

# TWENTY CENTURIES

## A Survey of Church History



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### THE FOURTH CENTURY

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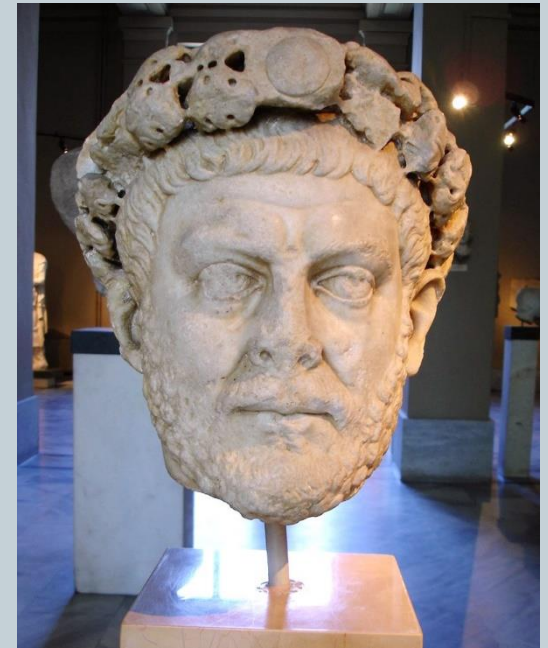


- The Persecution of Diocletian
- Constantine, the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, & the Edict of Milan
- The Conversion of Constantine
- Donatist Controversy
- Arian Heresy
- The Council of Nicaea
- The Nicene Creed

# The Persecution of Diocletian (303-311)



- **The Emperor Diocletian:**
  - A general who was appointed emperor (284-305). Faced a very difficult military situation. Successfully reformed the imperial office and set the stage for the next century.
  - Committed to traditional paganism, he demanded that all civil officials and soldiers offer a sacrifice
  - Christian preachers in Antioch denounced Diocletian's policy (302)



# The Persecution of Diocletian (303-311)



- In order to “appease the gods” Christians were first barred from government. Pressured by priests of Apollo, Diocletian ordered general persecution (303).
  - Pagan leaders concerned about Christian growth; Porphyry’s *Against the Christians*, 290. Diocletian surrounded by an anti-Christian clique.
  - Failed auguries of 299; Christian soldiers ordered to sacrifice.
  - Urged by Caesar Galerius, “Edict against Christians” ordered churches destroyed, Scripture burned, Christians forbidden to assemble. Feb., 23, 303 Feast of Terminus – Christianity to be terminated.
  - After a palace fire, torture and execution of Christians ordered. Many Christians burned alive.
  - Arrest of all clergy ordered/ universal imperial worship required
  - Because martyrdom strengthened Christian resolve, persecution in the East not imitated in the West. In 311, the Edict was removed by a dying Galerius.



# Constantine and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge



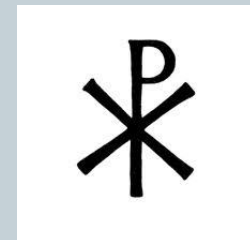
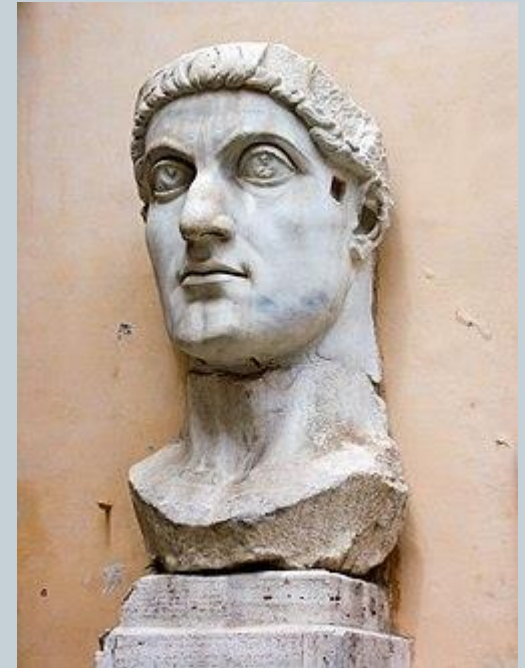
- **Background**

- Diocletian appointed three colleagues to be co-emperors (2 Augustuses and 2 Caesars).
  - ✦ Constantine was the son of a Caesar, educated in the Eastern court of Nicomedia, which had a strong Christian presence.
  - ✦ Witnessed the heroism of Christian martyrs.
- Dynastic Breakdown (305-312)
  - ✦ Diocletian abdicated in 305 and in 306, Constantius (Constantine's father, Augustus of the West) died.
  - ✦ Constantine hailed as Augustus by Army of the West. Became emperor of Britain, Spain, and Gaul. Showed a tolerant attitude towards Christians.
  - ✦ Dynastic breakdown led to civil war (310-312). Constantine claimed a vision from "Sol Invictus" granting him sole rule.

