

**A
Popular
History
of the
Catholic
Church**

A Popular History of the Catholic Church

Carl Koch

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God is so good that He not only brings us into existence by His act of creation but also desires that all of us come to the knowledge of truth. This truth is God Himself and all that He has willed to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through His apostles, and through His church. God desires all of us to be taught this knowledge, that our minds may be enlightened by the light of faith.

(Meditations for the Time of Retreat) ■

John Baptist de La Salle:

Patron Saint of Teachers

Contents

1 Exploring Church History

Seeing the Church with New Eyes 8

2 A Church of Converts

Widening the Circle of Jesus' Followers 22

3 The Lasting Legacy of the Apostles

Christian Communities and Scriptures 38

Map: The Major Cities of Paul's Travels 40

4 Gold Tested in Fire

Courageous Faith and Clear Doctrine 56

Map: The Spread of Christianity 66

5 Building the City of God

Holiness in the Wilderness, Leadership in the World 72

6 Growth in a Crumbling Empire

Spreading the Faith, Bringing Order to Chaos 92

Map: Three Styles of Monasticism by 700 101

7 The Challenge of Christendom

Church and Empire in Tension 112

Map: Invasions and Empires, 600s to 900s 126

8 The High Middle Ages

High Times, Low Times 132

9 The Late Middle Ages

Public Turmoil, Personal Piety 156

10 Revolt and Reform

Divisions in the Body of Christ 172

Map: Christian Denominations in 1560 188

11 A Missionary Church

Carrying the Gospel Around the World 190

12 The Age of "Isms"

Revolutionary Thinking Confronts the Church 210

13 The Church in North America

A Style of Its Own 228

14 World Church

Anguish in an Era of World Wars 248

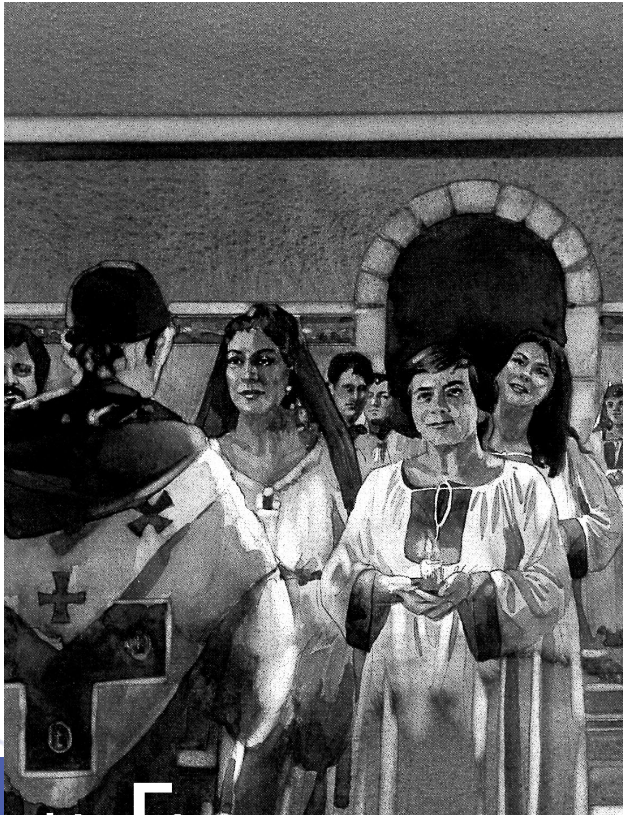
15 The Contemporary Church

On a Pilgrimage into the Future 264

Map: Christians and Catholics Throughout the World 271

Index 278

4



Gold Tested in Fire

Courageous Faith and Clear Doctrine

BY THE END of the first century, which was also the end of the era of the Apostles, the young Christian church had developed its own community way of life and worship. Its own Scriptures were evolving into the form we know as the Christian Testament. And the church, opening itself more and more to the Gentile world, was finally separated from active participation

in the Jewish community, though not from its Jewish roots and Scriptures.

To the first-century Christians, hostility and persecution from outside the community, as well as conflict over ideas and directions within the community, were no strangers. Such difficulties foreshadowed what was to come in the next two centuries—a period of greater suffering as Christian martyrs would die for their faith in an empire that was hostile to them. In those centuries, even ordinary Christians would wrestle with questions of who Jesus was, their different beliefs creating divisions among Christians. But from the intense heat of Roman persecution and internal conflict over doctrine would emerge “the gold tested in fire,” the courageous faith of the early Christian church and a clarity of understanding about who this Jesus was that Christians were dying for.

