

The First Half of the Church Age

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – an overview of the first half of the church age, up to the year 1000
2. aim – to cause us to understand how Christianity came to be the dominant force in Europe

b. outline

1. The Primordial Church
2. The Early Church
3. The Imperial Church
4. The Medieval Church

c. overview

1. why an overview at this point?
 - a. because some in the class *tonight* have not been with us all along
 - b. because a review will help cement *for regular attendees* a better understanding of the “flow”
 - c. because an overview will launch us into the second half of the church age *which will be much more detailed* and will take significantly longer
 1. obvious: details closer to the present are always easier to both a) find source material and support and b) be within the “memory” of the people considering it

I. The Primordial Church

Content

a. the primordial church (c. 30 – 60AD)

1. the falling of the Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost (c. 30)
2. the conversion of Jews in Jerusalem and throughout the Diaspora
3. the conversion of Paul and his missionary journeys (i.e. the Gentile church) – his death c. 64
4. the movement of the gospel out from “Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth”

b. the characteristics of the primordial church

1. small; mostly Jewish (at first); centered at Jerusalem, then at Antioch; modelled after Jewish worship practices (synagogue); believers meeting in homes; beginnings of church hierarchy
2. the writing and early dissemination of Scripture
3. early forms of opposition and persecution, particularly by the Jews

II. The Early Church

Content

a. the early church (c. 60 – 311AD)

1. the establishment of a more “settled” church
2. the advent and advancement of *physical* opposition to the church and the gospel
 - a. the fire in Rome under Nero (64)
 - b. the fall of Jerusalem (70) and the scattering of the Jews
3. the advent of *doctrinal* opposition within the church (e.g. Gnosticism)
4. the early church Fathers (e.g. Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, etc.; 2nd C.)
 - a. i.e. those who began to *interpret* and *apply* the apostolic writings into the life of the church
 - b. however, *at this time*, imperfect and inconsistent

b. the characteristics of the early church

1. the development of the canon of Scripture
2. the broad dissemination of Scripture throughout the Mediterranean basin
3. the development of early Christian creeds (2nd C.; e.g. the Apostles Creed)
4. the development of the *catholic* (universal) church (i.e. worldwide)
5. persecution as the *primary impetus* for the Scriptures being both *canonized* and *distributed*
 - a. it forced Christians to *codify* their beliefs; it forced *genuine* conversions; it forced Christians to *evangelize*; it kept Christianity and the government (during this period) separate

III. The Imperial Church

Content

a. the imperial church (c. 311-470AD)

1. the conversion of Constantine – his battle with Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge
 - a. seeing the *labarum* - the Greek letters *chi* (X) and *rho* (P), the first two letters of *christos*
2. the Edict of Milan (313) – officially ending Christian persecution
3. the establishment of Constantinople (Byzantium, later Istanbul) as the “New Rome”
 - a. and, the location of *most* of the controversies of the Imperial Church

b. the characteristics of the imperial church

1. Christianity becoming the *dominate* religion of the Empire (not the *official* religion)
2. the rise of the *monastic* movement, particularly in the Egyptian desert
3. the Donatist schism – the “split” over what to do with the “lapsed” under persecution
4. the Arian controversy – the controversy over the nature of the Son in relation to the Father
 - a. *i.e.* the *logos* as co-eternal with the Father (Alexander/Athanasius) vs. the *logos* as a created being by the Father (Arius)
 - b. “settled” at the Council of Nicea (325) – that the Son is of *substance* of the Father (*homoousios*)
 - c. Arianism continues, and becomes the *dominate view* of theology
 - d. Athanasius rises (and stands alone against the world) to defend *Nicene* orthodoxy
 - e. the Council of Constantinople (381) *confirmed* Nicene orthodoxy re: the Trinity
5. the imperial church Fathers (*e.g.* Basil, Gregory, Augustine [d. 430])
 - a. worked to *advance* the theological and doctrinal understanding of the church over against many forms of heresy and heterodoxy beginning to invade the church during a time of peace
6. the expansion of Christianity beyond the Roman Empire (E to Armenia, Persia, Arabia; S to Ethiopia; W to Spain, Ireland; N to Europe)
7. the fall of Rome under the Goths (410); the fall of the W empire (476)
 - a. the E empire continues from Constantinople until 1453

IV. The Medieval Church

Content

a. the medieval church (c. 470-1517)

1. the “middle ages” – between the *orthodox* church and the *Reformation*
2. the *Dark Ages* (c. 400–700AD) – a series of invasions by barbarians from Europe into Roman territory (*i.e.* Vandals, Visigoths, Franks, Angles, Saxons, Ostrogoths, Lombards)
 - a. (often) bringing Christianity back into Europe (*i.e.* of the *Arian* type)

b. the characteristics of the imperial church

1. the rise of the W church to “fill in” the void left by the crumbling W empire
 - a. the rise of *Benedictine* monasticism (*i.e.* the Rule of Benedict)
 - b. the rise of the *papacy* – the establishment of a single bishop in Rome as head of the church
 1. Leo “the Great” (440-461) – during the invasions of the Huns and the Vandals into Rome (c. 455), Leo stood up to defend what was left of the empire
 2. he also began the ideas of *papal succession* and *infallibility*
 3. he began to see himself as *patriarch of the W*
 4. the beginnings of many *extra-biblical dogmas* into the thinking of the W church
2. the Christological debates (5th-7th C.) – the nature of Jesus as the God-man
 - a. the view of Jesus as divine (Alexandrine) vs. the view of Jesus as human (Antiochene)
 - b. the *Third* through *Sixth* Ecumenical councils in the E (431-680) *confirming* the orthodox position that Jesus is fully God *and* fully man, two distinct natures without confusion, change, division, or separation (traced to *Chalcedon*, 451)
3. the iconoclastic debates (8-9th C.) – the nature of images within the church
4. the rise of Islam under Muhammad and his successors (7th C.)
 - a. the conquests of Islam over Arabia, Persia, Syria, Palestine, N Egypt, N Africa, Spain
 - b. the Byzantine Empire pushed back to Asia Minor
5. the rise of a New Western Empire (9th-10th C.)
 - a. the Carolingian Empire under Charles, king of the Franks (Charlemagne, d. 814)
 - b. the establishment of the “Holy Roman Empire” in Europe with Leo III crowning him 12/25/800
 - c. the decay of the papacy *spiritually* as the office became powerful *politically*