**A vibrant faith gained a strong foothold in Ireland before the collapse of the Western Empire. The spread of the faith is attributed to Patrick (432-461). As a young boy, Patrick was captured in Great Britain by Irish raiders and served as a slave in Ireland. After his escape and a variety of other experiences, Patrick had a vision calling him to serve as a missionary among his former capturers. Going back, he experienced great hardships, had remarkable success, and baptized people in droves.

Ireland became a vibrant monastic and missionary center. Monasteries were founded around the island and the learning of antiquity was one of the major concerns. Bypassed by the marauding barbarian hordes, Irish monasteries were one of the main sources from which the territories of the ancient Roman Empire in the west regained much of the classical knowledge and literature lost during the invasions.

§1-238. Germany and beyond—There was also expansion among the Germanic people north of Constantinople. Arian missionaries crossed the Danube and began mission work among the Goths. The faith moved west with the migration of the Germanic tribes as the Western Empire collapsed. Arianism provided the German tribes with a Church and a hierarchy independent of both Rome and Constantinople, fostering an identity they took into the territories they conquered.

A thumbnail guide to missionary work among Germanic tribes is as follows:

- ***Franks***—The historically most significant Germanic people were the Franks. They would eventually dominate a large part of Western Europe. They came from the lower Rhine in the middle of the 5th century. King Clovis I (481-511) ended Roman rule in Gaul and conquered middle Europe. He converted to orthodox Christianity in 496. It was through the Franks that Europe eventually adopted orthodox Christianity rather than the Arian form.
- ***The Lombards*** also started in Pannonia (an area north of the Danube, now Austria and Hungary), leaving there in 586 and conquering most of Italy except for Ravenna, Rome, and part of the Italian boot in the south. They were Arian and hostile to orthodoxy but eventually embraced orthodoxy and mingled with the Roman and Italian populations.

- ***Vandals***—The Vandals were an East German tribe converted to Christianity in 364 under the Emperor Valens. The Vandals were the most aggressive of the Germanic tribes. They started in Pannonia, devastated Gaul in 409, settled in Spain for a while, before crossing over to North Africa around 429. King Genseric crushed Roman power in North Africa and established a Vandal kingdom until Emperor Justinian reconquered it in the 530s. They were Arians who were hostile to orthodoxy.
- ***Visigoths***—In the 4th and 5th centuries, both the Visigoths and Ostrogoths followed the Vandals into an Arian form of Christianity. The Visigoths (western Goths) migrated from the northern shore of the Black Sea along the Danube and all the way to Spain. They were evangelized by Ulfilas under the direction of the Arian emperor Constantius II. Ulfilas learned the Gothic language, devised an alphabet for it, and then translated the Bible into a Gothic version. The Visigoths moved first to Thrace (north of Greece), then migrated through Greece and northern Italy, and ended up in southern Gaul and Spain by the early 5th century where they mixed with the local populations. They remained Arian in their understanding of the faith until the Islamic conquest in the 7th and 8th centuries.
- ***The Ostrogoths*** (eastern Goths) started in Pannonia and migrated to Italy in 489, establishing an extensive and stable kingdom under Theodoric the Great (471-526). The kingdom lasted until 553, and included Italy, Sicily, Dalmatia (Croatia), Pannonia, and Provence (southern France). They were Arians who repressed orthodox Christians, imprisoning and executing both Pope John I (526) and the philosopher Boethius (524-525).

D. Religious Controversies and the Church's Response

1. Controversies

§1-241. In general—How was the Church to understand Jesus considering an uncompromising monotheism inherited from Judaism? The Church needed to affirm that there was an absolute distinction between Yahweh and all other beings and that the Son and the Spirit were on the Yahweh side of that distinction. The early heresies the church confronted fell into three categories:

- Heresies dealing with the dualisms of surrounding belief structures;
- Heresies misconstruing the relationship between the Father and the Son;
- Montanism, the danger-prone spiritual enthusiasm of the early centuries.

Heresy comes from the Greek word for "choice." The idea is that the heretic had chosen to turn away from the true faith to a false conception of God. Several points need to be made:

- Not every doctrinal mistake is heretical. Heresy is a mistake on a point so central to the Christian faith that salvation itself threatened.
- Heresy is not usually a deliberate distortion of the faith.

- Ideas of heresy and orthodoxy are not arbitrary. Some modern scholars see many Christianities and that it does not matter a great deal which you choose. For the early church, heresy was recognized as such because it did not conform to Scripture and the church's tradition. The early church differed sharply from the modern mindset and believed there was a clear and strong consensus about the fundamental points of Christian doctrine.

***Importance of doctrine*—**Christianity was unique in the religious world of the Roman Empire for its emphasis on doctrine as an important aspect of religion. Pagan polytheistic faiths focused attention on cultic acts, not the content of belief about the gods. While Judaism certainly stressed belief per se, the religion itself was more about worship, life, and the religious practice of the community.

However, from its origins, Christianity stressed the importance of correct belief. This was, in large measure, due to the nature of the claims about Jesus—that He was the Messiah and died for the sins of the world. Therefore, knowing the correct things about Jesus (that He was the Son of God and offered his life as a perfect atoning sacrifice for sin) and having a proper faith (belief in His death and Resurrection and reliance on His work for salvation) was central to what it meant to be a Christian. Being a Christian did not mean performing certain cultic sacrifices to a certain god in a certain way and at a certain time. It did mean having correct understanding of God and His saving provision for people and proper beliefs about God and His involvement in the world.

The faith is certainly more than believing the right things, but it is not less than that. A Christian professes Jesus as Messiah and as Lord. Intellectual commitment is foundational to this confession. In addition, Christianity in the imperial period was influenced by the convictions of philosophical schools of the era. Among the philosophies of the day, it was a universal premise that right thinking was the basis for right practice.

Two questions predominate in the controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries: who or what is the Christian God and who or what is the Christ, the Messiah who stands at the center of Christian belief and piety. In these centuries, Christians debated the nature of God and the nature of Jesus and developed a more coherent understanding of the divine as triune and singular. Like the Jews, early Christians believed that “God is one” and considered themselves monotheists. But they also confessed Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3), sharing in the divine life and power as demonstrated by the Resurrection. How is monotheism compatible with such as confession?

§1-242. Political context—It is difficult for moderns to understand the vehemence with which the imperial Church debated matters. The issues were held by the people to be of much greater importance than they are now. Gregory of Nyssa once commented that one could not get one’s shoes repaired in Constantinople without getting into a discussion of whether the Son was of similar or of the same substance as the Father. Could God truly be present in a carpenter executed by the Empire as a criminal, or is God more like the emperor on his throne?

In all the theological controversies of the early centuries, there was a political constant behind the scenes. The concern of the Roman and Byzantine emperors was for the unity of the Christian religion as the new glue of the Roman/Byzantine order and the preservation, if not the enhancement, of their authority. One does not have to wonder for long why so many of the fourth century emperors preferred the Arian view. If the focus was to be on the divine Christ, represented as the exalted *Pantokrator*—the exalted emperor sitting on his throne and ruling the world, then an ecclesiastical check to imperial authority seemed to be the natural corollary**.**

***Needing a winner*—**Aside from this, the unity of the Empire demanded that one side or the other win and the losing side accept that. This added to the rancor of these debates and made them very intense. One historian remarked: "Not without astonishment and regret the historian finds that in these long, bitter disputes which rent the Church, heresy as such counted for less than men's passionate attachment to their own will, to a party spirit and obstinacy in schism." The emphasis on right thinking, far from guaranteeing right practice, as the philosophers held, worked to remove theology from the ordinary life of believers and become a matter of speculation. The disputes revealed within Christianity, a faith dedicated to peace and unity, a deep tendency toward conflict and division.

§1-243. Ecclesiastical competition—The New Testament asserts Jesus' full humanity (see Heb. 4:15) and full deity (see Jn. 1:14; 13:3; Heb. 1:2, 6; 10:5) with equal vigor. Somehow God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). What confessional formula adequately captures this paradoxical position?

Two schools of thought vigorously debated the issue of Jesus as the God-man. These two schools—one centered in Alexandria and the other in Antioch—were also prominent ecclesiastical rivals. Alexandria emphasized Christ's divine nature; Antioch stressed the complete humanity of Christ. A leading voice in Alexandria (Origen) coined the term the "God-man." His thought was that in Christ the encounter between God and humanity had taken place perfectly and emphasized the unity of these two realities in one person. In the Antioch camp, Gregory of Nyssa taught that in Christ the *Logos*, one person had united in Himself the divine and human natures. The Antioch school emphasized the distinctiveness of the natures after the Word became flesh.

The natural passion released by religious controversy over essential aspects of the faith was greatly intensified by the polarization of, and ecclesiastical competition between, the great patriarchal centers.

§1-244. Arianism—Arius (260-336) was a presbyter or pastor of the influential Baucalis Church in Alexandria. He studied under Lucian, a teacher at Antioch, whose tendencies were towards an adoptionist position about Christ. Adoptionism was a Christian theological doctrine that taught that Jesus became the son of God through adoption, rather than being the Son of God in his essential nature from birth. Arius became a popular priest at Alexandria and sometime between 315 and 319 began to publicly advocate

adoptionist views. He asserted that the Word (*Logos*), who assumed flesh in Jesus, was not true God but had an entirely different nature, neither eternal nor omnipotent. The Son was the first and greatest of the created beings, who could lead Christians up to God. He was an example of salvation as the upward movement of humanity to God. He was not everlasting or co-everlasting with the Father, sent from the Father as Savior. The phrase "there was a time when the Son was not" was the pithy statement that summarized this view.

Arius followed the Greek conceptions of his day in understanding God as absolutely unique and transcendent and who could not share or communicate his being or essence with anyone else. God, while creating everything that is, did not directly create the world. It could not bear His direct contact. Creation was accomplished by the Word (*Logos*), the agent of His creation and sustenance of the material world. This Word was also a created being, although the first and highest of beings. Thus, Christ was something of a quasi-divine hero or demigod, greater than ordinary human beings but lower than God. He was a superhuman creature, not the Creator—not of the same divine essence as the Father. He was temporal, not eternal, and subject to change.

The controversy became public when Alexander, the Patriarch of Alexandria, condemned Arius' teaching and removed him from all posts in the Alexandrian church. Arius appealed to the people of Alexandria and to the bishops throughout the Eastern part of the Empire. Demonstrations in the streets followed and Arius garnered support among the bishops. Constantine intervened and called a council of bishops from all parts of the Empire.

Fulcrum of debate—During this period of controversy, the battle lines came to be drawn around two terms that summarized the differences: *homoousios* (same nature—the Nicene formula) as the Father and *homoiousios* (like or similar nature—favored by the Arians) as the Father. Centuries later, Edward Gibbon, author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, sneered that Christianity fought for fifty years over a diphthong. But in this case, a little thing like a diphthong really mattered.

Illustration—A woman visiting in Europe wanted to buy a bracelet for $75,000. She wired her husband for his thoughts. He wired back "No, price too high." But the cable people omitted the comma, and the message read "No price too high." Little things can make a significant difference in meaning.

At stake in the Arian controversy was whether the *Logos* was coeternal with the Father. Arius famously claimed that "there was a time when He [the Word] was not." This seemed a fine point but the issue at stake was the divinity of the Word. Arius claimed that the *Logos* was not God, but the first and greatest of creatures. The counter argument was made by Alexander and then Athanasius of Alexandria, which emphasized the full deity of the Word, who was coeternal with the Father. Arius asserted that such a claim was a denial of Christian monotheism. Alexander and Athanasius argued that Arius denied the divinity of the Word and therefore of Jesus. The Church worshiped Jesus and Arius' proposal would force it to stop this practice.

For Alexander and Athanasius, the heart of the matter was that Christ achieved our salvation precisely because, in his person, God has entered human history and opened the way for our return to God. Salvation was a downward movement of God to humanity. Arius' retort was to assert that Christ's role as Savior was imperiled by such a view, for Jesus had opened the way for salvation by his complete obedience to God, and such obedience would be meaningless if he himself was divine, and not a creature. He was the example of the upward movement of humanity to God.

Philosophical or biblical backdrop?—The Arian controversy was a direct result of the way Christians came to think of the nature of God, drawing on the work of such people as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and others. Appealing to respected classical philosophers, many Christians apologists argued, in effect, that they believed in the supreme being of the philosophers and were not atheists, an accusation which arose because they did not worship visible gods. The danger in this was that the paradigm for speaking of God's nature became that of the classical philosophers rather than that of the Scriptures.

The classical philosophers conceived of God's perfection as immutable, impassable, and fixed and Christians equated the God of the Scriptures with these attributes. Two ways of marrying the philosophical notion with the God of the Scriptures came into vogue: by allegorizing the Scripture and by the doctrine of the *Logos*. In the first way, anytime the Scripture spoke in an "unworthy" way of God according to the ideas of the classical philosophers, the passage was to be taken allegorically. This intellectualized approach created a great distance between God and humanity in a faith that spoke of a highly personal relationship with the God of the ages.

The other way of bridging the distance between the god of the philosophers and the Biblical God was in the doctrine of the *Logos*. The Father is immutable, impassable, and completely transcendent, but there is the *Logos*, who is personal and who interacts with human beings. This led to the idea that between the immutable God and the world was the mutable Word or *Logos*. This was the context in which the Arian controversy arose.

Council of Nicaea—The Arian controversy was the primary matter taken up at the Council of Nicaea in 325. The Council supported Alexander's decision in condemning Arius and was influenced in its articulation of the doctrine by Athanasius. They denounced the idea of the Son as a created being, one who was not eternal and immutable. This view of the nature of God and the Word was incorporated into the Nicene Creed.

Ongoing controversy—While many assumed that Council of Nicaea finally decided this question, that was not the case. Arianism was a potent force for the entire 4th century. Several emperors after Constantine were themselves Arians and supported that view. Their frequent intrusion into Church politics is illustrated by the career of Athanasius, Nicene Christianity's great champion. For fifty years after Nicaea, the struggle with

Arianism continued and Athanasius was banned from his bishopric no less than five separate times.

The Arians were particularly active in evangelizing the Germanic peoples who would overthrow the Western Empire in the 5th century. We looked at this briefly in these notes (see §1-238) and will consider this more extensively in the early part of the course in the Medieval church.

§1-245. Adoptionism or Ebionism—These are heresies in the second and third centuries that arose because of inadequate understanding of the Father's relationship with the Son and the Spirit.

Adoptionism was first introduced by the Ebionites. The name Ebionite was derived from the Hebrew word for “poor”. Ebionism originated from Judaizing movements during the apostolic period. They were a continuation or offshoot of the early Judaizers who taught that in addition to accepting by faith the grace of God in Christ, one must also observe the regulations of the Jewish law.

They were strong monotheists and saw the asserted deity of Jesus Christ as problematic. They rejected the idea of the virgin birth and taught that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary in the normal fashion. Jesus was an ordinary man possessed of unusual but not supernatural gifts. Upon his baptism by John the Baptist, the Christ descended upon the man, Jesus, in the form of a dove. This was an indication of God’s presence and power rather than a personal, metaphysical transforming reality. Near the end of his life, the Christ withdrew from the man Jesus, who subsequently died on the cross. Thus, Jesus was not God, just a man upon whom the power of God was present and active in an unusual degree. This concept of Jesus' relationship to God is known as adoptionism.

§1-246. Docetism—From early in the life of the Church, there was a stream of thought denying the humanity of Christ. This view, known as Docetism, took its name from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning to seem or to appear. Its central assertion was that Jesus only seemed to be human. God could not really become material, since all matter is evil, and He is perfectly holy and pure.

Docetism was strongly rooted in Greek dualism, which assumed that mind or thought was the highest form of reality and matter the lowest. This distinction assumed ethical gradations where matter came to be regarded as evil. God was completely transcendent and utterly independent of the material world.

§1-247. Apollinarius—Apollinarius of Laodicea (310-390) was on this docetic continuum. He did not deny Jesus’ humanity, so much as he truncated it. According to Apollinarius, Jesus took on genuine humanity, but not the whole of our humanity. He proposed that Christ had the body and lower soul of an ordinary human but, in Him, the divine *Logos* took the place of a human mind. He asserted that only the divine Word could be perfect and save humanity and the divine Word was, in effect, the replacement for the human soul or mind of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christ had a single composite nature.

His opponents objected. If Christ's mind was not truly human, then the human mind was not redeemed. His humanity must extend to the totality of our humanity. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) also pointed out that the New Testament portrayed Christ as having a complete and truly human mind.

Apollinarius' views were condemned at a regional synod in 362 and at the Council of Constantinople in 381. The basic thought that guided orthodoxy was "only that which is assumed can be saved." The Word had to assume full humanity for humanity to be saved. It is noticeable that from the outset of these Christological controversies, the debate focused on ontology (the being of Christ) rather than his moral character or saving work.