The story of Blandina, a slave, and the other martyrs of Lyons (in the part of the Roman Empire known as Gaul, now France) dramatizes the horrors of the persecutions, but also the impressive strength of belief those early Christians held. This account of Blandina’s martyrdom, in the year 177, is excerpted from a long letter written at the time by one who survived a terrible persecution.

There can be no adequate description, either in word or writing of the magnitude of the suffering here, of the animosity of the pagans towards the saints, or of the steadfastness of the blessed martyrs. . . .

[Forty-eight Christians were dragged before the Roman governor. Every one of them confessed faith in Christ, knowing that they would thus be condemned to torture and public execution. The Christians were tortured in hopes that it would force them to reject Christianity.]

We were all in a state of terror . . . lest, Blandina, by reason of her physical frailty, would not be able to make a bold confession of faith. But she was filled with such power, that even those taking turns to torture her in every possible way from morning till night had to admit defeat. . . . Her whole body was a mass of open wounds. . . . Yet this blessed woman was renewed in

Timeline . . .

- 100 ■ Roman law makes Christianity illegal.
- Roles of bishop, priest, deacon, deaconess are evolving.
- Ignatius of Antioch writes seven letters on his way to martyrdom.
- Apologist Justin and six students are executed.
- Blandina dies in Lyons persecution.
- Irenaeus refutes Gnostic heresy.
- 200 ■ Apostles’ Creed, Christian Testament take shape.
- Barbarians attack frontiers of Roman Empire.
- Christians are required to sacrifice to Roman gods.
- 300 ■ Many Christians die in major persecutions.
- Constantine legalizes Christianity through Edict of Milan.
- Constantinople becomes new capital of Roman Empire.
- Council of Nicaea condemns Arian heresy, writes Nicene Creed.
- Christianity is made the official religion of the empire.
- 400

her vigor through her confession of faith. Indeed the very saying of the words “I am a Christian—we have done nothing to be ashamed of” was itself a restoration. . . .

[After being tortured, the Christians were tied up in the arena to be devoured by wild beasts.]

. . . Blandina, hanging from a stake, was exposed as bait for the wild beasts which had been loosed for the attack. She seemed to hang there in the form of a cross and continued to inspire . . . those still struggling. . . .

But since none of the beasts had touched her, Blandina was taken down from the stake and led back to prison. . . . This woman, little, weak, easily despised, had put on . . . the mighty and invincible warrior, Christ. . . .

. . . Blandina was brought back again together with Ponticus, a boy of fifteen. Every day they had been brought in to watch the rest being tortured, and these had been attempts to force them to take the oath by the pagan idols. . . .

After the scourging, after the wild animals, after the red-hot grid, finally [Blandina] was cast into a net and exposed to a bull. She was severely tossed by the animal yet was hardly aware of what was happening because of her hope and her grasp of all that she believed in and her communion with Christ. At last she was sacrificed, but the pagans themselves confessed that never had any woman suffered so much and so intensely. . . .

After the bodies of the martyrs had been subjected to every possible insult and had lain exposed to the elements for six days, these wicked people burned the remains and swept the ashes into the Rhone [River] which flows close by. They were determined that not a trace be left on the face of the earth.

Blandina died in Lyons, but Christianity could not be put to death. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of Christianity.

Courageous Faith amid the Fires of Persecution

Why were the Christians such a threat to the Roman Empire that the Romans felt it necessary to torture and execute them? The empire at that time, though seemingly all-powerful, was in fact coming apart at the seams, strained by its own corrupt emperors and by “barbarian” attacks from the north.

The Roman Demand for Conformity The thinking of the Roman authorities proceeded like this: Common religious observance fostered unity in the empire. Refusing to observe the Roman religious sacrifices and pay homage to the “divine” emperors was thus unpatriotic, even treasonous. Unpatriotic people caused disunity in the empire.

In addition, the Roman citizens believed that the gods sent blessings on them only if they offered sacrifices. They feared that the gods would curse them for tolerating the Christians’ refusal to offer sacrifices.

As a result of the Romans’ thinking, the faith of Christians was regularly tested in the fires of torture and persecution.

