



Snapshot of AD 325 & Later

Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Introduction

- This lesson is a snapshot of AD 325.
 - Snapshots show change.
 - Other lessons were like video – show movement.
- This is the second snapshot in this course.
 - In 100.
 - In 325.
- Snapshots help us to see the difference between the early apostolic church and what came later.
- Not everything mentioned in this lesson was normative by AD 325. Some of it was more fully developed a little later.



Snapshots Make Change Obvious!



What the Church was Called

- By AD 100, the most common name was Ekklesia.
- By AD 325, the common name was the Catholic Church.
 - This is not to be confused with the Roman Catholic Church.
 - It simply meant the universal church going back to the Apostles. It was set apart from the schismatics (Montanists; Novatians, and Donatists) as well as the heretics.
- Although there was cultural diversity that accounted for some variation in practice, for the most part, the church was united and Christians saw the church as universal.
- This is very different than today with both denominational and non-denominational Christianity.



Church Membership

- In AD 325, church membership was more complicated than it was in AD 100.
 - In AD 100, it was all confessing, baptized believers.
- Most obviously, bishops and presbyters were members of the church. Eventually, the church came to be seen as the clergy.
- Apart from the clergy, you had baptized members of the church.
- You then had catechumens.
 - These were disciples. They converted to Christianity, but had to receive formal instruction and education in the faith for a number of years before they were eligible for baptism. Only after baptism were they able to partake of communion and function as full-fledge members of the church.
- Monasticism began to develop around this time (more in a later lesson).
 - Church now included monks and nuns.

Church Government

- It was vastly more complicated than it was in AD 100.
 - In AD 100 there were multiple elders in each church and they were all equal. Under them were deacons who served the church.
 - It seemed like there was local church autonomy. Exceptions were networks of churches under a single apostle's authority.
 - Prior to AD 150, Ignatius introduced the distinction between bishop and presbyter. By the 4th century, this will be far more complex.
- Local church equality gave way to churches in larger cities having oversight over smaller churches.
 - Within the cities, churches would grow to a point that new congregations had to meet in different buildings or houses. The bishop could not attend all such congregations. So presbyters would be assigned to each congregation. They were priests at this point.
 - The largest and/or oldest church in the city was pastored by the bishop. He oversaw all the priests in his city.
- Remember, at first, every city had just one church. So this was a natural outworking of there being "one" church in each city.

Church Leaders

- When Cyprian of Carthage and Stephen of Rome opposed each other, the former argued all bishops were equal and master of their own churches.
 - The latter argued that the bishop of Rome as first among equals could command the other churches in the West. In the 3rd century, Cyprian's view was normative.
 - By the 4th century, Stephen's view won the day.
- Each province of the Empire had a capital city, and their bishops therefore were considered greater than other bishops.
 - They were called metropolitan bishops or archbishops (chief bishop), and had authority over other bishops in their province.
- Some became even more powerful than the archbishops. Cities that had outstanding spiritual or political significance had a greater claim.
 - Their bishops came to be known as Patriarchs (Gr. Fatherly ruler).
 - In AD 325, there were 3 (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch), by 381 there were 4 (Constantinople), and by AD 451, there were officially 5 (Jerusalem). Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Their bishops were in charge of all other bishops in their part of the Empire.
 - The Roman west spoke Latin, and so the term was *papa*, or pope.

Church Leaders

- In the course of time, Rome and Constantinople's patriarchs will become the top two.
 - Rome was the old and original capital of the Empire.
 - Constantinople was the current capital.
 - Rome had a greater claim in terms of Apostolic succession.
 - Constantinople had greater influence for a time because the seat of the Emperor was there.
- In the 1st through 3rd centuries, the language of Christianity and its worship was universally Greek.
 - By the fourth century, Latin takes over in the Western Empire.
 - By the fifth century, other national churches with unique languages will set themselves apart: Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, etc.
- In the 5th century, Rome will claim for itself the greatest authority, but it is not accepted by the East.

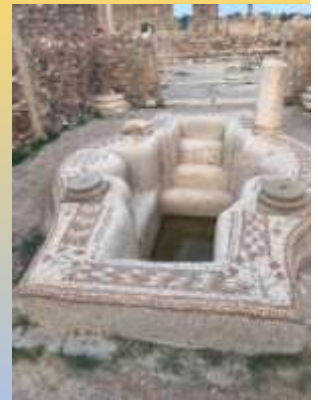


Church Teaching

- In the 4th century, it was believed that Scripture was inspired, infallible, and inerrant. They wouldn't use that terminology, but their statements about Scripture amount to the same thing.
- In hammering out the Trinity, and relying on Scripture and canon in that process, the church claimed to submit itself fully to the authority of the NT.
 - They argued the OT and NT together are the Word of God and true even to the tiniest details of what it records.
 - Nothing doctrinally was to be accepted unless it could be backed by Scripture.
- Why then were there so many practices that did NOT accord with what is recorded in Scripture?
 - When it came to church organization and worship, they believed it was okay to rely on church tradition.
 - In this sense, they argued the tradition was apostolic (going back to the apostles) and had equal authority with the Scriptures. Later, council decisions would be included.
 - They readily admitted that much of what they actually do in terms of worship and ritual is NOT in the Bible. They claim instead, it is justified by tradition (e.g. Basil).