Apollinaris' inadequate conception of what it meant to be human—a spirit in a body—led him to deny that the incarnate Christ possessed a human mind. Some in Syria and Anatolia understood Apollinarianism as an error so great that it required rethinking of what it meant for Christ to be divine and human.

§1-248. Nestorius—A controversy erupted when Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople and a champion of the Antioch school, objected to calling Mary *theotokos* (God-bearer). He said Mary could not have been the mother of Christ's divine nature and should be called *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer). To his opponents, Nestorius was espousing a belief that Christ was really two beings—one the son of God and the other the son of Mary.

Ecclesiastical politics at the turn of the fifth century—The ugliness of this controversy cannot be understood without delving into the ecclesiastical politics of the era. The Emperor Theodosius died in 395 and divided the empire between his two sons Honorius (395-423) taking the west and Arcadia (395-408) taking the east. Both were weak rulers, but the situation in the west was particularly devastating. Rome was sacked by the Goths in 410, the Vandals settled in Spain and then crossed the straits into North Africa. In the east, Arcadia died in 408 and was succeeded by Theodosius II (408-450) who battled the Persians and the Huns throughout his long reign.

The political crisis was compounded by the emergence of ecclesiastical rivalry between Constantinople, a newly recognized patriarchal see, and Alexandria and Rome. The latter two sees sought to thwart the ecclesiastical ambitions of the Constantinople see. This rivalry was in clear focus at the at the Synod of the Oak in 403 when Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria, had John Chrysostom deposed as Patriarch of Constantinople. Chrysostom had boldly called out the sins of the aristocracy from the pulpit, earning the ire of the Empress Eudoxia who conspired with Theophilus to have John removed. A serendipity at this synod was that Theophilus' nephew Cyril was at the synod and witnessed the proceedings. Cyril later became Patriarch of Alexandria and would have a major hand in deposing Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople a couple decades down the road.

Christological muddle—Into this cauldron came a Christological muddle. *Diodore of Tarsus*, a teacher of rhetoric, began to think of Christ not as the *Logos* who became human but as a man in whom the *Logos* dwelt. He thought this helped resolve a theological problem—how could the impassable, eternal God suffer and die. Diodore claimed that only the man Jesus suffered and died. The *Logos* was a different person altogether who abandoned the man Jesus as he hung on the cross. A prominent teacher, Theodore of Mopsuestia, seemed to follow this teaching. The Lord Jesus Christ was a compound person composed of the *Logos* and the man Jesus. The *Logos* was the true God, begotten not made, and the man Jesus was the one who suffered, died and buried, and rose again from the dead.

Nestorius of Constantinople—Theodore died in 428 and one of his students, Nestorius, was installed as the Patriarch of Constantinople by the Emperor Theodosius that same year. Nestorius followed Theodore in his understanding of the compound person of Jesus Christ. Nestorius' reluctance to call Mary *theotokos* (bearer of God) was the spark that brought this problematic teaching to the fore. Nestorius objected to this use because he did not seem to believe that the human Jesus was God the Son. He was the man that God the Son indwelt. As with John Chrysostom, who alienated a strong-willed empress Euodia, so Nestorius alienated the strong-willed Empress Pulcheria, sister of Theodosius II. When the *theotokos* controversy arose, Pulcheria wanted to make sure Nestorius was branded a heretic.

Cyril's Christology—The Cyril championed orthodox Christology. He was a prolific teacher and writer who composed a massive set of biblical commentaries in the two decades before this controversy. He insisted that salvation consisted of God's descent to restore humanity to grace. Christ was God the Son who took humanity into His own person. Even though He was impassable in His nature as God, God the Son did truly suffer on the cross in the humanity He had taken upon Himself. He was and is equal and co-substantial with God in all respects, and yet remaining God He became human as well, so that He could live, die, and be raised from the dead as a man for our salvation.

After receiving an angry letter from Nestorius, Cyril compiled a list of Nestorius' objectionable teachings and sent it to the bishop of Rome. Bishop Celestine of Rome had the influential monastic, John Cassian, investigate. John Cassian ended up agreeing with Cyril that Nestorius was essentially denying the deity of Christ. In 430, Celestine convened a synod at Rome and condemned Nestorius' teaching and wrote to Nestorius demanding that he affirm the faith of Alexandria and Rome. Nestorius appealed to Theodosius II to call an ecumenical council, which he did, to begin in the summer of 431. Pulcheria intervened to change the venue from Constantinople to Ephesus.

The Council of Ephesus was a seriously ugly affair. Cyril showed up early, his monks demonstrated in the streets, and he rammed home a verdict in the council before Nestorius’ followers arrived. The Antiocheans refused to abide by a verdict so derived and mutual excommunications flew back and forth. Under imperial pressure, a compromise resulted in Nestorius’ exile from the Empire (433). Nestorianism found a home outside the borders of the Roman Empire and thrived in Persia and beyond.

Why did this issue generate so much controversy? Was not the force of Christian teaching all along that Jesus was not just a separate man whose connection with God (the *Logos*) was simply like ours (indwelt by the *Logos* (the Spirit)) but in a more perfect way? Was not the teaching always that He is the same eternal, divine person both before and after the Incarnation, but after that incarnation was also human as well as divine?

- The controversy was in large measure a species of ecclesiastical politics. One could pass by a significant theological issue because of the way it was raised and dwelt with. Cyril's shrill demeanor and harsh anathemas seemed overboard.
- The words used to describe Jesus Christ's person and nature muddled the discussion. In the Arian controversy, *homoousios* was the culprit. This time it was *physis*. In that day, *physis* was often used in the sense of "person." Cyril spoke of the *Logos* as the *physis* (person) of Christ, where Nestorius tended to think of the *Logos* and the man Jesus as separate *physeis* (persons) in one compound or corporate presentation. Later in time, physis would carry the sense of "nature" and thus it be normal to speak of two *physeis* (natures) of Christ, not just one.

§1-249. Monophysitism—Eutyches (378-454), a monk at Constantinople, began to teach what came to be known as Monophysitism. He thought that before the incarnation, Jesus had two natures, human and divine, but after the incarnation, those two natures blended so that there was only one nature, fully divine. In other words, Jesus Christ was the same substance *(homousion)* as the Father but not the same substance as humanity. Thus, in reaction to the division between the divine and human natures of Christ ascribed to Nestorius, Eutyches asserted that there was only one (*monos*) nature (*physis*) in Christ, that is a divine nature.

Condemned by a synod in Constantinople in 448, Eutyches appealed to the Emperor Theodosius II who summoned a council. Pope Leo I (440-461) intervened with his *Tome* in 449, which clarified the orthodox position of two natures (human and divine) in one person. Nevertheless, the Alexandrians were able to score a victory at the "robber council" of 449 and adopt a one nature verdict in its most radical form.

***Chalcedon*—**After the death of Theodosius II, who favored the Monophysite position, and at the urging of Leo and many of the western bishops, a new council was called and held at Chalcedon in 451. That council followed the lead of Leo and affirmed that Christ had two natures, human and divine, without reduction or suppression of either one: "one single Christ, Son, Lord, Monogenic, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference in natures being in no way suppressed by the union, but rather the properties of each being safeguarded and reunited in a single person and a single hypostasis." This verdict ended the formal debate, but many continued to hold to the Monophysite tradition, especially in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Ethiopia, and many in Constantinople.

§1-250. Monarchialism or Sabellianism—Monarchialism was an early attempt to deal with the issue of the Trinity. It was a theological movement that emphasized the unity of God with little room for three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There were two types of monarchialists. Dymanic monarchialists (adoptionists) held that Jesus was not

God incarnate but a divinely empowered man. Modal monarchialists taught that one God expressed himself in three modes, Father, Son, and Spirit. But these were only names for modes in which God temporarily operated, not distinct and eternal personalities. The properties of a common substance, water, illustrate the approach. Water is one substance that takes on different modes—solid, liquid, and gas.

In this view there is a strong insistence on one God. This one God revealed Himself to humanity in three modes at different times: as Father and judge in the Old Testament, as Son and servant in the person of Christ, and as Spirit and helper in the Church period after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. This raises several concerns:

- Is God's integrity challenged because He reveals Himself differently at different times?
- Is the drama of salvation compromised if the Father and the Son are actually a single person? How does God in the mode of Son truly suffer the wrath of God (in the mode of Father) and die for sin? How does God (in the mode of Father) raise Himself (in the mode of Son) from the dead and breathe new life into believers (in the mode of the Spirit)? The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct from one another (three distinct persons and not just modes of one person) and yet not separate from one another (and therefore not three separate gods).

Modal monarchists came to be known as Sabellianism after its famous defender in the church at Rome. Sabellius believed he was defending the unity of God against a polytheism that was, in essence, speaking of the "persons" of God as separate gods. The Sabellian controversy raised a fundamental issue. How can the oneness of God be reconciled with the belief (and Scriptural references) that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all God and yet distinct?

§1-251. Pelagianism—The controversies listed above raged primarily in the Greek East, a culture taken with philosophical speculation. Issues in the Latin West were less theoretical and more pastoral and ecclesiastical. The dominant controversies were Donatism and Pelagianism, each named for its representative figures. The Donatist controversy was considered in sections §§1-184 and 1-185, above. In this section, we will consider the debate surrounding the views of Pelagius, a British monk known for his piety and austerity, who was active in the early 5th century.

***Optimistic anthropology*—**Pelagius taught an optimistic view of human nature. He understood the Christian life as a continuous effort through which one could overcome one's sins and attain salvation. Pelagius agreed that human beings were free agents and that the source of evil was in the will. For Pelagius, this meant the humans always can overcome their sin. Even after the fall, humans could please God by their own merit. Grace aided humanity but was not strictly necessary for them to lead virtuous lives. Pelagius' view of salvation was that of the upward movement of humanity to God.

***Original sin denied*—**Pelagius denied that humanity inherited a sinful nature from Adam. People were free to act righteously or not. There was no direct connection between Adam and humanity's moral condition. There is no such thing as original sin nor is human

nature so corrupted that it naturally leads us to sin. Pelagius said that God holds sinners accountable and therefore Christians should strive for moral perfection. He thought this goal attainable since God would never give commands impossible to obey. Pelagius' idea of a righteous life was similar that of the Stoic concept of self-control.

Augustine was Pelagius' great opponent. He thought Pelagius' ideas contradicted the plain sense of Scripture. Salvation by grace was always central to faith and necessarily so. The Scripture declared this forthrightly and Augustine's own agonizing personal experience underscored the need for grace. The freedom of the human will was not as simple as Pelagius characterized it. There are times when the will is powerless against the hold sin has on it.

Human depravity—Augustine saw human will under the sway of sin and that human beings cannot move their wills to be rid of it. The most one can do is to be willing and not willing. The sinner is powerless to stop sinning. A sinner's freedom exists in his freedom to choose among his sins. The fall has left us little more than the freedom to sin. Salvation must be a downward movement of God to humanity. With redemption, our wills are restored, and we are free to sin or not to sin. When we arrive at our eventual destiny in heaven, we shall still be free, but free only not to sin. At the point of conversion, we can only choose to accept grace by the power of grace itself. The initiative in conversion is not human, but divine. Furthermore, grace is irresistible, and God gives it to those who have been predestined to it.

Results—The controversy lasted for decades, but eventually Pelagianism was rejected, first at a regional council at Carthage in 411 and then again at the Council of Ephesus in 431. It did not consider the terrible hold sin has on the human will nor the corporate nature of sin that is manifest even at the beginning of human life.

However, there was also opposition to Augustine's views. Opponents of Augustine's idea of predestination have been called "semi-Pelagians". In the century that followed Augustine's death, his views were reinterpreted. At the Synod of Orange in 529, the Church upheld Augustine's doctrine of the primacy of grace in the process of salvation, but drew up short on his ideas of irresistible grace and what came to be known as unconditional election.

2. Church's Response to Controversies

§1-261. In general—More than a century earlier, Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (see §1-197), deployed the basic approach the Church would adopt in responding to these various controversies and in defining Christian orthodoxy:

- Specifying the Canon of Scripture, the texts and traditions to be relied upon;
- Convening Councils, calling on the authority of the bishops properly assembled, to address, debate, and decide the particulars of the issues raised; and
- Articulating Creeds to serve as the rule of faith.

a. Canon

§1-262. In general—*Canon* comes from Greek word for "measuring rod." The Canon is a list of books acknowledged as divine revelation. The idea is a list of books constituting a standard or rule for the churches.

***Authoritative texts unusual in antiquity*—**To moderns, it is common sense that a major religion should have an authoritative set of writings as a guide. However, this was anomalous in the ancient Roman world. The idea of having a collection of sacred books that indicated what one should believe about God and how one should live one's life was unheard of in ancient pagan circles. There were tales about the gods, but these were noticeably lacking in inspirational, didactic, and ethical value.

***Hebrew Scriptures*—**Judaism was the one exception to this phenomenon. Jews across the Empire recognized the Hebrew Scriptures as sacred laws, guidance, and stories for living according to God's will. Christian witness built on this tradition.

***New Testament*—** Several passages from what is known as the New Testament were referenced alongside those from the Old Testament. In 2 Peter 3:15-16, the author writes: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.'' Note the phrase "to the other scriptures." Paul's writings were considered Scriptural authority in the latter part of the first century. Again, 2 Timothy 5:17-18 says: "The elders who direct the affairs of the Church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain', and 'The worker deserves his wages'.'' The author is instructing the Church to financially back its leaders and cites two passages of Scripture in support of this. The first is Deuteronomy 25 (part of the Torah) and the other is from Matthew 10:10. New Testament writings were equated with Scripture.

Jesus Christ compelled a rethinking of what constituted sacred writing just as he had done for sacred time, action, and structure. Around the middle of the first century, written accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection began to appear. By the latter half of the second century, Tatian, in faraway Persia produced his *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four gospels in our Bible today, demonstrating that he, and at a distance, acknowledged the four gospels and those alone as authoritative. Numerous "Gnostic" gospels dating from the second century and later have been rediscovered in the mid-20the century and a few scholars have argued that they deserve a place alongside the four canonical gospels. The early church never considered these as additional revelation or even as supplemental aids to the four gospels.

§1-263. Need for the Canon and context of its formation—It was because of the proliferation of so-called "revealed" literature and a relentlessly critical assessment of traditional texts that it was necessary to establish a canon to define Christian teaching and

practice. Various dissenting or heretical groups highlighted the need to have a set of books to which to appeal for normative beliefs. A related question was whether the Old Testament was a Christian book or not. A couple of examples will have to do:

- Marcionism (see §1-134) —The God of the Old Testament was depicted as a God of wrath and the author of evil. This god was only concerned for the Jews. Marcion rejected the Old Testament and that part of the New Testament he thought favored Judaism. He adopted a truncated New Testament—ten of Paul's epistles (Pauline corpus minus the Pastorals) and a highly edited version of Luke's gospel. Marcion forced Church to decide whether the Old Testament is a Christian book and what books should be included in the New Testament.
- Montanus and "winds of the Spirit" (see §1-135)—Montanus and his two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, saw themselves as lyres across which the Spirit played a new song of revelation. Anyone opposing them was opposing the Holy Spirit, indeed guilty of the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:30. Montanists posed the question of whether self-authenticating new revelation would be allowed to push the apostolic message into the background.

***Rise of controversies*—**The controversies that arose with the ascendancy of Christianity during the age of Constantine pushed to the fore the question of what standard would be used to determine a true religious opinion from a false one. By what standard does one decide for or against Arius? How does one determine the truth concerning the nature of Jesus Christ? What does one rely on as a guide in these decisions?

§1-264. Gradual formation of the Canon—The recognition of an authoritative Old and New Testament happened gradually over time. The Hebrew Old Testament consisted of twenty-four books, including the five books of the Torah or Pentateuch, eight books of the Prophets, and eleven books in what they called the Writings. The Old Testament canonizing process was as long and involved as that of the New Testament. By time of Babylonian Captivity (586 B.C.), acceptance of Torah was well settled. The Prophets were accepted by the 2d century B.C. and the Writings at the Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. Marcion's attack on the Old Testament raised the question of whether it was a Christian book at all. However, the Church at large readily recognized it as the Word of God to his people and adopted the Hebrew canon.

As to the New Testament, by the second century the Church began to compile a list of sacred writings. What happened over several centuries is that a consensus gradually developed concerning the authoritative writings to be relied upon. The gospels were the first to attain general recognition. The early Christians were aware of the differences in the gospels, and it was precisely for this reason that there were more than one included. The Christians chose an open tradition and multiple sources upon which to base definitive doctrine—a portrait of Jesus in stereo, if you will. These were collected and circulated by the second century. Note references in *Didache 8:2* and in Justin Martyr's *Apology*. After the gospels, the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles enjoyed early recognition. By the end of the second century, the core of the New Testament was established: the four gospels, Acts, and Paul's epistles.