Periodic Persecutions

A law against being Christian was in effect for two centuries, although it was enforced only periodically. The outright persecution of Christians was limited to those periods. But throughout the two centuries, much of the Roman world looked upon the Christians with deep suspicion. Christians never knew if someone might turn them in for being Christian, or when the next persecution would come.

Despite the constant possibility of harassment, suffering, torture, and even death, Christian communities took root in Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, Gaul, Spain, and the coast of Africa.

Well-known Early Martyrs

Among the early martyrs were many bishops, including Ignatius of Antioch, who was taken to Rome to be eaten by lions in the amphitheater, for the amusement of the crowds at the circus. Not concerned about himself, on the way to Rome, Ignatius wrote letters to the Christians of each of the seven towns at which he and his captors stopped; he encouraged those groups of Christians to be united with their own bishop.

At one point on his journey, Ignatius summed up the type of belief that sustained not only him but many of the early martyrs:

Now I begin to be a disciple. . . . Come fire and cross, gashes and rendings [tearing of the flesh], breaking of bones and mangling of limbs, the shattering in pieces of my whole body; come the wicked torments of the devil upon me if I may but attain unto Jesus Christ.

Another renowned martyr of the period was Justin. Born of non-Christian parents, he studied all kinds of philosophies in his search for the meaning of life. He found his answers in Christianity. In

Rome he started a school of philosophy that would be a bridge between Christianity and pagan philosophy. Arrested for being Christian, Justin and six of his students refused to sacrifice to an idol, and all of them were executed. Justin was one of the earliest, most important apologists, or “defenders of the faith,” well-educated people who knew Greek philosophy and could debate with non-Christians on an equal basis.

Church Structures and Roles Develop Besides their strong faith in Christ and strong sense of community in the midst of a world that was hostile to them, the Christian churches were held together by the organizational structures and roles that had evolved by the second century.

Bishops

Each community selected one of its members to be a bishop. (*Bishop* comes from the Greek word for “supervisor.”) The bishop led the community’s worship and, as the Greek meaning implies, supervised the life of the Christian congregation. The communities generally were small enough that all the members of a given community could meet at one location for the Eucharist, so each city needed only one bishop. The position of priest did not develop until later.

Deacons and Deaconesses

Assisting the bishop were deacons and deaconesses. Like Stephen, the first martyr, deacons and deaconesses attended to the welfare of the community’s poor, widowed, orphaned, and sick persons. The bishops, deacons, and deaconesses were not full-time ministers; in most cases, they continued to support themselves through their own labor.

The Bishop of Rome as Peter’s Successor

Another development was the increasing importance of the bishop of Rome. Before Jerusalem was crushed by the Romans in 70 c.e., the bishop of Jerusalem was considered most important of all the bishops. After Jerusalem’s fall, the bishop of Rome became more and more central in the church. This was because Peter died in Rome, and Rome was the imperial capital. Most significantly, the bishop of Rome was considered to be Peter’s successor. Because, according to tradition, Peter had been appointed by Jesus as head of the church, his successors would have that role also.

Barbarians Threaten the Empire’s Order For most citizens besides the Christians, life in the Roman world from approximately 100 to 200 c.e. was peaceful enough. Prosperous cities ringed the Mediterranean. The various ethnic groups were held together by Roman law. A single currency was used in the empire, and roads led everywhere. Commerce flowed throughout the empire. The “peace of Rome” did not bring justice and peace to Roman subjects in any deep sense; after all, they were living under the boot of a powerful dictatorship that could execute people at will for dissenting. But there was peace in the sense of relative order.

Nevertheless, nomadic tribes from the north posed a constant threat as they gathered strength to attack Roman territory. They were known as barbarians, from the Greek word meaning “hairy ones.” The term referred to any non-Roman who spoke an unfamiliar language and who was unshaven. (Now it is synonymous with “brute” or “savage,” an association that is probably unfair to the tribes.)

The barbarians lived on the northern frontier formed by the Rhine and Danube rivers. The Romans built forts and walled cities to protect the empire’s northern border. Sometimes the Romans even hired barbarian tribes to help guard the frontier border. Later on, barbarians were recruited for the imperial army. However, most barbarians lived free of control and liked to make quick raids across the borders into Roman lands. The Romans’ fear of the barbarians and of any dissent fueled the suppression of minority groups like the Christians.

The Decline into Chaos The years from 100 to 200 had seen persecutions of Christians. The next one hundred years brought the emergence of worse emperors and crueler persecutions, but a sharp decline in the real influence of the Roman Empire. A tyrannical emperor was assassinated; then one inept emperor followed another. The empire was rotting from the inside, and on the outside the nomadic tribes were sharpening their swords.