Church Ordinances—Baptism

- Baptism by this point was certain understood in sacramental terms.
 - Around AD 350, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote *Catechetical Lectures* where he describes the typical beliefs about baptism at this time.
 - In practice, the catechumens were only baptized two possible days per year—Easter and Pentecost.
 - They denounced Satan facing West. Then facing East they confess the Trinity. Then they are anointed with oil. Then they are immersed in water three times for each person of the Trinity and the amount of days Christ was entombed.
 - Then they are anointed with oil again (forehead, ears, nostrils, and chest) in a ritual called chrismation, which symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - Infant baptism was increasingly practiced, but it was not yet the norm. By 418, however, denying it was considered heretical.
- They believed baptism had three effects:
 1. Washed away all sins prior to baptism.
 2. United person with Christ; gave the Holy Spirit; effected adoption.
 3. Sets the person apart as the Temple of the Holy Spirit



Baptism

- This certainly differs from an evangelical view. A few things should be noted about baptism in the Patristic era.
 - The water does not actually do anything. The Holy Spirit does all these effects while the person is immersed in the water.
 - It was a believers baptism. Many people did not want to baptize infants since it only forgives sins prior to baptism. Some folks waited until the deathbed for baptism (Constantine).
 - If a catechumen died before baptism, it was still assumed he was saved since he had the intent to get baptized.
 - True faith was necessary, otherwise the baptism has no effect—so this is not *ex opere operato*.



The Lord's Supper

- It was a weekly rite.
- It was increasingly viewed as a sacrifice, but not a repeated sacrifice.
 - However, there was some understanding of Christ being present in the eucharist.
 - Some writers saw it as symbolic of Christ's body and blood, and others saw it as His body and blood.
- Though it was called Eucharist and even Mass, it was not yet what is taught in Roman Catholicism.
 - Eucharist just means, "Thanksgiving."
 - Mass comes from the word "dismiss" because that is when all non-baptized people were dismissed and forced to leave. Then only those who remained could partake.
- Special prayers were stated, and eventually those will develop into what characterized the Supper in the Middle Ages.



Liturgy and Iconography

- Though liturgy was around in the 2nd century, possibly the 1st, it was much more fixed and rigid by the 4th century.
 - Liturgy is a fixed and written form of worship.
 - By this point, there was less room for a bishop to mess around with the pattern.
- Holidays are big part of liturgy too.
 - Easter liturgy was expanded to include 40 days of Lent and Good Friday.
 - December 25 officially was added as a celebration of the incarnation—some Eastern churches chose January 6.
 - It is theorized that gift exchanges were taken from the Roman pagan Saturnalia festival that was from Dec 17-21.
- With the legalization of Christianity, official church buildings became more common. With those buildings came iconography.
 - Not everyone was supportive of it.



Why the Changes?

- The horrors of persecution made the church's embrace of imperial theology understandable.
 - The merging politics with religion leads to some of the hierarchical changes.
- The battle against Gnostics required a counterargument about apostolic tradition—hence apostolic succession.
- The battle against Gnostics required a universal church with definable boundaries of orthodoxy.
- The battle against Gnostics required legitimate church leaders that can perform the ordinances.
- The legitimate church leaders came to be identified as the church. "Where the bishop is, there is the church."
- A continued tradition of practices that could not be justified by Scripture required an "apostolic tradition" that traces such practices back to the writers or Scripture.
- Because of all of this, converts had to relate primarily to the church as an institution rather than to Christ via personal relationship.

Why the Changes?

- Tremendous growth is another major reason. It directly influenced the rise of sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, and later monasticism.
 - Prominent priests became bishops. Even today we look to megachurch pastors as experts.
 - Pagan converts brought in their sacramental beliefs.
 - Eventually some Christians will want to get away from the masses in church and so they will become monks.
- The pagan persecutions also contributed to the changes.
 - It led to divisions among churches, especially regarding whether or not to receive back apostates and rebaptisms. Since it was taught that salvation depended upon being part of the church, those not allowed back were seen as damned.
- Internal conflicts against heresy also led to some changes.
 - Orthodox bishops consolidated more power to fight the heresies. This gave them more power, authority, and status than the Scriptures did.
- Ecclesiastical rivalry also caused problems as large scale bishops competed with each other and were jealous.
 - Begins to be seen clearly at the Council of Nicaea and the following councils.

Conclusion

- By AD 325 the church was a lot more complicated in its practice and ritual than it was in AD 100.
- It was also more complex in its organizational structure.
- The Christians of the 90s likely would not have recognized the church of AD 325.
 - But then again, they probably would not recognize churches today either.
 - The 4th century was the era of most rapid ecclesiastical and doctrinal change and development until the Reformation.
 - Most of the rest of the course is simply the outworking of what began in this century.
 - That is why there will be no other snapshots in this course.