Lists of accepted New Testament books began to appear. Muratorian Canon, dated to the end of the 2nd century and was circulated at Rome, affirmed the gospels, all thirteen of Paul's letters, and most of general epistles. Hebrews and James were disputed and the shorter epistles (2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) were left off the various lists perhaps because they were too short to be cited frequently. The book that received the most debate was Revelation. It was caught up in the controversy over the renewal movement in the latter part of the second century called the New Prophecy, more commonly known as Montanism today.

***Emerging consensus*—**Slowly, a consensus emerged. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon in the late 2d century, listed including 20+ books (minus Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, and Jude) as canonical. Tertullian, a noted apologist in the early 3d century, only questioned James, 2 Peter, and 2-3 John. As for the shorter epistles, recognition did not finally come until the 4th century. Bishop Athanasius' Easter letter in 367 listed all twenty-seven New Testament books and only those as authoritative. Many people point to this letter as the time the Church agreed on the New Testament canon. This list of authoritative books constituting the New Testament Canon was affirmed at the regional gatherings at Hippo (393) and Constantinople (397).

§1-265. Canon chronology—The following chronological chart may be of help by way of summary:

100	200 – Mura-torian Canon	250 – Origen	300 – Eusebius	400—Hippo & Carthage
* New Testament written but not collected. * Writers quote from Paul & Gospels * Paul's letters collected by 100 * Gospels col-lected by 150	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters * Rom * 1-2 Cor * Gal * Eph * Phil * Col * 1-2 Thess * 1-2 Tim * Titus * Phile James (?) *Disputed* 1-2 John	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters * Rom * 1-2 Cor * Gal * Eph * Phil * Col * 1-2 Thess * 1-2 Tim * Titus * Phile 1 Peter 1 John Rev (?) *Disputed* Heb	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters * Rom * 1-2 Cor * Gal * Eph * Phil * Col * 1-2 Thess * 1-2 Tim * Titus * Phile 1 Peter 1 John Rev (?) *Disputed* James	Four Gospels Acts Paul's letters * Rom * 1-2 Cor * Gal * Eph * Phil * Col * 1-2 Thess * 1-2 Tim * Titus * Phile Heb James 1-2 Peter 1-3 John Jude Rev

	Jude Rev of John Rev of Peter Wisdom of Solomon Shepherd of Hermas	James 2 Peter 2-3 John Jude Shepherd of Hermas Letter of Barnabs Teaching of Twelve Gospel of Hebrews	2 Peter 2-3 John Jude	

§1-266. Criteria of canonicity—So how did people decide what made the grade and what did not? The practical criteria related to the use of the text in public worship. The theoretical underpinnings for making that choice rested on the following criteria:

- Apostolic authority—Was the book from the hand of one of the apostles or one of their disciples.
- Orthodoxy—Did the book conform to accepted teaching? A corollary to this related to its use in public worship. If the book was not used in worship, then why wasn't it?
- Antiquity—The Church revered ancient authority and was suspect of newer works,
- Catholicity—Did the book receive consensus or universal recognition?
- Inspiration of the Holy Spirit—Was the text commonly considered to be of God.

b. Councils

§1-271. In general; Apostolic succession—A second response to controversies concerned the authority of the Church. The Gnostics claimed access to secret knowledge through a succession of teachers. Marcion claimed to have access to the original message through Paul and Luke and was claiming authority to purge the rest of the New Testament, which didn't agree with his views. In response, the Church claimed to be in possession of the original message and the true teachings of Jesus.

Apostolic succession— The idea of the apostolic succession is set in this context. If Jesus had secret knowledge to communicate to his disciples, then he would have entrusted the teachings to the same apostles to whom he entrusted the churches. If those apostles had received such teaching, they in turn would have passed it on to those in leadership in the various churches.

To strengthen this argument, it was necessary to show that the bishops of that day were indeed historical successors of the apostles. Several ancient churches had lists of leaders dating back to their origins. In fact, the early leaders of these churches (Rome, Antioch, Ephesus etc.) were not the monarchial bishops of the second and third centuries, nor were they singular heads of the churches in these various cities but part of collegiate groups of

officers, sometimes called “bishops” and other times called “elders” or “presbyters”. However, these lists did link the churches to the apostles in ways that served as a useful check on the expansive claims of the teachers like Marcion and the Gnostics. Later, the idea of apostolic succession grew to include additional authority claims (e.g. the idea that an ordination of a presbyter (in the sense of a priest) was only valid if performed by a bishop (e.g. a monarchial bishop who could claim direct apostolic succession)).

“Catholic” in its original connotation, meaning common or universal, arises in this context. The common or universal witness of these bishops was further strengthened by a collegial network. Bishops in the early Church were often elected in each city and the custom soon developed that after such election, the prospective bishop would send a statement of faith to neighboring bishops who would vouch for his orthodoxy. “Catholic Church” referred to this episcopal collegiality as well as to the witness to the gospel as described above. “Catholic” underscores both universality and the inclusiveness of the witness upon which it stood. It was the Church “according to the whole,” that is, according to all the apostles and evangelists.

§1-272. Early ecumenical councils summarized—The early Church met in general gatherings to settle issues among themselves. Many of these were local or regional gatherings (often called synods). However, some issues took on a more serious and universal character and attempts to gather the universal Church to decide these issues were made. Over time, such councils came to be known as ecumenical councils.

Summary—The ecumenical councils in the period we are considering were called primarily to decide Trinitarian and Christological issues. A quick thumbnail summary follows:

- Trinitarian issues were primarily addressed at the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). The councils arrived at the following conclusions:
    - God is one and exists from all eternity in three co-equal, consubstantial persons.
    - The Father begets the Son.
    - Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (and Son) – filioque clause later a great controversy.
    - Jesus is not subordinate to God; He is not just a man of Spirit, adopted for a particular purpose.

- Christological issues were primarily addressed at the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). The councils arrived at the following conclusions:
    - Since the Incarnation, Christ has two distinct and complete natures, one human and the other divine.
    - These natures are inseparably joined in the one person of the Redeemer.

Summary chart:

Nicea (325)	Christ is fully divine; Trinity defined
Constantinople (381)	Christ is fully human; Trinity further elaborated
Ephesus (431)	Christ is a single, unified person
Chalcedon (451)	Christ is human and divine in one person

***Ontology as primary concern*—**It should be noted that during the debate over the nature of the Son and of the Godhead, the use of ontological metaphysical language (language pertaining to being in and of itself) came to the fore and attention shifted from what Jesus did and what God did in Jesus to who Jesus was. It shifted from the Lord's work to his person. In a sense, the debate shifted the focus from Easter and the Resurrection to Christmas and the Incarnation. Christian monotheism was recognized as a richer, more nuanced, and paradoxical monotheism than that of Judaism or Islam. Three persons in one God suggested an understanding of "unity" not simply as singleness but as embracing a rich diversity of life.

§1-273. Nicaea (325)—The Emperor Constantine summoned the Council of Nicaea in 325 to re-establish religious unity in the Empire. It was an assembly with a euphoric atmosphere. Many of those attending had been imprisoned, tortured, or exiled just a few years before. Many bore on their bodies the physical marks of their faithfulness. Furthermore, this was the first general assembly of all the Church. There before their eyes was the physical evidence of the universality of the Church and many were meeting for the first time fellow believers they had only known by correspondence or by hearsay.

The Council approved standard procedures for readmitting the lapsed, for the election and ordination of bishops and presbyters, and for establishing ecclesiastical sees. In addition, the Council diplomatically settled the dating of Easter, which had caused such consternation between east and west in the 2nd century.

***The principal issue was the Arian controversy*—**There was a small band of convinced Arians led by Eusebius of Nicomedia (not the historian). Arius was not a bishop and not allowed at the Council, so Eusebius served as his spokesman. The opposing party was led by Alexander of Alexandria, but the real champion of what became Nicene orthodoxy was Athanasius. A small group held the view that later became known as *patripassianism*, that is, that the Father and the Son are the same and that therefore the Father suffered the passion. Most bishops did not belong to any of these groups. Many hoped to forge a compromise and move on to other matters. Eusebius of Caesarea (the historian) was representative of this group.

When Eusebius of Nicomedia explained his views, the scene changed considerably. The assertion that the Son was no more than a creature met with vehement opposition and the majority was convinced that they had to reject Arianism in no uncertain way. Deep convictions were at stake concerning the nature of God and of salvation. Those on the Arian side thought they were protecting the "oneness" of God by relegating Christ to

merely a creature. For Athanasius and friends, Jesus' divinity was essential to his saving mission.

***Creedal formulation*—**A creed was produced that expressed the faith of the Church in a way that Arianism was clearly excluded. What they formulated was the Creed of Nicaea to distinguish it from the final form of the Nicene Creed ratified near the end of the fourth century at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

- The Council clearly stressed the downward movement of God in redemption by asserting of the Son "who because of us men and because of our salvation came down."
- It also affirmed the complete equality of the Son with the Father is such expressions as "God from God," "light from light," "begotten not made". However, Arius' followers would subsequently twist these statements, requiring further clarification at a subsequent council.
- It decreed that certain episcopal (patriarchal) sees would hold a special place in the Christian world. These included Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome.
- It also resolved the long-standing dispute in how to calculate the date of Easter.

The bishops used a Greek term *homoousios* in describing the Son's nature. The word meant "of the same essence or substance." It was intended to convey the idea that whatever characterizes God also characterizes the Son. They little realized that a raging controversy would attend a single Greek word.

The Council declared those supporting the Arian position heretical and deposed them. Constantine added the arm of the state to this—he banished the deposed bishops from their episcopal sees. The addition of this civil sentence to the ecclesiastical one established the precedent for intervention of the secular authority on behalf of ecclesiastical decrees. However, the Council's pronouncements on the nature of Christ did not end the controversy. It raged on for most of the 4th century with the resolution in favor of orthodoxy not at all certain.

§1-274. Constantinople (381)

Politics and theology after Nicaea—Two realities kept controversy alive:

- the term *homoousios* troubled many bishops;
- political changes complicated matters.

The mid-4th century was a period of theological confusion, largely of Constantine's doing. Several years after the Council of Nicaea, Arius drafted a creed designed to show his orthodoxy without really changing his ideas. He showed it to Constantine rather than the bishops, and Constantine asked the bishops to reinstate Arius. Alexander and his successor bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius refused. The troubling nature of the term *homoousios* increased the tense environment. The word had been associated in the third century with quasi-modalist views that blurred the distinction between the Father and the Son. In 335, Athanasius himself was deposed by a council presided over by Eusebius of Nicomedia, one of Arius' supporters. This would begin a most interesting career for

Athansius as he was exiled five separate times by four different emperors over the course of the next two decades.

The political arena kept things in turmoil. Constantine died in 337 and was succeeded by his three sons who carved up the empire. Constantine II ruled Gaul and Britain, Constans Italy and North Africa, and Constantius the eastern regions. It took approximately fifteen years to sort this out. Constantine II invaded Italy (Constans portion) and was defeated and killed. Constans subsequently lost the support of his army and was overthrown and killed by his general Magnetius. Constantius took advantage of the discord in the west and defeated Magnetius and became sole emperor in 351.

At first, Constantius seemed to take a middle road between the Creed of Nicaea and the Arian faith. But by 357, it became clear that he was advocating Arianism. At a council in Serbia at Sirmium, a document was approved that criticized Nicaea, concluded that the Son "was like the Father in all respects," and removed the central assertion of Nicaea that the Son "came down" for our salvation. The document accomplished something Constantius did not intend. It rallied the church to a consensus around Nicaea. Hillary of Poitiers, sometimes referred to as the Athanasius of the west, called Constantius' document, the "Blasphemy of Sirmium."

Constantius died in 361 and was succeeded by his cousin, Julian, dubbed "the Apostate". He longed to return to the old days of glory of pagan Rome and to conquer Rome's constant eastern opponent, Persia. He died on the battlefield in 363. He had allowed all the exiled bishops to return to their sees, hoping that the presence of both orthodox and Arian bishops together would lead to infighting that would weaken the church. Athanasius returned to Alexandria and held a regional council in 362 which solidified the articulation of trinitarian orthodoxy. Athanasius forged a general agreement to use the word *hypostasis* in the sense of "person" and thus to speak of three persons (*hypostates*) in one essence (*ousia*) in God. This eliminated the modalistic objection to the use of *homoousios,* allowing that term to be understood as "of the same essence" without implying that the Father and Son were the same person in different modes.

Valens (363-378) followed Constantius to the imperial purple and followed Constantius' policy favoring Arianism. Athanasius was exiled for the fifth and last time as well as the other orthodox bishops. However, the church finally had sorted this issue out. With Valens' death at the battle of Adrianople in 378 and the succession of orthodox Theodosius I in 379, the political storm with theological consequences was finally over. All subsequent Roman and Byzantine emperors would affirm the Nicene faith.

***Turning to the Holy Spirit*—**Some affirmed the full deity of the Son but not of the Spirit. The Cappadocian fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianus) would lead the charge for the full deity of the Spirit. Theodosius I (379-395) consolidated his power and proceeded to enforce Nicene orthodoxy. He installed Gregory Nazianus as bishop of Constantinople in 380 and called for an ecumenical council to meet in Constantinople in 381.

The council of Constantinople in 381 produced what we now know as the Nicene Creed. It affirmed—

- That the Father and Son of the same essence.
- The downward movement of God in His Son's redemptive work.
- The full deity of the Spirit. Echoing the words of John 15:26, the Council articulated the relationship of the Spirit in the Godhead as "proceeding" from the Father rather than "begotten" as with the Son, thus clearly indicating that the Spirit is not another Son.
- The condemnation of Apollinarianism, a view of Christ as having a human body but not a human mind because He already had a divine mind or spirit. Without a human mind, would the incarnate Son be able to fully undergo human experience and be tempted as we are? Gregory of Nazianus led the dissent. "The unassumed is unhealed" became the classic expression of the Son taking on himself every aspect of humanity at the Incarnation.
- That the see at Constantinople was equal in honor to the other patriarchal sees (Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem) and second only to Rome.

The followers of Arius continued to insist on the subordination rather than the equality of the Son to the Father. Imperial politics played into the controversy. Constantine seemed to back off on the Nicene formula while his sons spilt on the issue: Constantius II (337-361) being an avid supporter of Arius in the east and Constans (337-351) an avid supporter of orthodoxy in the west. Missionary activity was no boon to orthodoxy as most of the barbarians converted in the 4th century were converted to an Arian form of the faith.

Capable teaching and imperial support won the day for orthodoxy. The teaching of the Cappadocian fathers (Basil of Caesarea (330-379), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (330-395), and Gregory of Nazianus (329-390) in the East and Ambrose (339-397) and Hilary (315-368) in the West provided support to Nicene orthodoxy. The reversal of Christian fortunes under Julian the Apostate (361-363) revealed how fragile a divided Christianity could be in the ruthless politics of the Empire led to the rallying of support for Nicene orthodoxy as the faith of the Empire. That was cemented under Theodosius I (379-395) with the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire in 380.

Nicene Creed outside the Roman Empire—Both the Persian and Indian churches affirmed a version of the Nicene Creed. In the fourth century, the Persian church was in the throes of a merciless persecution by Shapur and his successors. That ended with an edict of toleration in 409 and in 410 the Persian church convened a major council, which made Seleucia-Ctesiphon the principal see of the church and took up the questions related to the Nicene Creed. The church affirmed a version of the Creed, the idea of mono-episcopacy (one bishop per diocese), and approved dates for the celebration of Christmas and Easter. The Nicene Creed was also affirmed by the Indian, Armenian, Georgian, and Ethiopian churches as well.

North of the Empire was a different story. The Goths and the Vandals were to defeat the Roman legions in the 5th century. These northern tribes were converted to Christianity in

the fourth century through the missionary work of one Ulfilas, a man of Gothic and Cappadocian ancestry who was an ardent Arian believer. He explicitly affirmed that the Son and the Spirit were created creatures. When the Goths and Vandals conquered the Western Empire in the 5th century, they lived in uneasy coexistence with their subjects who adhered to the Nicene faith. It was not until the ascent of the Franks under Clovis and the Merovingians in the sixth and seventh centuries that the Nicene faith gained ascendancy and Arianism died out.

Concluding reflections—The Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the fourth century were messy and the twists and turns in the debate are difficult to follow. However, the essential issue is straightforward. Christians have always affirmed than human beings cannot rise up to God or save themselves. If we are to be saved, God must come to us. Thus, the Son and the Spirit who come down to accomplish and apply our salvation must be as fully God as the Father. Messy though it was, the controversies concluded with a consistent affirmation of allegiance to God the Father, His eternal and equal Son, and His eternal and equal Spirit.