No Tolerance for Nonconformity

Corrupt as the Roman emperors were, each of them demanded complete loyalty from all citizens. In 250 c.e., the emperor required each citizen to carry a certificate showing that he or she had sacrificed to the gods. Faithful Christians, of course, refused to take part in the pagan rites. Another strike against the Christians was their

Christians in the early church did not escape the prejudices of their culture any more than Christians do today. Consequently, not many women make appearances in the few documents that we have from those early centuries. Paul mentioned the good work done by specific women who spread the word of God. Agnes and Cecilia were two among many women martyrs honored by the early church. We know that deaconesses had responsibilities similar to those of the deacons. And women were almost certainly part of the deliberations in the Jerusalem community.

However, throughout much of Western history, most women were kept in the background and allowed to be skilled solely at homemaking. Their purpose in life was to please their husband by being subservient, obedient, and the mother of sons. So women appear infrequently in historical accounts, although there are notable exceptions. For the most part, in recorded histories of Western civilization, it has been a man's world. This has been no less true in recorded church history. Again, with rare exceptions, such as the women featured in this book (contemplatives, educators, founders of religious orders, and so on), we know little about what women thought, felt, or did during much of church history.

When women are featured in documents or histories of the early church, they are often being preached at about their place in the scheme of things. The belief that Eve was responsible for original sin and that women were the sources of temptation—especially sexual temptation—for men, led some early Christian writers to urge women to wear chaste dress, to assume quiet ways, and to keep orderly houses for their men. An example of this comes from an essay written by Tertullian, a theologian who died in about 230. Here are a few things he had to say about female dress:

Very many women . . . have the boldness so to walk in public as though chastity consisted only in the bare integrity of the flesh and in the avoidance of fornication. . . . In their gait they display the same outward appearance as Gentile women, in whom the sense of true chastity is lacking. . . .

The desire to please by outward charms, which we know naturally invite lust, does not spring from a sound conscience. Why should you rouse an evil passion? Why invite that to which you profess yourself a stranger? . . .

You must not overstep the line to which simple and sufficient elegance limits its desires, the line which is pleasing to God. Against Him those women sin who torment their skin with potions, stain their cheeks with rouge, and extend the line of their eyes with black coloring. Doubtless they are dissatisfied with God's plastic skill. . . .

. . . Bow your heads before your husbands, and you will be sufficiently adorned. Busy your hands with wool; keep your feet at home; and you will please more than if you were arrayed in gold.

Tertullian's words indicate that women were typically treated as sex objects by men, and his advice is intended to show a different option for Christian women—that their bodies, created by God, should be treated as God's creations. However, typical of the men of his time, Tertullian blamed women for men's lust and relegated women to the home and the commands of their husband. (It should be noted that Tertullian was probably at the extreme of strictness within Christianity. In fact, eventually he joined a heretical group, the Montanists, who discouraged marriage and all things related to worldly pursuits.)

Tertullian was a product of his times; we are products of ours. In written accounts of the church, the most prominent figures are men, with a few remarkable exceptions. This does not mean that women were not active in and essential to church life; it simply illustrates that the history of the church was recorded by men, primarily for men, in a world where public deeds (governmental proclamations, service in wars, and so on) were performed mostly by men. ■

Women in the Early Church

resistance to joining the army or, if they did join, their participating in only a noncombat capacity. Pacifism—the belief that it is wrong to kill another human being in war or for any purpose—was, for the most part, the tradition of the early church. This commitment won the Christians the contempt of society, because helping to fight the barbarians was deemed a patriotic duty.

A general persecution of Christians was ordered, in which the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Jerusalem were martyred. Other periods of persecution followed.

Diocletian's Persecutions

As the 200s came to an end, the Roman Empire finally had a competent ruler, Diocletian—who was competent in the sense of being able to get things done. He managed to hold off the barbarians' invasions, which was something his immediate predecessors had failed to do. He reorganized the government, moving from military to civilian administration.

But Diocletian demanded complete conformity to his will, which he mistakenly thought would bring unity to the empire. Naturally Diocletian turned his attention to the dissenting Christians. In his last two years of rule, he ordered churches destroyed, sacred books burned, and leaders executed. The persecutions were especially horrible in North Africa and in the East. Ironically, some of Diocletian's own relatives were Christians.