§1-275. Ephesus (431) and Formula of Reunion—Ephesus was an unfortunate council. There were bishops and delegates coming from Constantinople (led by Nestorius), Anatolia (led by Memnon, an ally of Cyril), Syria (John of Antioch), Egypt (Cyril), and Rome (Celestine). John of Antioch let the Council know that his party would be arriving late and if he was delayed beyond that, the Council should start without him. Cyril started the Counsel immediately and summoned Nestorius to defend himself prior to the arrival of delegates sympathetic to Nestorius. The Council then read a selection from Nestorius' writings and condemned him. When John and the Syrian bishops arrived, they were furious with Cyril's action and met with Nestorius and “his” bishops and condemned Cyril and Memnon for their action. Celestine's delegation came late as well and affirmed Cyril and Memnon's action. Theodosius ended up affirming Cyril's council and sent Nestorius into exile. What was supposed to be an ecumenical council had turned into an ecclesiastical standoff, with Syria and Constantinople one side and Egypt, Anatolia, and Rome on the other.

John of Antioch later proposed a document (the Formula of Reunion) as a basis for reconciliation. Cyril and John agreed to a modified version of this formula and had Nestorius banished to a Saharan oasis in Egypt for the rest of his life (two decades). The Formula stressed two things:

- The person who was the Father's eternal Son was the very one born of Mary for our salvation.
- The affirmation of two natures (using *physis* to mean “nature”) in one person.

The Formula embodied the belief that the Son really did come down for our salvation and that the Father's Son was the same one who was born of Mary. The consensus going forward involved the use of physis to mean “nature” rather than “person,” thus the affirmation of two *physeis* in the person of Christ. This consensus was widely misunderstood.

§1-276. Chalcedon (451)— The lead-up to Chalcedon was as messy as Ephesus ever was. John of Antioch died in 441 and Cyril in 444 and subsequently their Formula fell apart. Controversy enveloped Eutyches, an elderly monk who served as a spiritual adviser at the imperial court in Constantinople. He allegedly claimed that Christ's humanity was absorbed into his deity. It also touched Bishop Leo of Rome in his *Tome to Flavian,* whose language was claimed to have Nestorian overtones. Flavian, bishop in Constantinople, held a synod at Constantinople in 448, which condemned Eutyches and questioned Leo's *Tome*. A council was called in 449, the so-called "Robber's Council" at Ephesus, which reinstated Eutyches and declared Flavian heretical. In 450, Theodosius died, his sister Pulcheria stepped in the power vacuum, marrying Marcian, a senator, and having him named emperor. In 451, Marcian called for an ecumenical council which met at Chalcedon, an imperial resort near Nicaea.

The hypostatic union (divine-human union in Christ) was the focus of this Council. The Antioch school emphasized the two natures of Christ taking care that they were not understood as confused. Alexandria school emphasized Christ's divinity. The Antiochenes saw the doctrine of salvation at stake—what Christ did depended on who he was. By living in perfect obedience to God, the second Adam undid the damage of the first Adam's sin.

The Council affirmed that Jesus Christ was "complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, … in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, or without separation … coming together to form one person." Thus, the final resolution was that Christ had two complete natures without confusion or change (rejecting Monophysitism), whose two natures coexisted without division or separation (rejecting Nestorius). Christ had a reasonable soul and was one substance with the Father (rejecting Apollinarius and Arius). The *Tome* of Leo, bishop of Rome, had a significant effect on the ultimate outcome and raised the prestige of that bishopric.

Physis was used as in the Formula of Reunion to mean "nature" rather than "person." However, many Greek speakers in the east, who were somewhat inattentive to the full statement of the Council, misinterpreted the Council's declaration as implying a separation of Christ into two persons, the man Jesus and the *Logos* who indwelt Him, rather than referring to the Lord's two distinct natures, divine and human. In the Latin speaking West, it was assumed that "two *physeis*" meant two natures and thus had no difficulty in affirming the conclusions of the Council.

***Concluding reflections*—**What may have been a genuine consensus of the person and nature of Christ was obscured by imperial and ecclesiastical intrigue and confusion over the use of words. The consensus was that fallen human beings could not rise up to God, but that God must come down to us. Therefore, Christ must not be merely a man with a special connection to God, but God the Son himself, who has come down by taking human nature upon himself and living as a human being. However, consensus was muddled by all the theatrics and basically three groups emerged from Chalcedon:

- The Orthodox, following Cyril's thought.
- The Monophysites, who were still in the thralls of debating how "*physis*" was used. Some prefer to describe them as Oriental Orthodoxy.

- True Nestorians.

Responses to Chalcedon by region varied—

- In Byzantium it saw it as a clear statement of orthodox faith;
- In Egypt and Syria, the language of two *physeis* was interpreted in the sense of "two persons" and rejected as a heretical Nestorian statement.
- In the West, where authority of Rome was always a paramount concern, the Chalcedon formula was attributed to the influence of Leo's *Tome.* The West insisted on its authority and drew implications from it for the authority of the Roman bishop.
- In the Persian church, a separate and self-governing church since 424*,* Chalcedon was largely ignored since they were uninvolved. The church looked warily at those in Syria and others due west of Persia who seemed to be following Eutyches and asserting the absorption of Christ's humanity into his deity.

1-277. Ecumenical councils (as accepted by the Roman Catholic Church)—The early ecumenical councils established a tradition in the Church of general meetings to decide issues of pressing import. What follows is a chart summarizing the ecumenical councils of the Church as accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. Orthodox believers of various ethnic stripes accept the verdicts of the first seven of the councils. Protestants have come late on the scene and have a varied take on the results of the councils, but usually agree with the early councils through the Council of Chalcedon (451).

Councils through the years (Roman Catholic reckoning):

Number/date		**Name**	**Primary decisions; Headlines**
1 (325)		1 Nicaea	Condemnation of Arius Creed of Nicaea Son of one substance with Father
2 (381)		1 Constantinople	Reiteration of Nicaea; Nicene Creed in Divinity of the Holy Spirit Condemnation of Apollinarius
3 (431)		Ephesus	Condemnation of Nestorius Mary *theotokos* "bearer of God"
4 (451)		Chalcedon	Condemnation of Eutyches Two natures—divine & human—in Ch
5 (553)		2 Constatinople	Condemnation of "Three Chapters" Theodore of Mopsuestia Theodoret Ibas of Edessa
6 (680-681)		3 Constantinople	Condemnation of monothelism Condemnation of Pope Honorius
7 (787)		2 Nicaea	Condemnation of iconoclasts Images worthy of veneration *(dulia*), bu *(latria)*
8 (869-870)		4 Constantinople	Ended schism of Photius

9 (1123)		1 Lateran	Confirmed Concordat of Worms betwe Emperor of Holy Roman Empire
10 (1139)		2 Lateran	Compulsory clerical celibacy
11 (1179)		3 Lateran	Determined method of papal election
12 (1215)		4 Lateran	Transubstantiation Yearly confession & communion requi Condemnned Joachim of Fiore Condemned Waldensians & Albigensia Regulated Inquisition
13 (1245)		1 Lyons	Deposed Emperor Frederick II
14 (1274)		2 Lyons	New papal election regulations (essenti used to the present day) Nominal reunion with Constantinople
15 (1314)		Vienne	Templars suppressed
16 (1415)		Constance	End of Papal Schism Condemnation of John Huss Conciliar authority over the Pope Plans for reformation & additional cou
17 (1431-1445)		Basel/Ferrara/Florence	Nominal reunions with Constantinople, Jacobites
18 (1512-1517)		5 Lateran	Condemned schismatic council of Pisa
19 (1545-1563)		Trent	Condemned Protestantism Authority of Scripture & tradition Consolidated Catholic Counter-reforma
20 (1869-1870)		1 Vatican	Papal infallibility
21 (1962-1965)		2 Vatican	Liturgical renewal (use of vernacular) New openness to lay ministry and parti New openness to other Christians Church to the modern world: addressin inequalities; nuclear war; & religious fr

c. Creeds

§1-281. In general—Our word comes from the Latin *credo,* meaning "I believe." The focus of the early church was equally focused on whom we profess to believe as well as what we believe. The early believers saw being a Christian as fundamentally about allegiance to the risen Lord Jesus. The creeds have something of a baptismal declaration about them. Just as the catechumen professed belief in and allegiance to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in baptism, so too the structure of the creeds reflect professed allegiance and belief. They were organized around the three divine persons, with the details of Christ's life, death, and resurrection amplifying the discussion of the Son, making that section of the creed much longer than that of the Father or the Spirit.

***Early efforts*—**The final aspect of the Church's response to heresies was the development of creeds. Attempts to formally state the basic beliefs of the Church began quite early. Baptismal creeds were developed and handed down from mother to daughter churches.

One of these was a shorter version of what we now call the Apostles' Creed. It was not composed by the apostles but was assembledr around 150, probably in Rome. Later in the second century, Irenaeus developed a rule of faith like the Apostle's Creed in providing a doctrinal framework for Christian faith for the churches he was shepherding.

***Controversies as prompting*—**The Trinitarian and Christological controversies, which prompted the calling of the initial ecumenical councils, resulted in the production of creedal statements. The nature of Christ and His relationship to the Father dominated the first two councils at Nicaea in 325 and at Constantinople in 381. The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated at these councils. The relationship between the human and divine in Christ was dealt with definitively at Chalcedon (451).

***Purpose and use*—**Creeds of the faith attempted to state the essence of Christianity with accuracy and concision. Such statements were intended to be useful in preaching and in instructing catechumens. The two most extensively used formulations were Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Apostle's Creed was in widespread use by the 3rd century and perhaps in its present form by 7th century. The Nicene Creed was formulated and revised by the end of the 4th century. As a rule of thumb, the Latin West favored Apostle's Creed while the Greek East preferred the Nicene Creed.

§1-282. Apostles' Creed

"I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.

"And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day he arose from the dead; he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

***Observations*—**The Apostles' Creed adopted the name because it attempted to concisely summarize the apostolic faith. The creed was directed against Marcion and the Gnostics. Consider the following:

- Use of "Father almighty" (*pantokrator*), which means "all ruling". Other versions read "Creator of all things visible and invisible." Nothing, including the material world, falls outside of God's rule. The distinction between a spiritual reality that serves God and a material reality that does not is rejected.
- The paragraph dealing with the Son is extensive. Jesus Christ is declared to be the "Son of God" who rules over this world and all reality. He is declared to be born of the Virgin Mary, affirming the virgin birth to be sure, but, to the point of controversy, affirming that Jesus was born and did not just appear on earth as claimed by Marcion. Pontius Pilate is mentioned, not to put the blame for Jesus' death exclusively on the Romans, but rather to date a definitive historical event.

Docetism is denied in the affirmation that Jesus "was crucified … dead, and buried". That Jesus would judge this world is affirmed, a thing Marcion would deny.

- The third paragraph or clause affirms the authority of the Church against the various groupings arising in Marcionite and Gnostic circles. The "resurrection of the flesh" is a final rejection of any idea that the flesh is inherently evil or of no consequence.

§1-283. Nicene Creed (325); revised at Constantinople (381).

"We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.

"We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, being of one Being with the Father, through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

§1-284. Chalcedon Creed (451)—"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and the only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to use."

E. Reaction to Christian Ascendancy

§1-291. Reactions to the new order—Reactions were positive and negative. Those enthusiastically supporting the Christian faith's sudden rise to favor began to develop what might be called an "official theology." This sought to show that Constantine was chosen by God to bring the history of both Church and Empire to its culmination. The Church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, was typical of this attitude.

However, others did not see imperial favor as a boon. They saw it as the faith being watered down and wanted nothing to do with the whole situation and retreat into the wilderness or desert to lead lives of meditation and asceticism. While martyrdom was no longer threatening, true disciples must continue training and that was in the monastic life. The fourth century witnessed a mass exodus of devout Christians to the deserts of Egypt and Syria.

Others just chose to break with the main Church for disciplinary reasons. The Donatists were representative of this track. Intellectual activity abounded in the era, and not always in the realm of sound teaching. The Arian and Monophysite controversies loomed and caused divisions.

Finally, there was a pagan reaction as well, best represented by the Emperor Julian (361-363). This reaction gained the most ground in old Roman aristocratic circles and in the rural areas of the Empire.

1. Monasticism: Call to Simplicity and Discipleship

§1-292. In general—Monk comes from *monos* and means "one who lives alone." Moderns do not know what to make of monks. Edward Gibbon, the author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and others like him sneer "at the unhappy exiles from social life, impelled by the dark and implacable genius of superstition." However, monasticism represented much more than that. It started as a movement of believers who were looking for a more vigorous, vibrant faith.

In the first three centuries, earnest discipleship was not a problem. Christians were surrounded by a suspicious, slanderous, and hostile society that became a persecuting one in various locales and eras. However, after Constantine, being a Christian could be quite a comfortable gig. Becoming a Christian was the thing to do, a ticket to a possibly good ride to influence and position. Gregory of Nazianzus complained "The chief seat is gained by evil doing, not by virtue; the sees (bishoprics) belong, not to the more worthy, but to the more powerful."

White martyrdom—It is true that ascetic monasticism was about being a Christian hero for some. The martyrs received recognition and kudos. They were venerated. Christians went on pilgrimages to their shrines. Relics would soon be a booming business. However, with the advent of Constantine, martyrdom was not in the cards anymore. In the 4th and 5th centuries, the model Christian was no longer the courageous bishop dragged before

wild animals in the Roman arena, but the “white martyr”, the lonely hermit in the forsaken Egyptian desert defying evil. The martyrs renounced their lives by defying the world system; the monastics and ascetics renounced the world system by withdrawing from it.

Asceticism in the pagan and Christian worlds— To varying degrees, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Gnosticism, and philosophical systems like Neoplatonism were uneasy with, or even antagonistic to, the physical world. Various forms of asceticism were profoundly world-rejecting and deeply committed to the soul's self-salvation. People were urged to forego marriage for celibacy, restrict their diet and even fast severely, and to shun the accumulation of wealth and property and embrace poverty. Stoics held that passions were the great enemy of true wisdom and the wise should devote themselves to perfecting their souls by subjugating their passions. There were precedents of communal living outside the bounds of ordinary society among the Epicureans and the Pythagoreans. Additional precedents were found in Judaism (the Essenes and the Therapetuae, described by Philo of Alexandria), and the community in the desert at Qumran.

Christianity stands at odds with dualistic ascetic movements. It does not identify the physical world or all physical activity as evil. Indeed, the created world is declared to be very good (Gen. 1:31) at its outset. Properly understood, Christian faith does not speak of souls ascending to the true God, but of the true God descending to our realm to redeem unworthy humanity. However, Christianity has always spawned ascetic movements, not denying the goodness of matter, of food, of marriage and sexual relations, but instead focusing on denying oneself legitimate interests for the sake of pursuing higher ones.

§1-293. Monastic patterns—There were two patterns for monastic living:

***Eremitical monasticism*—**It was in the desert, particularly the Egyptian desert, which proved to be the starting place for monasticism. The desert was at first attractive to monastics, not so much because of the hardships it presented, but because of its inaccessibility. This was eremitical monasticism (from *eremos* = wilderness, desert). The milieu of the birth of monasticism was a combination of a chaotic and crumbling Empire and the ascendancy of the Church in power. The hermit fled from both the world at large and the world in the Church.

The Scriptural precedent was the wilderness motif that runs throughout Scripture. The desert/wilderness was the place for encountering God:

- Moses and Israel in Pentateuch;
- Elijah fleeing to the desert;
- Jeremiah’s laments; and
- The Lord’s own practice (e.g. his retreat into the desert to be tempted 40 days and nights)

***Wilderness scene*—**In the closing centuries of the Roman Empire, so popular was the wilderness life that a virtual city appeared on the fringes of the Egyptian desert. The

monks sought to create an alternate culture, based not on wealth but poverty, not on power but weakness, not on prestige but lowliness. In their communal life they saw themselves as living the "apostolic life" described by the book of Acts. In a sense, the same impulse that drove the Reformation in the 16th century was alive and well in early monasticism—a return to simplicity, poverty, the imitation of Jesus, and the trusting heart of faith.

***Cenobitic monasticism*—**Another form of monastic life, and eventually the dominant form, was *cenobitic* monasticism, a form of communal monasticism. The term "cenobite" comes from the Greek *koinos bios* (meaning life together). It arose out of the tendency among monastics to gather around particularly saintly hermits and out of the very nature of the gospel.

§1-294. Monastic development and appeal—From the solitude of the early hermits, monasticism evolved into disciplined and large communities of monks. Initially eschewing books and learning, the movement soon enrolled such scholars as Jerome, Augustine, and Basil. Originally a lay movement, it soon embraced bishops and eventually became the standard for the ideal bishop. At root was the conviction that the ideal Christian life was one of personal poverty and sharing of goods. The monastics took the New Testament exhortation to not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2) very seriously. They looked back to the early believers who shared all their possessions and lived very dedicated lives (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-36). This radical dedication caused a distinction to arise in Christian community which continued through the centuries—two levels of Christians, one marked by vows of celibacy and obedience that only monastics took.

***Wealthy and sophisticated*—**The appeal of monasticism reached the wealthy and sophisticated of the day. Evagorius (345-399) was born a Christian and educated in Constantinople. After an affair when a priest, he fled to Jerusalem and joined a monastery. He spent most of his life in the desert. A disciple of Origen, his writings (*Praktikos* and *Gnostic Chapters*) were influential on later spirituality.

Palladius (364-420 or 430) was a well-established figure in society who went on pilgrimage to the monks in the desert in Egypt and Palestine, seeking a simplicity and nobility of life he felt was unavailable in the cities of the late Empire. He collected sayings and stories in *Lausiac History*, which presents a vivid picture of Egyptian monasticism.

Macrina was a Roman matron who used her massive fortune to establish and support monastic foundations and met the practical needs of the monks. Here we see the Roman patronage system (or *clientalia*) taking on a Christian ministry face. She influenced her brothers, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, two of the three Cappadocian fathers, to a more serious and disciplined Christian discipleship.

***Athanasius, Jerome, and others*—**Word spread about the monastic ideal by pilgrims to the desert. But those who contributed most to the spread of the monastic ideal were

bishops and scholars who saw the value of monastic witness for the daily life of the Church. Athanasius wrote the *Life of Anthony*, observing the monastic life first-hand when he fled persecution by imperial authority in the Arian controversy. Augustine partly attributed his conversion to reading that book. Athanasius was not a monk himself but sought to organize his own life by monastic discipline and promote the monastic ideals and worldly renunciation.

Jerome wrote *Life of Paul the Hermit*, translated Pachomius' *Rule* into Latin, and became a monk himself. His works and example had a tremendous impact on the Western Church. Basil of Caesarea found time amid theological controversy to organize monasteries where he spent time in devotion and in care of the needy.

Martin of Tours is a name to remember in Western monasticism. He was born in Pannonia (now Hungary) in 335 to a soldier and resided in various parts of the Empire. He decided to become a Christian against his parents' wishes and his father, to keep Martin away from his Christian contacts, had him enrolled in the army. Martin served in the early campaigns of Julian the Apostate. During this era of his life, near the city of Amiens in Gaul, Martin encountered a freezing beggar and responded by cutting his cloak in two and giving half to the freezing man. Soon after this event, Martin was baptized and then discharged from the army. He settled in the town of Poitiers in Gaul (modern day France) and devoted himself to the monastic life. His fame for sanctity spread through the region. When the bishopric of nearby Tours became vacant, Martin was elected bishop but did not abandon his monastic ways. His example took root. Many came to think of a true bishop in terms of the monastic ideal and not in terms of the pomp and worldly power that had come to characterize the bishoprics in the post-Constantinian era.

***John Cassian*—**An important source of what we know about early monastic ideals are two works by John Cassian (360-430) entitled *Institutes* and *Conferences*, a compendium of Egyptian monastic lore. The *Institutes* elaborates on cenobitic life in detail while the *Conferences* are sermons by desert monks on topics extending from prayer and contemplation to fighting boredom or temptation.

§1-295. Anthony and the early hermits—Christian monasticism in the form of solitary wilderness life initiated with by the life of Anthony of Egypt (251-356). He was something of a "rock star" of the early hermits. What we know of Anthony comes from a biography, the *Life of Anthony*, written by Athanasius of Alexandria around 360. Athanasius lionized solitary monasticism, also known as anchoritic or eremitic monasticism = Greek for "retreating" and "desert." Antony alternated between seclusion where he struggled against his own sinfulness and engagement where he provided spiritual advice to the other disciples who visited with him. This latter pattern of engagement began to manifest what has been described as the *a laura* pattern in solitary monasticism. These were groups of solitary monastics in loose communities. Over time, the wisdom of the monastics like Antony were collected and revered by fellow monastics and by believers from all levels of society. Particularly noteworthy in these sayings is that these "desert fathers" including many women.

***Background*—**Anthony was born in Egypt of wealthy parents. They died when Anthony was young, leaving him an inheritance sufficient for Anthony and his younger sister to live comfortably. The story of the rich young ruler inspired Anthony to dispose of his property, reserve a portion for the care of his sister, and to give the rest to the poor. He then spent several years learning the monastic life from an old anchorite. He then spent his life retreating ever deeper into the desert pursued by other monks desirous of learning from him the discipline of prayer and contemplation. Anthony's desire to be alone was in danger of being thwarted by the desire of his disciples to join him.

He visited the great city of Alexandria on two occasions. The first occurred during the persecution of Diocletian, when he and others went to offer their lives up as martyrs. The Roman official deemed them unworthy of his attention, and they contented themselves with offering encouragement to their fellow believers. The second visit was during the Arian controversy to quell rumors that he was an Arian supporter. He lived into the 350s and attended by two younger monks as he approached the end of his days.

***Elements of early monasticism*—**In Athanasius' account of Anthony's life, we see the elements of early monasticism:

- The world is corrupt. The disciple desires to be alone and apart from the world to strive to achieve true discipleship through struggle.
- Monasticism is a form of "white martyrdom". The monk is not fighting wild beasts in the arena and dying a bloody death, but inner demons in a solitary environment to die to self and struggle for an authentically pure faith.
- The arena for battle is the mind and the body. The control of the body through mental and physical dedication (asceticism) is a key dimension of early (and subsequent) forms of monasticism.
- Early monastics, while striving to live alone, were submissive to ecclesiastical authority and strongly orthodox in their outlook.
- The "desert fathers" or "sages of the desert" were magnets that drew other followers who sought the wisdom the fathers personified.

***The desert monks lived extremely simply*—**Their daily routine included prayer, usually standing, sometimes for hours, meditation, reading from Scripture, and fasting, often and lengthy, from food and sleep. The desired consequence was a growing spiritual awareness. Some planted gardens, but most earned their living by weaving baskets and mats out of reeds that they traded for bread and oil. Their possessions were their clothing and a mat to sleep on. They did not own books, fearing that knowledge might puff them up. They memorized entire books of the Bible, particularly the Psalms and the New Testament.

***Severe asceticism*—**Some engaged in ridiculously severe asceticism to gain reputations. Stories of hermits going to extremes abound—pole dwellers, cave dwellers, anchorites. Fantastic stories of temptations and hallucinations raised real questions of their mental

balance. Other hermits, thinking their lives holier than those of most bishops and priests, deemed themselves the proper deciders of Christian teaching.

§1-296. Pachomius and communal monasticism—Communal or coenobitic monasticism (coenobitic = Greek for "common life") is exemplified by the communities founded by Pachomius (286-346). He was born in Egypt to pagan parents. As a young man, he was forced to join the army. Consoled by Christians in the army, he sought out believers when he was discharged unexpectedly from the service. He converted to Christianity around 313. He lived as a solitary hermit for seven years and was deeply influenced by a solitary monastic named Palamon. He received visions to join in the monastic but in a communal, not solitary, manner and felt commanded to move in the direction of founding a community of hermits. He persuaded his younger brother join him in the life of prayer and contemplation.

Pachomius established the first monastery where monks lived communally under a formal rule as a corrective to the abuses of the hermits. Their basic rule was one focused on mutual service. New initiates were required to break from their former lives but given significant freedom to pursue their spiritual callings once this break was made. Daily life in community was dominated by work, Bible reading and meditation, prayer, and discussion of how to apply Biblical principles to communal life. By the time of his death, there were nine monasteries for men and two for women under his authority with thousands of members.

Rule of life—He established a regulated common life, in which the monks ate, labored, slept, and worshiped. Anyone joining the community was required to give up all their possessions and pledge absolute obedience to their superiors. He called for fixed hours, manual work, uniform dress, and strict discipline. Life in community kept one connected and accountable in an orderly and productive routine. The rule consisted of a rhythm of isolation—time alone in prayer and meditation and in working small crafts—and common time together devoted to meals, common prayer, and instruction. Subsequent leaders would elaborate on this rule, particularly Basil of Caesarea in the east and Benedict of Nursia in the west. Augustine was influenced by this and started his own community at Thagaste in North Africa.

Daily routines of the monks included both work and devotion. Common prayers were twice a day, in the morning and evening. These prayer times included the singing of the psalms and the reading of Scripture. Poverty was the vow, but Pachomius did not insist on exaggerated poverty. The diet included bread, fruit, vegetables, and fish, but never meat. The monks produced their own food and sold the excess to local markets or gave it to the poor or provided hospitality to sojourners. In each housing unit, there was a superior, who in turn was subject to the superior of the monastery and his deputy. Above the superiors was Pachomius and his successors who called themselves abbots or archmandrites. Twice a year all the monks gathered for prayer and worship and to deal with issues necessary to maintain proper order in the communities. The monks never accepted ecclesiastical office or ordination. Each Sunday a priest would come to the monastery and celebrate communion.

***Novices*—**People seeking admission to the monastery simply appeared at the gate of the enclosure. They were usually spent several days and nights at the gate, begging to be let in. When let in, the gatekeepers took charge of the new arrivals, living among them until the newcomers were deemed ready to join the community. Surprisingly, many new arrivals were not Christians, an indication of the enormous attraction of the solitude of the desert in the fourth century.

§1-297. Egyptian monasticism—The Egyptian desert beckoned people to abandon the crowds, the complexity, and the danger of city life and live more simply away from civilization. In the third century, Rome encountered economic and political crises, and many headed for the sands for a variety of reasons:

- Persecution—The Decian/Valerian and the Diocletian/Galerian persecutions were the most violent and systematic of the Roman persecutions. Christian headed to the desert and stayed there even after the persecutions lifted.
- Societal breakdown—The third century was a century of crisis for the Roman Empire. Many fled to the desert to escape.
- Spiritual critique—Many felt that the Constantinian church had become thoroughly worldly.
- The noble heroic—Some wanted to court spiritual battle to be strengthened in their faith.

This was a mass exodus involving many people. Some wanted to leave their environs because of the compromise they saw in Christians around them. Others abandoned their villages to flee the increasingly oppressive tax burden that characterized the later Empire. The reasons for the exodus abounded, including the inspirational life of Anthony. He was a legend of solitude attractive to the early monastics. Anthony went out into the desert in the middle of the 3rd century. As many as 100,000 followed him to the desert in the last years of antiquity.

Monastic theologians—Egypt was also the home of the first great monastic theologians—Shenoute of Atripe and Evagrius of Ponticus. Shenoute lived more than one hundred years, dying in 466. His writings were mostly sermons, moral homilies for the benefit of the communal monastics that he led. Evagrius wrote of eight besetting sins that hindered the monastic's spiritual progress. He called these the “eight words” (gluttony, lust, greed, anger, dejection, weariness, vainglory, and pride). They would become the basis for the medieval “seven deadly sins” that one finds expounded in Aquinas. He also proposed a three-step pathway to spiritual perfection:

- *praktike*—eradicating one's vices (the eight words) and acquiring virtues;
- *physike*—acquiring an equanimity of soul in order to fight demons;
- *theologike*—contemplating God purely and perfectly once one had vanquished one's own sinfulness and demonic opposition.

These became monasticism's problematic theological underpinnings. The strong focus on ascetic denial and the upward progress of the soul undercut the Christian insistence on the essential goodness of the physical realm and ran the danger of espousing an essential

dualism as well as tending to obscure the priority of God's downward action for our salvation. The Christian idea of redemption is not humanity reaching for God but God reaching down to us.

§1-298. Syria, Palestine, and Asia Minor—The presence of significant biblical sites in Palestine contributed to the growth of monasticism in the region. Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, went on pilgrimage from 326 to 328 to identify important biblical sites and Constantine had churches built on the sites she identified, including the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Monastic communities grew up around these sites. Wealthy widows, Melania in Jerusalem and Paula in Bethlehem, established communities that drew famous inhabitants—Rufinius in Jerusalem and Jerome, translator of the Latin Vulgate, in Bethlehem. These communal monasteries focused on scholarship, manuscript preservation, and hospitality to visitors. Monasteries not located at famous sites were usually of a *laura* pattern of solitary monasticism.

During the fourth century, communal monasticism exploded in Syria. The fifth century witnessed the phenomena of the Stylites or “pillar monks”, those living on pillars using elevation to gain a unique vantage on the world around them. The most famous of these was Symeon the Stylite. He spent a decade in a communal monastery before receiving permission in 423 to live alone atop a nearby hill. Over the next four decades, he developed a system of pillars upon which he lived. He prayed, carried on extensive correspondence influencing the affairs of the church, and provided spiritual advice to thousands of visitors.

In Edessa, now Urfa, a city in southwest Turkey, clusters of celibate monastics, called the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant, made explicit commitments to remaining in society at large while following a set of spiritual steps towards greater closeness with God. Edessa became a significant center for Persian Christianity and its expression of monasticism was less bent on separation from society than in the Roman world. Rather than emphasizing a decisive break with one's previous life, as in Pachomian monasticism, Persian monasticism called for its adherents to live within and be concerned about their local communities and churches while remaining celibate and exercising a set of spiritual disciplines marking them out as different from society at large.

In Anatolia, also called Asia Minor, was a province in consisting of the Asian part of modern-day Turkey. Monasticism here was the story of a remarkable family. Basil (the elder) and his wife Emmelia were wealthy Roman aristocrats and devout believers. They had ten children. The eldest, Macrina, lost her fiance before they were married and subsequently devoted herself to the monastic lifestyle. She convinced her mother to dedicate the family estate in central Anatolia to monastic ascetism and the property became home to several monasteries. Her brother Naucratius became a noted jurist and lived as a hermit on the property. Another brother, Peter, became a bishop. Two other brothers became the great Trinitarian theologians, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. Macrina's influence on her younger brothers was notable. Basil became a great monastic leader and wrote a short treatise *Small Asketikon,* enumerating the principles of

monastic life that became the closest thing to a fixed rule in eastern monasticism. It was translated into Latin in the fifth century and became known as the *Rule of St. Basil*.

***Episcopal authority*—**The monks submitted to the authority of the bishop as a curb on spiritual freelancing. They began to focus on service to the surrounding community, including medical treatment, relief of the poor, and educational activities. They sought the salvation of their souls by fleeing the "entanglements of the body." Monasticism provided a context for the pursuit of the Christian ideal—mutual support, context for freeing one from selfishness and bodily passion, and the community supplied with a range of gifts needed for spiritual exercise.

§1-299. Western monasticism

Early monasticism in the Western world—Monasticism spread quickly from Egypt to North Africa. Augustine lived as a monk before becoming a bishop and wrote a monastic rule for the monasteries around Carthage. Most of western monasticism took place north of the Mediterranean. Early eastern monasticism was often sponsored by wealthy aristocrats, many of them women—Helen, Melania, Paula, Macrina and her mother. In the west, Martin of Tours, a converted former pagan soldier, loomed large. In 360, he established a communal monastery near Poitiers in central France and in 371 became bishop of Tours. He dedicated his pastoral efforts to the evangelization of the rural poor in northern Europe.

John Cassian was a significant figure in early western monasticism. He spent time in eastern monasteries in Palestine, Egypt, and Constantinople before founding monasteries near Marseilles in France. In the 420s, he wrote the *Institutes* and the *Conferences,* which brought the principles of Egyptian monasticism and ascetic spirituality to the western world.

***Benedict of Nursia*—**Casian's writings and those of Basil of Caesarea had profound influence on the greatest of all Christian monastic systematizers. Benedict of Nursia is regarded as the father of Western monasticism. In 529, he founded the famous monastery at Monte Cassino in central Italy and in 540, he wrote the *Rule of Benedict*, which became the basis of subsequent communal monasticism in the West. There were three keys to Benedict's *Rule:*

- the monk's voluntary obedience to the abbot of the monastery;
- the monk's acceptance of voluntary poverty and chastity; and
- the concept of the "work of God," the daily routine of work, study, and worship/prayer/reflection.

The monastics sought closeness to God through a disciplined life of moderate asceticism, productive manual work, and attention to Scripture and prayer.

***Spiritual fortress*—**Benedict saw the monastery as a spiritual fortress apart from the world. He emphasized work, study, prayer, and worship; there were seven or eight short services each day. Monks were to be "instruments of good works" —to love God and

others in tangible ways, to fast regularly, to aid the poor, to be truthful, to avoid returning evil for evil, and to shun gluttony and sloth. They were to avoid complaining and murmuring, boisterous laughter, and raucous behavior. They were to enjoy holy living and honor the elderly. The list went on—there were seventy-two such rules of discipline.