Christians Who Sacrificed to Idols: What to Do?

Besides mourning for martyred or enslaved family and friends, Christians had to face a new problem resulting from the persecutions: What should they do with Christians who had sacrificed to the idols to save their life? Should those people be allowed to re-enter the Christian communities? Most of these apostates, or people who had renounced their faith, wanted to repent and return to the church. Some bishops said that their sin of denial could never be forgiven. Other bishops disagreed.

Sharp debate about this issue ensued for many years, but the decision of the bishop of Rome became generally accepted: apostates could be reunited with the Christian communities after repentance. The public penance and ritual of re-entry were the first forms of what we now know as the sacrament of reconciliation.

Christians on the Brink of a Revolution

By now the church had endured, even thrived, during three centuries of persecution. The suffering had tested the convictions of anyone who wanted to be a Christian. Little did the Christians of the

early 300s realize that a revolution in their identity and power was about to begin. They would soon change from a church of nonviolent martyrs with no political power into a church entwined with the culture, politics, and wars of Europe for many centuries.

Constantine's Conversion: A New Era for the Church

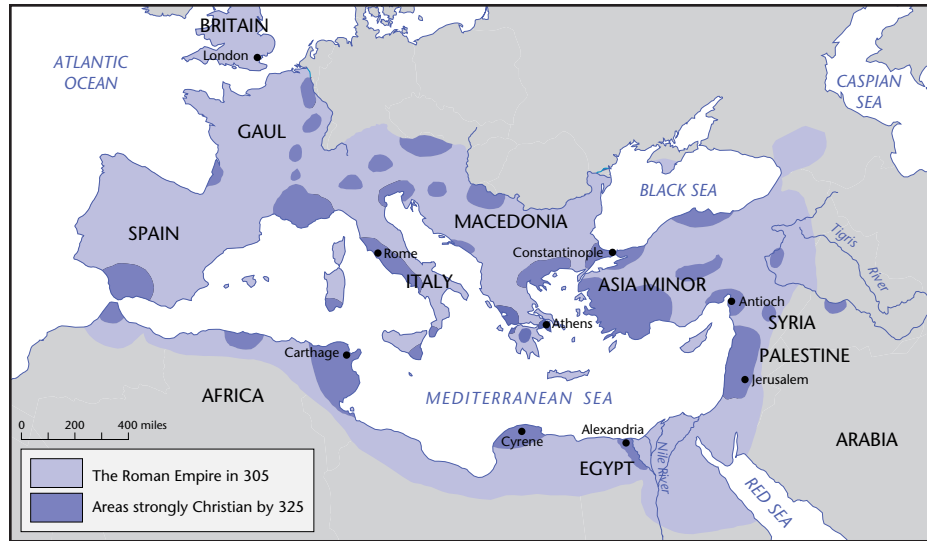
One person can be singled out as initiating a whole new era for the church. Although not a Christian himself at the time, Constantine's conversion would alter the church's power and status dramatically. How and why did this radical reversal of fortune for the church come about?

A Claim of Victory Through the Son of God After Diocletian's rule, several contenders grasped for the imperial throne. Constantine was chosen to be emperor by the Roman troops in Britain, but he faced the superior forces of a rival emperor when he reached Rome in 312 C.E. to make his claim to the throne.

The story is told that before the decisive battle, Constantine had a vision promising him that he would conquer through a special sign—the sign of Christ. (Constantine's mother, Helena, was a Christian, but Constantine, himself a pagan, worshiped the sun god.) Trusting the vision, Constantine instructed his soldiers to put the first two Greek letters of Christ's name—XP (or chi-rho)—on their banners and shields. Out of the battle, Constantine's smaller army emerged victorious. The Roman senate erected a triumphal arch to Constantine, which attributed the victory to the sun god. Constantine shocked them by honoring the Son of God instead. (Although he then supported Christianity, Constantine would not be officially baptized until shortly before his death in 337.)

Christianity The Edict of Milan Becomes Legal Constantine at first agreed to share power with a general, who would be emperor of the Eastern part of the empire while Constantine would be emperor of the Western part. Shortly after assuming power, in 313, Constantine and the Eastern emperor issued the Edict of Milan, granting freedom of worship to Christians in the Roman Empire. Christians could no longer be punished by law for practicing or preaching their religion. They had moved from a secret, or “underground,” status to an open and legitimate, or “aboveground,” status. Further privileges

The Spread of Christianity



followed, with Christian clergy being exempted from paying taxes and many churches being built by Constantine, especially in Rome and Palestine.

A New Capital for a Fresh Start

In 324, Constantine defeated the Eastern emperor, united the empire, and became sole ruler. But problems still plagued the empire. Rome itself was run-down; many people lived in crumbling slums. Feeling that a fresh start was needed, Constantine decided to move to a new capital in the Eastern part of the empire, closer to the centers of population. For the site he chose a little town called Byzantium. He named his city New Rome, even modeling the public buildings after Roman structures. Constantinople, as it came to be called, became the new center of the empire.

Church and State Entwined

Like emperors before him, Constantine saw religion as a way of unifying the people from various cultures who were under his domination. Therefore, Constantine began to interfere in church matters. Previous emperors had dominated the Roman pagan reli-

gions, so Constantine was following suit by trying to run the church. The Christians, finally legitimate and enjoying Constantine's good favor, were of course grateful to him and therefore not inclined to resist his influence. This development, though, was an enormous one. Christianity, which had been powerless, poor, and nonviolent for three centuries, became allied with the Roman Empire. The tension between being true to the faith versus being loyal and subservient to the government was to saturate church history for centuries.

The Official Religion of the Empire

By the end of the fourth century, the reversal of fortune for the church was complete. The emperor Theodosius declared paganism illegal and made Christianity the official religion of the empire in 380. Christianity was not only tolerated but enforced! By the year 500, in another ironic twist for the once generally pacifist church, only Christians were allowed to serve in the army.

Thus, while Constantine's conversion saved the church from the horrors of persecution, a new era began when the church became intimately connected with worldly power and, too often, with the corruption of power. By the mid-300s, Christian bishops ranked high in public life, some of them holding civil positions as judges. Staying free from political pressures and influence proved difficult. The church was also given lands, and the revenues from these properties were to be used for the upkeep of the church. However, the accumulation of property sometimes led to greed. The church in 350 was a far cry from the band of Apostles who had wandered with Jesus, having no place to lay their heads.

Clarity of Doctrine amid the Fires of Heresy

In its early centuries, even as the church was suffering persecution from outside itself, it was not immune to conflict within. The early Christians were not uniform in their belief, and various splinter groups challenged the beliefs of the majority. So the church had to sift through the varieties of beliefs, keeping those that seemed consistent with the message passed on from the Apostles but vigorously opposing those that did not square with basic aspects of the faith. Beliefs contrary to some essential belief of the faith are called heresies.

Gnosticism: As early as the second century C.E., one splinter group was the Gnostics, who believed that all material things, including the human body, were evil. They claimed that if Jesus came from God, he could not have taken on a body, which was evil by nature. Therefore, the apparently human figure of Jesus was just an apparition. To the Gnostics, Jesus was divine but not human.

The Gnostics believed that human beings remained totally ignorant of God because God was so removed from material things. The exception to this, they claimed, was that the Gnostics themselves had a special secret knowledge of God and of their own spiritual destiny. Salvation was not the gift of Jesus to all persons but the special privilege of the Gnostics.

The Gnostic denial of Jesus' humanity was considered a heresy because it was contrary to the understanding of Jesus as human that we get from the Gospels and the Epistles. Irenaeus, a Christian who became the bishop of Lyons, particularly opposed Gnosticism.

Challenges to Christian belief, such as Gnosticism, caused turmoil but also led to clarity and unity in the church because the basic beliefs of the church then had to be agreed upon and expressed. As a result, by the year 200, Christians had formulated a statement of faith—the Apostles' Creed. This creed became part of Christian worship, and candidates seeking baptism had to understand it and accept it publicly before they could join the church.

Arianism: Gnosticism thrived during the period of the persecutions. But another heresy, Arianism, arose after the persecutions, around the time of Constantine, and ended up dividing the church for centuries. A year after he became sole emperor, Constantine called the bishops together in a council to discuss a divisive problem that was especially troublesome in the East. The problem had to do with the teachings of an Alexandrian priest named Arius, whose followers were thus called Arians.

Neither Divine nor Human

Whereas the Gnostics had denied Jesus' humanity, the Arians denied Jesus' divinity. The Arians did not believe that the unknowable, unreachable, and unchangeable God could ever take the form of a human being. And to the Arians, Jesus was made or created by God and subordinate to God. Calling Jesus divine was merely a courtesy. He was neither God nor human, but somewhere in between.