Work and prayer—Benedict felt that "idleness is hostile to the soul," and therefore the monks should be occupied at fixed times in manual labor and at definite hours in prayer and religious reading. Work has moral value—both mental and manual labor. Benedict saw the monastery as a little world unto itself, in which the monks lived a strenuous but not overburdened life, involving worship, vigorous labor in the shop and the fields, and serious study.

§1-300. Assessment of monasticism—Monasticism found a permanent place within Christianity and has exercised enormous influence. In the imperial Church of the 4th century and beyond, many bishops came from the monastic ranks. These leaders were ascetical, celibate, and frequently scholarly. The monks were the "foot soldiers" of both the fierce doctrinal wars and of earnest service in the era of the imperial Church. They were active, mobile, and militant in their support of their doctrinal particularities and in their regimens of service. In addition, through these centuries and beyond, monasteries provided a constant "alternate lifestyle" that enabled Christians to express their discipleship in a more radical fashion. As such, they were an outlet for reforming impulses in the Church.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the service the monks rendered after the ruin of the Western Empire and the growth of new Europe with its mix of Germanic kingdoms and old Roman customs. Civilization and classical learning survived because of the Benedictine monasteries which dotted the European countryside. Monasteries were centers for reform in knowledge and religious practice. They preserved and copied manuscripts and taught techniques in agriculture as well as a basic curriculum in learning. The monks were the basic missionary force of the early medieval Church and the only real educators in the vast reaches of a barbarian continent.

Tensions within monasticism—Monastic faults flowed from **failing to live up to lofty ideals** (ideals that the populace at large would not think of reaching for). However, perhaps the most serious flaw was the **monastic concept of life**. It was essentially unnatural and unbiblical. To enter a monastery was to separate from the world, to abandon the ordinary relationships of social life, and to shun marriage and all that Christian home and family signified. The movement was poised between the dualistic world around them (with its sharp distinction between matter and spirit) and Christianity's affirmation of the physical world and God's incarnate manifestation in that world in the person of Jesus Christ.

- The first and most significant tension in monasticism was that of focusing on the soul and not considering the whole person. A movement requiring the renunciation of most bodily pleasures and needs ran the risk of treating the body as insignificant. The tendency was to see the soul as the "real" person and the body as a temporary and problematic appendage. The critics assert that

undergirding the monastic ideal was the erroneous view of humanity as essentially a soul trapped in a body, the spirit made prisoner to a corpse. This is not a biblical view of humanity as the image of God, albeit fallen.

- Works salvation—Tension between the upward movement of the soul and the downward movement of God's redemption. The monastic emphasis on the upward movement of the soul certainly did tend to descend into a works righteousness. The movement ran the risk of focusing salvation on human striving. Christianity focused on God's downward work in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
    - ***Pause and ponder—***The monks renounced the comforts of society and sought the spiritual rewards of self-discipline. Their theory held that renunciation of the body and creature comfort frees the soul to commune with God. But how does such renunciation relate to the gospel? Is it a form of self-salvation, a works righteousness that achieves an atonement for sin based on the denial of self? Or is it a legitimate form of repentance, and essential preparation for joy in the good news of God's salvation in Christ? While many did neglect the downward dimension of God's redemptive work, not everyone was guilty of this. Monastic discipline can spur evangelical thought concerning Christian discipleship.
- Tension between contentless contemplation of God and a focus on the relational experience of God in Christ. Monasticism became closely associated with mysticism, a spirituality that revolves around the mystic's direct experience of God. In eastern pantheistic faiths, this mystic experience was seen as contentless, an experience of the ineffable ultimate. Christian faith calls us to a relationship with God Himself through His incarnate and fully human Son, a faith that is anything but contentless.
- Commitment to poverty and hard work, staples of communal monasticism, tended to undermine communal monasticism's principles. Vows of poverty and hard work made by capable people end up producing an excess that makes the community very prosperous. While the monastics could not own anything, the monastery could and did. There arose a tension between the growing wealth of monasteries and the increasingly hollow commitment to technical poverty that became a huge problem for the monastic movement in the centuries that followed. Thus, monastic poverty and diligence soon accumulated wealth that tempted subsequent generations of monks to sloth (the dreaded *accadia* decried by so many monastic reformers). Discipline started off strictly and grew increasingly lax. Scandal seldom plagued monasteries early in their existence, but moral vigor declined over time.
- Tiered spirituality—Monasticism did see singleness as a superior state. They were wedded to Christ, the "athletes of God" if you will, more committed, more disciplined and earnest. Protestants have inverted that and regard marriage as the superior state, but we still have a general tendency to a tiered understanding of the faith. The ranking of ourselves is not geared to monastic disciplines lifting the soul to heaven but in other comparisons we use to flatter ourselves. The human tendency to comparison is always an issue.
- Concern for the church and the larger world—Monasticism is often criticized on this ground. Monasticism, particularly solitary monasticism, was prone to focus

so much on individual salvation that it neglected community. Even communal monasticism, so focused on its own members and their life and worship, tended to neglect the broader community of the church in the world. However, monastics saw themselves as serving the community, as a noble form of Christian community and in practical ways—business, scholarship and education (Scriptoriums and monastic schools), and in evangelism and missions (the missionary monks).

- Small-minded group loyalty—The monastics were often overly loyal to their group as against the larger church. However, evangelical Protestants are hardly the model critic here. Haven't we been guilty of the same kind of small-mindedness?

2. Pagan Reaction

§1-306. In general—Imperial favor did not mean the Empire immediately became Christian. Many were dedicated to the old practices, mindsets, and ideals. People in rural areas and the intellectual classes were slow to convert to Christianity. For example, the famous rhetorician Libanius (314-394), a highly sophisticated and learned scholar, continued to defend traditional ways. He was a teacher of Julian the Apostate and composed a magnificent eulogy for Julian at his death. One purpose of Augustine's *City of God*, composed more than a century after the Edict of Milan, was to reply to pagan critics who claimed that the fall of the city of Rome was due to the abandonment of the pagan gods.

Resistance to the Christianization of the Empire was significant and were demonstrated by the difficulties Constantine's successors had in imposing Christianity on the populace. In 341, Constantius prohibited all pagan sacrifice, an indirect confirmation that the practice had persisted. In 346, Constantius and Constans issued an edict forbidding sacrifices and closing pagan temples. In 353-356, the imperial edict of 346 was reissued, clearly indicating its lack of complete success. This pagan reaction reached its crescendo in the reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363).

§1-307. Julian the Apostate—Julian the Apostate (361-363) is a prime example of this pagan resistance to the Christianization of the Empire. Julian was raised as a Christian in the imperial family. The decade prior to Julian's elevation witnessed him immersed in his studies in rhetoric and philosophy at Athens. He became interested in ancient mystery religions and abandoned Christianity, seeking after truth and beauty in the literature and religion of classical Greece. Julian's defection became very apparent upon his elevation to the throne and his attempt to restore the Empire to its traditional polytheistic religion.

Constantius II made Julian Caesar in the west in 355. He proved an able soldier, winning victories, and was proclaimed Augustus by his troops in 360. When he became the sole emperor in 361, he promoted a syncretistic form of paganism with a much-diminished place for Jesus. Jesus was viewed as a man, among others, who manifested the divine.

***Pagan restoration*—**Julian sought to restore and reform paganism and to impede the progress of Christianity. Constantine had not persecuted pagans but had favored Christianity and sacked pagan temples to build Christian basilicas. Constantine's sons had decreed laws favoring Christianity and a half century of neglect had put paganism on the rocks. Julian reorganized the pagan priesthood along the hierarchical lines of the Christian Church. He restored pagan worship, returned the property taken from the pagan shrines, and reinstituted sacrifices.

He did not persecute Christians but worked to put the faith at a disadvantage. He removed Christians from high office and sought to return education to pagan standards. He passed laws forbidding Christians from teaching the classics, aware of how Christians were using the classics to enhance the appeal of the faith. He set out to systemically ridicule and mock the faith. He wrote *Against the Galileans*, in which he charged that Christians twisted and misinterpreted the Jewish Scriptures and vigorously undercut the Bible and Christian teaching. Having been raised in the emperor's extended household, he was well aware of what Christians taught and his work had impact. Basil of Alexandria felt the need to reply to Julian's attacks eighty years after Julian died.

***"Thou has conquered, Galilean"*—**Death overtook Julian on the battlefield a mere two years into his reign. Legend has it that his dying words were: "Thou hast conquered, Galilean." He pushed his pagan agenda vigorously but did not have time to roll back the Christian tide. Christians of the day interpreted his death as the judgment of God for his apostasy.

§1-308. Effect of pagan reaction—The specter of a pagan emperor unsympathetic to the Christian faith sobered believers. Doctrinal conflicts continued but there was new energy to resolve these. Gone was the assumption that Christian emperors were a constant and that State support could be taken for granted.

F. Theologians and Writers

§1-311. In general—We can only pause briefly to discuss a few of the significant theological voices of this era. The first is Eusebius the great Church historian. Then we will briefly consider the career of Athanasius, the champion of Nicene Christianity. Additionally, in the East, the so-called Cappadocian fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, along with John Chrysostom, were the most important. In the West, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, the first three of the four so-called Latin fathers, bear particular attention.

1. Eastern Fathers

§1-312. Eusebius of Caesarea—Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340) was prehaps the most learned Christian of his time. Early in his career he collaborated with a scholar named Pamphilus, traveling far and wide in quest of documents concerning Christian origins. The two jointly wrote several significant works. Diocletian's persecution ended their

peaceful and scholarly life when Pamphilus suffered martyrdom. Fortunately, Eusebius escaped this fate.

***Ecclesiastical history*—**Eusebius continued alone working on his masterpiece, *Church History*. Before Constantine became sole emperor, Eusebius was elected bishop of Caesarea, which pulled him away from his scholarly life. His role in the Arian controversy was ambiguous. For him, the peace and unity of the Church was the primary concern which caused him to minimize the danger of Arianism. He did vote against it at the Council of Nicaea but began to waver in his convictions after the Council.

Eusebius' *Church History* is really an apology to show that Christianity was the goal of human history, particularly seen in the context of the Roman Empire. Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria had popularized the idea, at least in the eastern part of the Empire, that both Greek philosophy and the Hebrew Scriptures were given in preparation for the gospel. In addition, the relative peace which the Empire had brought to the Mediterranean world was seen as ordained by God to disseminate the Christian faith. Eusebius wove all these ideas together in his work, demonstrating the truth of Christianity and understanding it as the culmination of human history. We are deeply indebted to Eusebius and his scholarly work in shedding light on the early Church. Without this work, we would know far less about these early centuries of the Church.

***Criticism*—**However, his perspective in understanding his day as the culmination of human history made it difficult for Eusebius to take a critical view of the events of the time. He ignored Constantine's shortcomings and is mute about his crimes. His work is something of a warning of how Christian thought can be unwittingly shaped by circumstances, even to the point of abandoning traditional themes and critical concerns. Three examples should suffice to demonstrate this:

- In the New Testament and in the early Church, the gospel was good news for the poor and downtrodden. The rich were not particularly responsive, and a number of New Testament passages speak of the difficulty of the rich being saved. With Constantine, the Church was awash in imperial favor and riches were seen as signs of divine favor. The monastic movement was in part a protest against this accommodating understanding of the Christian life.
- Eusebius waxed eloquently over the ornate churches that were built all over the Empire. The net effect of all these elaborate buildings and the increasingly formal liturgy that fit them was the development of a clerical aristocracy remarkably similar to the imperial aristocracy. The Church grew away from the common person and imitated, in liturgy and in social structure, the great offices and rites of the imperial government.
- The scheme of history Eusebius developed led him to set aside or at least postpone a fundamental theme of Christian preaching: the eager expectation of the full reign of God. One gets the impression that with Constantine and his successors, the plan of God was fulfilled. Eusebius seemed to be expressing a common feeling among Christians of the day that, with the advent of Constantine

and the peace he brought to the Church, the final triumph of Christianity over its enemies had arrived.

§1-313. Athanasius—Athanasius (296-373) was bishop of the influential see of Alexandria from 328 to his death in 373. Nicknamed the "black dwarf" by his enemies because of his dark complexion and small stature, Athanasius was born to Coptic parents in a small village along the Nile River. In his early years, he was in close contact with the desert monks, and he maintained that association throughout his life. The monks repeatedly gave him support and asylum throughout his stormy career. He learned discipline and austerity from the monks, which earned him the admiration of his friends and the respect of his enemies. His strong suit was his close ties to his people and in living out his faith without the obtuse subtleties of the Arians or the luxurious pomp of so many of the bishops of important ecclesiastical sees.

Battle for Nicene orthodoxy—As a young advisor to his mentor and predecessor Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, he was the architect and champion of Nicene Christianity. When Alexander died, Athanasius brcame bishop of Alexandria much against his own wishes. The year was 328, the same year Constantine revoked the sentence banishing Arius. Arianism was again on the rise and the battle lines were drawn. During his tenure as bishop, he was exiled five separate times as the conflict between the supporters of Nicaea and the Arians grew increasingly intense through the 4th century. Athanasius frequently sought refuge among the monks of the Egyptian desert. During one exile, while in Germany, he published *The Life of Anthony*, which influenced the course of Western monasticism.

Presence of God in history—Athanasius was perhaps the greatest theologian of his day and the primary human reason for the defeat of Arianism. Athanasius saw the presence of God in history as a central theme of the faith. Therefore, he saw Arianism as a grave threat. Their assertion that Jesus was not really God, but a lesser being, put the very core of the Christian message at risk. Athanasius saw Jesus' humanity as a key tenet of orthodoxy. The corruption of humanity because of sin was such that a new creation was required, a radical transformation and restoration of what had been destroyed by sin. The work of salvation is not less than the work of creation. The person responsible for our re-creation can be no less than the one responsible for our creation.

Athanasius sought both the affirmation and clarification of the Nicene formula. Those who opposed the Nicene Creed did so because they feared that the assertion that the Son was of the same substance as the Father could be understood to mean that there is no distinction between the Father and the Son. They preferred to say, "of similar substance" (*homoiousios*) rather than "of the same substance" (*homoousios*) as declared in the Creed. Athanasius worked with these believers and arrived at an agreement at a synod in Alexandria in 362, that it was acceptable to refer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as "of one substance" if it was clear that that did not mean the obliteration of the distinction between the three persons. In part because of these negotiations, most people rallied to the Nicene formula and that formula was ratified at the ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381.

In addition, he wrote *De incarnatione*, a carefully reasoned explanation of the doctrine of redemption. His apologetic work, *Contra Gentiles*, was a defense of Christianity against an increasingly belligerent paganism, epitomized by the short reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363).

§1-314. Cappadocian fathers—The Cappadocian fathers are Basil of Caesarea (330-379), the famous monastic and theologian, his brother Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), famous for his works on mystical contemplation, and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389), poet, author, and hymn writer. They were the early pillars of Eastern Orthodoxy. In addition, there was Macrina, the remarkable sister of Basil and Gregory. All these people hailed from the province of Cappadocia in eastern Anatolia (modern-day Turkey).

***Nicene formula*—**The Cappadocian fathers championed the view of the Trinity that was formulated in the Nicene Creed. In their view, there was one divine substance (*ousia*) but three persons (*hypostateis*). One divine nature in three persons was encapsulated in the Nicene Creed and became the common formula by 375. One God in three consubstantial yet distinct persons has been foundational doctrine ever since.

§1-315. Basil of Caesarea—Basil, bishop of Caesarea from 370 to 379, was a stout defender of the doctrine of the Trinity as formulated at the Council of Nicaea and further clarified at the Council of Constantinople. He is known for lasting contributions in three areas. First, he introduced the idea of communal monasticism based on love, holiness, and obedience, which refocused that movement away from the sensational asceticism of the wandering hermits. The Rule of St. Basil remains today the basic directive of Eastern monasticism. Second, he established the administrative control of the bishops over the monasteries and other works of the Church. Third, he defended orthodoxy along with his friends, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa.

***Background*—**Basil initially intended to follow in his father's footsteps as a lawyer and orator. He returned to Caesarea after his studies, puffed up in his own estimation, to take a position teaching rhetoric. Macrina, his sister, intervened and took him down a peg in no uncertain terms. Then word came that their brother, Naucratius, with whom Basil was very close, had died. This blow led Basil to search for answers. He resigned his teaching position and asked Macrina to teach him the secrets of religious life. Macrina proposed a life of renunciation and contemplation like the ascetics of the desert.

Macrina founded a community for women in nearby Annesi. Basil went to Egypt to learn more about the monastic life and then, he and his brother Gregory of Nyssa founded a monastic community for men like the one their sister founded. Basil emphasized community life based on service to others and is regarded as the father of Eastern monasticism.