The Council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed

The ecumenical (worldwide) council called by Constantine met in 325. Bishops gathered at the small town of Nicaea, across the water from Constantinople. More than three hundred bishops came, mostly from the East. It is important to remember that the church was still mostly made up of North Africans, Syrians, Palestinians, and residents of Asia Minor and Greece. As might be expected, because of the great number of council participants and their varied cultural backgrounds, disagreements occurred.

After much discussion, Arius's beliefs were condemned as wrong. They were inconsistent with the understanding about Jesus that was traditional in the church at large. When Arius refused to alter his stand, he was declared a heretic. The bishops also wrote a more elaborate creed than the earlier Apostles' Creed, one that would incorporate the understanding of Jesus as both God and human being. The Nicene Creed is still recited at Mass. The part of the creed that Arius rejected states:

*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, one in Being with the Father.*

(Emphasis added)

This passage expresses the Christian belief that Jesus was not *made* by God but is *one with* God, being both divine and human.

The Council of Nicaea was a major defining moment for Christianity, and belief in the Nicene Creed has been an important definition of membership in the Christian community for over sixteen hundred years.

Athanasius: Jesus as the Brilliant Reflection of God Emerging from the Arian controversy as a great church thinker and leader was Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. As a young deacon present at the Council of Nicaea, he had forcefully and clearly opposed the Arians. His position began with this belief: the Word of God "had become man so that you might learn from a man how a man may become God." He proclaimed that Jesus—God present as a human being—made truth of the passage in Genesis that says human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

To counter the Arians, Athanasius tried to help his listeners understand that *Jesus is related to God as brightness is to light*. The two realities cannot be separated. Jesus is the brilliant reflection of the light that is God. The Scriptures state that if we know Jesus, we know God.

When Athanasius was chosen to be a bishop, he was constantly harassed by Arian bishops from the East. To force him out of office, they brought all sorts of false accusations against him. As a result of such plotting by the Arians, Athanasius was removed from office five times—the last time at the age of seventy—by four emperors in turn. In all, he spent seventeen years of his life in exile, sometimes safely hidden by people in the city, other times escaping to the Egyptian desert. During the last seven years of his life, he brought peace to the conflict-ridden church in Alexandria.

By 392, Emperor Theodosius had outlawed Arianism along with paganism. Arianism continued to grow outside the empire among the barbarians who had been taught by missionaries from Constantinople years before. But within the empire, by the end of Theodosius's reign in 395, what we now call the Catholic faith was the only religion allowed in the Roman Empire.

Conclusion The three centuries from 100 to 400 c.e. saw dramatic changes for the church. It was transformed from a persecuted minority religion, an “underground” church, to the official religion of the Roman Empire, with other religions barely tolerated. The pivotal incident for the church was Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christ and then his legalization of Christianity through the Edict of Milan. This ended the persecutions of the Christians. The courageous faith of the early Christians was found to be strong and pure, like gold tested in fire.

But Constantine's welcome move also set the stage for the increasing involvement of the state in the affairs of the church. The church and the empire were, in a sense, wedded from the time of Constantine on. That relationship gradually turned the church from a politically powerless but very alive countercultural way of life into a powerful, wealthy mainstream institution. Naturally the emperors tried to use the church to their advantage. Sometimes the Gospel was compromised as emperors hastened to attach church approval to whatever they did. Some church leaders were only too happy to cooperate with imperial power.

The period from 100 to 400 saw the faith of the church tested in another way: The church had to respond to challenges to its understanding of Jesus, causing reflection and the refining of its faith into

statements that Christians still recite today—the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed in particular was worded with precise philosophical language as a means to answer the philosophical arguments about the nature of Jesus.

Lying ahead for the church after 400, as it emerged from the fires of persecution and doctrinal controversy, was a period of creative growth, both in numbers and in its spiritual and intellectual heritage. Chapter 5 will focus on the richness of that period.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you see any evidence today that people continue to be persecuted for their religious beliefs?
2. Constantine used religion to unify his empire. In what positive ways can religion serve as a unifying factor in a culture? What are the dangers in trying to have religion serve a unifying role?
3. The early Christians held diverse religious views and expressed their beliefs in different ways. What are some areas of Christian religious belief about which diverse views exist today? How did the early church respond to diversity? How should the church respond today?