***Ecclesiastical career*—**Basil was a monk for about six years before he was made a presbyter against his own wishes. The bishop of Caesarea recruited him to assist him with

the struggle against the Arians. Arriving in the city, conditions were difficult. Bad weather had destroyed crops, the rich were hoarding food, and many people in the city were up against it. Basil preached against the hoarding and sold his property to feed the poor. He collected resources from the wealthy, telling them it was an opportunity to invest in the treasure of heaven. On the outskirts of the city, he created "the new city," later called Basiliad. The hungry were fed, the ill were treated, and the unemployed were put to work.

When the bishop died, the Caesarea see became the focal point of the struggle between the orthodox and the Arians. Basil won the election and was immediately at odds with the Arian Emperor Valens. Basil focused his efforts on organizing and spreading communities of the monastic life, consolidating the authority of the bishops, and in advancing the Nicene cause. He maintained a vast correspondence and wrote several theological treatises. He died a few months before the Council of Constantinople reaffirmed Nicene doctrine in 381.

§1-316. Gregory of Nyssa—Gregory of Nyssa, Basil's brother, had a completely different temperament than his brother. Basil was tempestuous, inflexible, and at times arrogant. Gregory preferred silence, solitude, and anonymity. He did not want to be the champion of any cause. Initially choosing a career in rhetoric, Gregory retired at a young age to a monastery in the Pontus after the death of his wife and became absorbed with mystic contemplation.

***Reluctant proponent*—**However, Gregory was an extremely able person and Basil drafted him to become bishop of Nyssa at the time when Emperor Valens was using all his power against the orthodox party. The strife caused Gregory to go into hiding. After the death of both Valens and Basil, Gregory assumed the Nicene banner and was one of the main Nicene leaders at the Council of Constantinople. His primary contribution was his detailed working out of the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically the distinction between substance (*ousia*) and person (*hypotasis*). He may have been the most theologically capable of the Cappadocian fathers.

***Christian mystic*—**The Emperor Theodosius made him one of his main advisers on theological matters, and Gregory spent several years traveling throughout the Empire. Finally, assured that the Nicene cause was firmly established, Gregory returned to the monastic life, hoping the world would just leave him alone. His anthropology was an important contribution to Christian mysticism. He understood humanity's creation in the image of God as focal in redemption's goal. He saw people's souls as like unto God's nature, enabling people to intuitively know God and, through purification, to become like God. In the end, his desire to be left alone was granted. The date and circumstances of his death are not known.

§1-317. Gregory of Nazianzus—Gregory (329-389) was a monastic, a theologian, and a cogent preacher and teacher. His heart was with monastic solitude, but his theological ability thrust him into the limelight and the controversies of his day.

***Background*—**Gregory was born into a devout Christian family. He was a serious student and spent his youth studying, during which he met Basil of Caesarea. Around the age of thirty, he returned home and joined Basil in the monastic life. He was reluctantly ordained a presbyter, yearning for a contemplative life and fearing that he was unequal to the pastoral task. Basil had him made a bishop of Nazianzus against his wishes and at a time when Gregory lost his parents and both of his siblings. Gregory felt imposed upon in a way that deeply strained his friendship with Basil. Alone and bereaved, he retreated from his pastoral duties to have a time of quiet meditation.

During this period, news came of Basil's death with whom he had never been reconciled. Gregory was initially in shock, but the loss of Basil compelled him to take a leading role in the struggle against the Arians. He went to Constantinople in 379 at a time when Arianism enjoyed the total support of the state. He opened the lone orthodox church in the home of a relative. The church was repeatedly harassed by Arian monks who disrupted services and profaned the altar.

***Council of Constantinople*—**Gregory soldiered on and eventually the tide turned. Theodosius, an orthodox general, entered the city of Constantinople and soon expelled all Arians from the positions they had used to further their cause. Theodosius made Gregory the patriarch of Constantinople. The emperor called the Council of Constantinople in 381, over which Gregory presided. His opponents pointed out that Gregory was already bishop of a small hamlet and should not be patriarch of Constantinople. Gregory promptly resigned from the position he never sought and returned home, spending his time composing hymns and attending to his pastoral duties. He avoided all further ecclesiastical pomp and involvement until his death.

His doctrinal contributions lie in the clarification of the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines. The *Five Orations* was his most influential work. In Oration 1, he defends the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. Oration 2 is a treatise on the office of the presbyter which greatly influenced John Chrysostom's *On the Priesthood* and Pope Gregory I's *Pastoral Rule*. He wrote many letters, two of which were very influential (designated as Epistles 101 and 102). They were treatises against Apollinarius. Epistle 101 was adopted as a statement of orthodoxy by the Councils at Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451.

§1-318. John Chrysostom—Like Tertullian, John of Constantinople (347-407) was trained in law and rhetoric before abandoning the law and devoting himself to the ascetic life while caring for his elderly parents. After the death of his parents, he joined a community of monks in the Syrian mountains where he spent six years rigorously practicing monastic discipline.

***Golden-mouthed*—**He returned to Antioch, was ordained a deacon in the early 380s, and then a presbyter several years later. He began to preach and developed such skill in the pulpit that his fame became widespread throughout the Greek-speaking Church. He was given the nickname *Chrysostomos* (golden mouthed) a century after his death. When in 398 he became the patriarch of Constantinople at the order of the emperor, his popularity

in Antioch was such that the order was kept secret because they feared a riot over his elevation.

***Straight talk express*—**His preaching ministry in capital of the Roman world was the original straight-talk express. He was an eloquent and forceful speaker with lofty standards and little diplomatic skill. He kept being deposed and returning throughout his career at Constantinople. Constantinople was a rich city, given to luxury and intrigue. As John assumed his responsibilities, there was plenty of intrigue swirling around the empress and the chamberlain, who was the power behind the throne. John was an earnest monk, and he had no intension of wedding the gospel to the comforts and luxuries of the decadent people in the capital city.

***Reform efforts*—**He began by attempting a reform of the clergy. Many so-called celibate priests kept "spiritual sisters" in their homes. Others were living in rich and luxurious situations. Church finances were a mess and pastoral care neglected. John ordered the "spiritual sisters" to move out, the priests to adopt a much more austere lifestyle, and sold the luxury items in the bishop's own palace to feed the poor. He placed Church finances in a system under strict scrutiny. He opened the churches at times convenient for all and not just the wealthy. He also challenged clergy and laity alike to lead lives in accordance with the gospel. His sermons went far beyond preaching in an erudite but comfortable way. He seriously meddled in the lifestyles of the day.

***Backlash, exile, and death*—**The rich and powerful, led by the chamberlain and empress, were upset and resented the growing influence of the eloquent Patriarch. A series of ugly incidents and trumped-up charges led to years of exile and various recalls when John's supporters, including delegations from the Western emperor, compelled his return to the pulpit.

John's tenure as Patriarch was a sad period full of intrigue and backstabbing. His supporters were systematically removed or sent to distant areas within the Empire. He himself ordered to be exiled to the little village in the Caucasus and then to move to an unknown hamlet on the Black Sea. Mistreated and neglected, he died on the way. A great injustice was done and many refused to accept the authority of the new bishop and those in communion with him, namely the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria. The schism only ended thirty years later when John's memory and reputation was restored, and his body brought back to Constantinople.

***Chrysostom and Ambrose compared*—**There was a noticeable difference between the careers John Chrysostom and Ambrose (see §1-321, below). Ambrose opposed the emperor and won. John criticized the emperor and the decadence of the day and was deposed and banished. From that period on, the Latin-speaking Church of the west became increasingly strong and filled the vacuum left by the crumbling Empire. In the east, the Empire would last another thousand years. The Empire's strength would wax and wane, but the emperor would zealously guard his prerogatives over the Church. Theodosius was not the last ruler in the West humbled by a bishop. John was not the last Eastern bishop banished by an emperor.

2. Western Fathers

Ambrose provided the political posture, Jerome the biblical source text and learning, and Augustine the intellectual vision of subsequent Latin Christianity.

§1-321. Ambrose—Ambrose (340-397) was one of the Latin doctors of the Church and a leading foe of Arianism in the Western Empire. He served as bishop of Milan from 374 until his death in 397. Classically educated, fluent in both Greek and Latin, he introduced the thinking of Greek Christianity to the Latin West and played a vital role in the unity of the Church in the late 4th century as the Western Empire collapsed. He had a substantial influence on the conversion of Augustine (circa 386) and set a crucial precedent for the following centuries when he confronted the Emperor Theodosius (379-395) and compelled the emperor to do public penance.

Episcopal detour—Ambrose came from a noble family and was trained in rhetoric. He was a dedicated civil servant, rising in the Roman bureaucracy. In a most abrupt transition, Ambrose was elected bishop of Milan while serving as a Roman governing official of the city, still a catechumen being instructed in the faith, and prior to his baptism.

In 373, the death of the bishop of Milan threatened the peace of the city. The bishop had been appointed by an Arian emperor and both Arians and orthodox were determined to have one of their number succeed to the episcopal see. To avoid a riot and keep the peace, Ambrose attended the election and made a speech that quieted the crowd. The crowd's response to his address was a growing chant "Ambrose, bishop." Election as bishop was not part of Ambrose's career plans and he vigorously attempted to dissuade the people. When that failed, he unsuccessfully attempted to escape from the city. Finally, when it became clear that the emperor was pleased with Ambrose's election and would frown on his refusal to serve, Ambrose agreed to become the bishop of Milan. He was baptized and ordained in 374.

Influence—Ambrose took his responsibilities seriously and devoted his best efforts to his duties. He undertook the study of theology, enlisted able assistants to aid him with the administrative tasks of the bishopric, and devoted himself to the exposition of Scripture. Speaking both Greek and Latin, he made available to the Latin-speaking West the theology of the Greek-speaking East. He contributed to the development of Trinitarian theology in the West by popularizing the work of the Cappadocians.

He was also very much involved in the formation of the clergy with whom he worked. He wrote *Duties of the Clergy*, which helped shape the understanding of Christian ministry long after his death. Among those who heard Ambrose preach was Augustine, a young teacher of rhetoric. Ambrose's sermons influenced Augustine's journey to faith.

Imperial confrontations—Ambrose's relations with the imperial power in the West were stormy. First, there was a deep conflict with Justina, the Arian mother of the western Emperor Valentinian II, which played out in several confrontations. Then there were

several clashes with the orthodox Emperor Theodosius. The first clash took place when overzealous Christians in a small town burned a synagogue. The emperor decided that they should be punished and rebuild the synagogue. Ambrose protested that Christians should not be compelled to build a Jewish synagogue, The emperor yielded on that point. This was a sad precedent to which Ambrose contributed, for it meant that the Christian emperor would not extend the protection of law to those of a different faith.

In another instance, justice was on Ambrose's side. Rioters at Thessalonica had killed the commandant of the city. Ambrose counselled moderation, but Theodosius decided to make an example of the disorderly city. He informed the rioters that they were forgiven and then sent troops to trap and slaughter those who met in an arena to celebrate the pardon. Seven thousand people were killed in this incident. Ambrose confronted the emperor and demanded that he publicly repent. The emperor's courtiers threatened violence, but the emperor acknowledged the truth of Ambrose's charge and publicly repented. After the clash, the relations between Theodosius and Ambrose became increasingly cordial. On his deathbed, it was Ambrose that the emperor called to his side.

At the end of his life, Ambrose's fame was such that the queen of the Macromanni, a dominant German tribe, asked him for an introduction to the Christian faith and resolved to visit the wise man in Milan. Ambrose died on Easter Sunday, 397, before the queen arrived.

§1-322. Augustine—Augustine (354-430) was born in Tagaste in North Africa to Patricius, a minor Roman official who followed traditional pagan religion, and Monica, his devout Christian mother. He was an outstanding student and received a fine education first at nearby Madaura and then at Carthage. Augustine studied rhetoric and was preparing for a career in public service. In the world of the day, eloquence and persuasiveness was the point, not truth. Reading Cicero convinced Augustine otherwise.

His tortuous path to truth led him first to Manichaeism, then to Neoplatonism, before becoming a Christian. Much to his mother's chagrin, the young Augustine resisted the faith for two principal reasons: (1) its inelegant, even barbaric writings, where one found crude episodes of violence, rape, deceit, and the like, and (2) the question of the origin of evil. If God were supreme and pure goodness, evil could not be of divine creation. However, if all things were created by God, as taught in the Bible, God could not be good and wise for Augustine saw evil all around him and in himself.

Philosophical journey—Augustine spent nine years with the Manichaeans, but always with reservations. He remained a "hearer," without seeking to join the "perfect". Pursuing his career options, he moved first from Carthage back to Tagaste, then to Rome, and then to Milan. In Milan, he was introduced to the writings of the Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism was a philosophy with religious overtones. Through a combination of study, discipline, and mystical contemplation, one sought to reach the Ineffable One, the source of all being. Evil consisted in moving away from the One, turning one's gaze to the inferior realms of multiplicity. Evil, while real, is not a "thing," but a direction away from the

goodness of the One. Neoplatonism gave Augustine an approach to the problem of evil and helped him understand God and the soul in non-corporeal terms.

Scripture and allegory—There remained his distaste for the Scriptures. How could one claim that the Bible, with its stories of violence and falsehood and its crude accounts, was the Word of God? In Milan, at the urging of his mother, Augustine heard Ambrose preach. At first, he played the role of rhetorical critic but soon Augustine became a most intent listener. He observed that Ambrose interpreted the passages that created difficulties for Augustine in an allegorical way. It made the Scripture seem less crude and more acceptable to Augustine.

Conversion—With his intellectual objections dealt with, Augustine found that his main remaining hurdle to faith was himself. He could not be a lukewarm Christian—he had to confront his own carnality. Augustine was convinced that he must accept the monastic life, give up his career in rhetoric and his secular ambitions, and his addiction to sexual pleasure. He later wrote that at this time he used to pray: "Give me chastity and continence, but not too soon." In 386, in a garden in Milan a dejected professor of rhetoric heard the words "Take up and read." He picked up the manuscript he had put aside and read the words of Paul: "Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Augustine made the decision he had long postponed. He devoted himself to the service of God.

Soon he abandoned his career as a professor, dismissed his concubine, returned to Tagaste with his son, where he planned to spend the rest of his days in monastic retreat. Arriving in Tagaste, Augustine sold most of the property he inherited, gave money to the poor, and settled at Cassiciacum with his son and a few friends who shared the goal of mystical contemplation and philosophical inquiry. Their goal was a disciplined life, with no unnecessary comforts, devoted entirely to prayer, study, and meditation.

Episcopal ascent—In 391, Augustine visited Hippo to invite friends to join his monastic community at Cassciacum. Against his will, Augustine was ordained to assist the bishop at Hippo. The bishop died shortly thereafter and in 395, Augustine became bishop. While Augustine attempted to retain as much of the monastic discipline as possible, his energies turned to his pastoral duties rather than contemplation. It was with these responsibilities in view that he wrote the works that made him the most influential theologian in the Latin-speaking Church since New Testament times.

Thinker and writer—Augustine was an amazingly prolific writer and wrote searchingly on a phenomenal number of topics in his lifetime. Even a brief survey of these writings is beyond the scope of this course and of my ability as a teacher. However, his thought was forged in the crucible of controversy, three of which were paramount and each relating to evil—Manichaeism and evil in the world, Donatism and evil in the Church, and Pelagianism and evil in individuals.

***Manichaeanism*—**This youthful dabbling by Augustine related to evil in the world. Based on the teachings of Mani, a 3rd century Babylonian prophet, Manichaeanism located evil in material. They taught that the universe was the scene of conflict between two powers—one good and one evil. Humanity is a mixed bag, light or the spiritual part is good, and darkness or the physical part is evil. Salvation consists in separating the two elements and in preparing our spirit for its return to pure light. Since any mingling of the principles was evil, true believers needed to avoid matter, including procreation. The task of true religion is to free the good from the evil—by prayer and abstinence from the lusts of the flesh, sex and the products of sex—and from luxuries. They professed a belief in Jesus as savior, but that belief was in the framework of a Gnostic-like cosmic dualism, for the true Jesus had no body and did not die. His purpose was to teach the way out of physical enslavement.

Manichaeans held that everything was predetermined, and human beings had no freedom. In refuting the Manichaeans, Augustine affirmed freedom of the will. By that he meant that a decision is free because it is not the product of nature, not born of circumstance or of an inner necessity, but of the will itself. Augustine insisted that there is only one God whose goodness is infinite. How to explain evil? The explanation lies in affirming that the will is created by God and is therefore good. The origin of evil is to be found in bad decisions made by free human and angelic agents. However, evil is not a thing, but a decision, a direction, a negation of the good.

In addition, his anti-Manichaean works established a positive sense of the Church and the material order. He developed a principled defense of the created order: the goodness of the body, food, marriage, and children.

Donatist controversy related to evil in the Church**.** The controversy grew out of the persecutions of the Church in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Believing the sanctity of the Church depended on the loyalty and morality of its members, the Donatists opposed leniency to those who had fallen away in persecutions. Donatus (313-355) led a protest against bishops that had lapsed in Diocletian's persecution. Donatus claimed that his followers were the true, pure Church and that the sacraments performed by fallen bishops were not valid. Augustine asserted both the importance of the Church as an inclusive body of sinners and the need for forgiving grace. He saw the Church as a mixed multitude (Mt. 13:24-30 imagery) and believed that the sacraments were effective despite the moral stance of the bishop or cleric administering them.

In addition, in response to the ongoing Donatist controversy, Augustine developed his just war theory. Some Donatists, the circumcellions, turned to violence in opposition to the orthodox. He was certain that the violence of the circumcellions had to cease and authorized the State to suppress them by force. He concluded that war could be justly waged if certain conditions were met:

- The purpose of the war must be just;
- The war must be waged by a properly instituted authority;
- Amid violence that is a necessary element of war, the motive of love must be central.

Pelagian controversy related to individual evil. Pelagius denied that human sin was inherited from Adam. People were free to act righteously or to sin. There was no direct connection between Adam and humanity's moral condition. Pelagius said that God holds sinners accountable and therefore Christians should strive for moral perfection, a goal he thought attainable since, according to Pelagius, God would never give commands impossible to obey. Pelagius' idea of a righteous life was almost identical to that of the Stoics concept of self-control.

Augustine opposed Pelagius's optimistic view of human nature. He thought Adam's sin had enormous consequences on all people. Humanity's power to do right was gone. People died spiritually and physical death was the ultimate result. All power to do good must be a gift of God's grace.

***Signature works*—**Two other of Augustine's writings are particularly significant. His *Confessions* is a spiritual autobiography, addressed in prayer to God, which tells how God led him to faith through a long and painful pilgrimage. It is not only a classic account of conversion, but also introduced a sense of self unique to antiquity and witnesses to Augustine's profound spiritual and psychological insight.

The *City of God* is Augustine's response to pagan allegations that the fall of Rome in 410 was due to Rome's abandonment of the ancient gods and its turn to Christianity. Augustine composed an encyclopedic view of history in which he claims that there are two cities or social orders each built on a foundation of love. The city of God is built on the love of God. The earthly city is built on the love of self. In human history, these two cities always appear mingled, but they are in an irreconcilable fight to the death. In the end, only the city of God will remain. Human history is and will be filled with kingdoms and nations which are passing expressions of the earthly city built on the love of self. In the case of Rome, God allowed it and its empire to flourish so that they could serve as a means for the spread of the gospel. While Christians had hoped for a Christianized empire, Rome had given itself over to wealth, glory, and power. Sin was bringing the destruction of an earthly empire, but the love of God would lead to perfection in His sovereign timing.

The *City of God* provided a profound political theology that impacted medieval Church and society. His vision of a society on earth that sought to embody and foreshadow the "city of God" in heaven was a distinctively Christian political/societal vision.

***Lasting influence*—**Augustine died in 430, with the Vandals at the gates of Hippo. However, his works were not forgotten. Throughout the Middle Ages, no theologian was quoted more often than Augustine. He became not only one of the doctors of the Roman Catholic Church but also the favorite theologian of the 16th century Reformers.

§1-323. Jerome—Jerome (347-419) was a Bible scholar, papal secretary to Pope Damasus, monastic, and author of the Latin Vulgate. His outstanding characteristic was his struggle with himself and the world. Jerome was not humble, peaceful, or sweet, but proud, stormy, and bitter. He strove mightily with himself and had little patience with

those who did not match his effort. His ire was with those who dared to criticize him. He attacked nearly all of his contemporaries and upbraided those who disagreed with him as "two-legged asses."

***Background*—**Jerome was born into a Christian family, studied classical Latin language and literature at Rome, was baptized at twenty, and dedicated himself to the monastic life. He was an ardent admirer of classical learning but feared that his regard for this essential pagan tradition was sinful. While ill one time, he had a dream that he was summoned before the judgment throne and asked who he was. Jerome replied, "I am a Christian." In the dream, the judge retorted: "You lie. You are a Ciceronian."

Jerome lived as a hermit in Syria for a time, learning both Greek and Hebrew. At Constantinople, he studied biblical exegesis with Gregory of Nazianzus. He spent three years in Rome as the secretary and counselor to Pope Damasus I. There he met and developed lasting friendships with Albina, her widowed daughter Marcella, Ambrose's sister Marcellina, and the scholarly Paula. Paula, along with her daughter Eustochium, would play a leading role throughout the remainder of Jerome's life. He felt free to discuss his scholarly questions with these women. These women would be among his supporters and confidantes during the later stages of his life.

***Latin Vulgate*—**While in Rome as secretary to the Pope, Jerome was assigned the task of translating the entire Bible into Latin (the Old Testament from Hebrew and the New Testament from Greek). The goal was to provide a standardized text to replace the "old Latin" versions. The resulting translation (the Vulgate) provided the standard text for medieval Latin Christianity. After Damasus' death, Jerome cantankerous disposition caused him to fall out of favor in Rome. He moved to Bethlehem in 389, where he lived as a hermit until his death in 420. His *Lives of Eminent Men* is an indispensable source of early Christian history.

***Lasting influence*—**Jerome is often counted as one of the Latin fathers and a significant influence on medieval Christianity and especially medieval monasticism. His masterpiece was the Vulgate, the translation of choice in Western Christianity for more than a millennium. He was also a driving influence in the monastic emphasis on study and the desire to preserve the classical heritage that was rapidly being lost.

G. Early Christian Attitudes

§1-331. In general—The following sections attempt to characterize early Christian attitudes on subjects relevant to their lives and ours. Obviously, these are generalizations, but hopefully helpful ones.

§1-332. The "world"—Early Christians saw themselves in opposition to what they called "the world," a culture organized according to "the spirit of this present age," in the words of the apostle Paul. They recognized and were persecuted for an antagonism between Jesus and the culture in which they lived. This involved opposition to features of

Greco-Roman society—its polytheism, immoralities, amusements, practices such as infanticide, sexual irregularities, and others.

This contrast found its dramatic expression in Augustine's *City of God* with its sharply drawn distinction between the city of the world and the city of God. At heart, this attitudinal contrast involved a philosophy of history. Greco-Romans saw history as endlessly repeating itself in a series of cycles where mankind's career was determined by fate. For the early Christians, history had God as its sovereign and was linear rather than cyclical. This present age will culminate in a climax in which God's mastery will be made manifest in the second coming of Christ. For early believers, this attitude had starkly apocalyptic features with an earnest anticipation of the near return (the *parousia*) of the rightful king.

§1-333. War and peace—The earliest believers were opposed to war and to Christians bearing arms. Hippolytus, a prominent teacher in second century Rome, and Tertullian, a noted apologist in the early 3d century, were outspoken in their opposition to Christian participation in active military service. So clear was the opposition of early Christians to bearing arms that Celsus, an early pagan critic, declared that if all citizens were to do as the Christians, then the Empire would fall victim to the wildest and most lawless barbarians. For the earliest Christians, pacifism was a theoretical concern. They were not one of the groups in the Empire from which the legions were recruited nor were they the least bit influential in formulating state policy.

However, from Constantine on, when Christians were responsible for the welfare of the body politic, the attitudes of most Christians toward war changed from one of total and unqualified opposition to viewing it as an unfortunate necessity in a fallen world. Wickedness was real and must be restrained. Virtue did not lie in excusing yourself from such conflicts. However, not all wars were just. To be just, a war must be waged under proper governmental authority, must be fought without vindictiveness and undue violence, and must be carried on with an inward love. This last point was not meant as moderns mean "love." It was not an emotional gauge at all, but an emphasis on and devotion to the common good resulting from the military action engaged.

§1-334. Amusements and entertainment—The early believers set themselves against the prevailing attitudes of the Greco-Roman society. Leading Christian apologists unhesitatingly condemned the gladiatorial contests of the day, as well as the general tenor of pagan literature and theatrical productions. When the political clout of believers came to the fore after the ascension of Constantine, changes were made. Gladiatorial contests were forbidden and legal penalties requiring criminals to become gladiators were abolished. However, the nature of public amusement did not radically change with the ascendancy of Christianity in the Empire and, indeed, those amusements continued with most patrons being nominally Christian.

§1-335. Slavery—Christians did not conduct an organized campaign against slavery in the Empire. However, by the 5th century, slavery on the decline in the Empire. This was not due chiefly to Christian opposition, but the influence of Christians helped. Christian

teaching reminded masters that they were accountable for the treatment of their slaves. In Christian congregations, the expressed teaching was that all "were one in Christ Jesus" and there was to be no "respect of persons" in the treatment of one another. Ambrose would speak of slaves being superior in character to their masters and freer than they. Augustine taught that God did not create rational people to lord it over their fellow rational humans. Finally, Christianity undercut slavery by giving dignity to all work, no matter how menial. Work was divinely sanctioned and profitable in ways that financial recompense could not properly gauge.

§1-336. Wealth and property—Could a person of wealth become and remain a believer? Did Christianity demand a revolution in one's attitude towards property that expressed itself by the necessity of unburdening yourself of it? There are several disquieting passages in the New Testament on this issue, not the least of which is Jesus' statement to the rich young ruler that if he would be perfect he must sell all that he had and give it to the poor and his further comment that it was extremely difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 19:16-29; Mark 10:17-30; Luke 18:18-30). Early Christians struggled over this as have Christians throughout the centuries. We will be speaking of the call of "Lady Poverty" (in Francis of Assisi's words) in subsequent courses.

The early Church in Jerusalem practiced a community of goods for a time (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). The Scripture is quite forthright in the problems that arose from this (Acts 5:1-11). The monastic communities that mushroomed in late antiquity uniformly required a vow of poverty from their adherents.

Yet, Christian teaching did not forbid the ownership of property. It condemned luxury, commanded simplicity, enjoined labor, and urged generosity, but did not require the full surrender of the fruits of one's labor. This led to a curious dilemma, particularly in the monastic movement as it progressed. While the individual monks took a vow of poverty and simplicity, the diligence of these monks earned their monasteries and governing Church authorities a considerable bounty and wealth that would prove to be a significant snare.

§1-337. Charitable giving—Philanthropy was not a Christian invention. Indeed, particularly in the Roman Empire in its heyday, benefactions by private individuals and public officials were commonplace and often quite substantial.

However, Christianity did bring several innovations to this issue. First, it made giving an obligation for Christians. Christians were to regard all that they had as from God and to give back a portion of this in recognition of the rightful owner. Second, the motive for giving was stressed. It was not to garner personal kudos but to be a grateful response to the love and generosity of Christ experienced by the believer. Third, the objects of the benefaction changed from large public displays to preaching the good news and to caring for the less fortunate members of the community—widows, orphans, the sick and disabled, the imprisoned, the persecuted. Fourth, love and service of generosity was not just to be extended to your own but to a wider sphere. Fifth, Christian giving was to have

a personal nature to it. The care the giver experienced from Christ was to be tangibly extended to another individual. Individuals were to value each other, as having distinct worth in the sight of God.

§1-338. Marriage, sex, and family—As to the place of women in community, this is a controversial issue into our day. Some insist that Christianity merely adopted the chauvinistic headship model of earlier Judaism and did little to help woman realize the truth of Galatians 3:28 that in Christ Jesus "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." Others insist Christ's willingness to be dependent on the support of woman, that the first generation of Christian women served as prophetesses (1 Corinthians 11:3-6) and, arguably, as deaconesses (1 Tim 3:11) revealed a different attitude. The high regard for widows, virgins, and the single state further highlighted this.

It is arguable that the early believers regarded virginity and the single state as superior to the married state. This can be seen in some of Paul's writings (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:25ff.) and can certainly be garnered from the insistence on singleness and chastity in the monastic movement of late antiquity. However, marriage was not proscribed (except for priests in the West). Indeed, its sanctity was underscored by proscriptions against divorce and even multiple remarriages in the event of the death of a spouse (several groups allowed a second remarriage in that event, but not a third).

Sex outside of marriage was condemned. Homosexuality was prescribed. Sexual offenses were certainly not unknown in the early Church, and they were dealt with rather harshly when discovered. The offense was held to exclude people from the ministries of the Church for a substantial period.

Children were held in tender regard. Jesus' reception of children was often cited as was his insistence that people must come to him in faith as "a little child." The early Christians opposed abortion and infanticide, strongly emphasized the nurture and instruction of children "in the Lord" and underlined both parental responsibility and filial devotion.

§1-339. Music and arts—As to the literature of the age, the early Christians did not fully agree. Several outstanding molders of Christian opinion, Clement of Alexandria and Origen come readily to mind, were students of the Greek philosophers and the classics and credited them in forming their own conceptions of the Christian faith. Ambrose was deeply indebted to Stoicism and Augustine to Neoplatonism. Jerome so loved the Greek and Roman classics that he feared that his passion for them was idolatrous. Many early Christians struggled with the implications that all truth is God's truth, wherever it is found and (often) despite the sneering demeanor of its advocates.

However, several early believers poured scorn on the literature and artistic milieu of the day and denounced it as inherently immoral and as promoting Christian waywardness. Tertullian would ask earnestly: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem" as a rhetorical device to mark a clear divide between the literature and thought of the day and Christian fidelity. There were ancient voices that resembled the strident Christian condemnation of the intellectual and artistic culture of our own day.

And indeed, these voices had reason for concern. There was a substantial gulf between the Christian and the Hellenistic approach to the intellectual life. The Greeks relied on reason as the primary way to truth, but underneath that reason there were presuppositions, consciously and unconsciously maintained, which accompanied their reasoning. Their literature reflected this. The New Testament frequently decries the "wisdom of the world" and its host of accompanying assumptions (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-31). The road to the most salient truth was acceptance by faith in what God had done in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Augustine succinctly summarized this intellectual paradigm with the following: "Believe in order that you may understand." This was anathema to the Hellenistic mind.

As for the visual arts, their conscious development within the framework of a Christian worldview would await other eras of Church history. Christian visual art followed in the classical mold of the Greeks and Romans. The early Christians were very conservative with respect to the visual arts because of their fear of idolatry. The second commandment was interpreted as prohibiting any visual images of God. The understanding of the place of art in the context of worship and Christian practice would be probed in the iconoclastic controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries.

§1-340. Christians and the State—The early Christians did not set out deliberately to supplant the Roman state or to remake the structure of society of which it was an essential part. The early attitudes were framed by those of Jesus, whose demeanor towards the state was neither one of unqualified disapproval nor approval. He was critical at times of the Herodians and the Jewish Sanhedrin but commanded obedience to people in authority in the Jewish community and beyond. Paul argued that government derived its authority from God (albeit often abusing it) and instructed believers to be submissive to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). Likewise, Peter instructed believers to submit to their rulers and to give them their due (1 Pt. 2:13-17).

In the first three centuries, Christians bore state persecutions passively and did not oppose the state with violence. While there were believers in positions of public authority in the more benign times, there seems to have been a conviction among the earliest believers that they should not hold State office. To do so might entail participation in pagan ceremonies and entertainment or in the imposition of the death penalty for various offenses. Opposition to the death penalty was common among the early believers.

With the ascendancy of Constantine, these attitudes changed. The Church entered an alliance with the state and most civil and even military officials were at least nominally Christian. Constantine sought to bolster the flagging power of the Empire by reinforcing the political regime with the most comprehensive and well-articulated private organization in that empire. This union brought the idea of a Christian empire to fore and even that the ascendancy of the Church marked the beginning of the millennium itself. Those dreams were disabused by the way the emperors attempted to control the Church and use it for their political purposes and by subsequent events of the 5th century when the Empire in the West completely unraveled.

So, the Church in the Roman era knew opposition and favor, persecution and ascendancy, being powerless and being influential. It knew the hardship and adversity that state opposition imposed, and it also learned of the advantages and high cost to Christian earnestness that official favor brought.

G. End of an Era

§1-341. In general—The imperial Church which Constantine inaugurated continued for another thousand years in the Byzantine Empire. Not so in the West. It was a long time before western Europe experienced the political unity and relative peace it had known under Roman rule. It took centuries to recover, not only in terms of the economy and infrastructure of western Europe, but even more in terms of its literature, art, and learning. In all these fields, it was the Church which provided continuity with the past. It became the guardian of civilization and order. Meanwhile, the victorious Germans were pagan and through the unrecorded witness of many believers, the invaders gradually accepted the faith and eventually provided generations of leaders of the future Church. Out of all this, a new civilization would arise, heir to the classical Greco-Roman culture, Christian faith, and Germanic traditions.

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