# Constantine and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge



- **Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312)**
  - Constantine invaded Italy and fought Emperor Maxentius outside Rome.
  - Claimed that a vision of Christ ordered him to advance under his sign (“*In Hoc Signo Vinces*” – *under this sign conquer*). Constantine declared for Christ.
- **Edict of Milan (313)**
  - Official toleration of Christianity within Roman Empire



# Conversion of Constantine



- **Was Constantine Truly Converted?**
  - Father held Britain-Gaul, with relatively few Christians; minimized persecution
  - Constantine was raised a pagan, but inclined to monotheism (sun worship)
  - While at Diocletian's court, he would have witnessed extreme Christian persecution
  - Was exposed to Christian teaching and, prior to his conversion, employed a Christian tutor to his children.
  - Claims to have been converted through a vision of Christ on eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge
  - Eusebius of Caesaria, the great Christian scholar and Constantine's court chaplain, fully accepted his conversion.
  - Regarded by the Church as a magnificent providence.

# Conversion of Constantine



- **Long Range Effects of Constantine's Conversion**
  - Officially ended over two hundred years of persecution
  - Gave prominence to Christianity and opportunities for the gospel
  - Marginalized paganism throughout empire
  - Changed Church-State relationships.
    - ✦ Constantine de-facto head of the Church
    - ✦ Christian Empire or Secularization of Church? Yes.
  - Led to formalization of church and worship
    - ✦ Accelerated tendency to clericalization
    - ✦ Increased power of bishops
  - Finalized canonization (*Codex Sinaiticus & Codex Vaticanus*)



# The Donatist Controversy



- **Donatism**
  - A Christian sect in North Africa, named for Donatus
  - Celebrated the “cult of the martyrs”
- **Donatist Controversy**
  - During the Diocletian persecution, some Christians cooperated with the Empire, known as *traditors*.
  - In 311, Caecilian was elected bishop of Carthage. Donatists objected because he had been ordained by a man who became a traditor. Donatists overruled by Constantine.
  - Donatists argued that “morality validated church office.”
  - Council of Arles (314) rejected Donatist argument.
  - Donatists schismed, declaring themselves the only true church.
- **Long-term issues**
  - Glorification of martyrdom
  - Demand that morality validated office
  - Tendency to division and sectarianism

# The Arian Heresy



- Arius (250-336), a presbyter from Alexandria
  - Question: How to define Jesus' special status?
    - ✦ Theologians had wrestled with this question for 150 years.
      - Biblical data includes: “Son of God,” “the Word,” the Savior who is “one with the Father.” How to balance unity within Godhead and personal distinction between Father and Son.
    - ✦ Modalism: Answered that Jesus was one manifestation of God
    - ✦ Adoptionism: Jesus was born a man but was adopted into deity.
    - ✦ Origen: The eternal generation of the Son. Christ divine, but a lower grade of deity.

# The Arian Heresy



- Arius: Answered that Christ was subordinate to God in his person – more than man but less than God.
  - ✦ Emphasized the subordination of Son to Father
  - ✦ Christ was god-like but not God. For instance, Christ was not eternal but begotten (“There was a time when the Son was not”).
    - Christ was closer to God than all other creations.
    - Christ was the created mediator to God.
    - Arius sought in this way to defend the belief in one God only vs. the idea of two Gods, and to protect the transcendence of God.

# The Council of Nicaea



- Arius reported his views to Alexander of Alexandria in 318.
  - Arius deposed by a North African council in 320. Alexander insisted that the Son is fully and truly divine, no less than the Father.
  - Moved to Antioch, where he was welcomed by fellows of Lucian of Antioch, who held similar views.
  - Launched a controversy between Alexandria and Antioch. The theological divide: Is Christ *equal to* or *inferior to* the Father?
- Constantine responded to the Arian controversy by summoning a Church-wide council in 325.
  - First ecumenical council of bishops (mostly from the East), Nicaea (near Constantinople).
  - Over 300 bishops attended (plus their staffs), with Constantine presiding over the bishops.

# The Council of Nicaea



- **The Council Proceedings**

- Constantine's religious adviser was Hosius of Cordova, a strong believer in Christ's deity.
- Debate involved important terminology:
  - ✦ *Homoousios vs. Homoiousios (note the i) vs Heteroousios. Same vs. Similar vs. Different Essence.*
  - ✦ *Begotten, not created*
- Constantine set forth a statement of faith insisting on Christ's full and eternal deity. It was modified as the Nicene Creed.
- Anathemas proclaimed on Arius and 2 supporters ("outside the church").

"As for those who say, There was a time when He [the Logos] was not; and He was not before He was created; and, He was created out of nothing, or out of another essence or thing; and, The Son of God is created or changeable, or can alter – the holy, catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes those who say such things."
- Arius and his supporters were exiled by Constantine.

# The Council of Nicaea

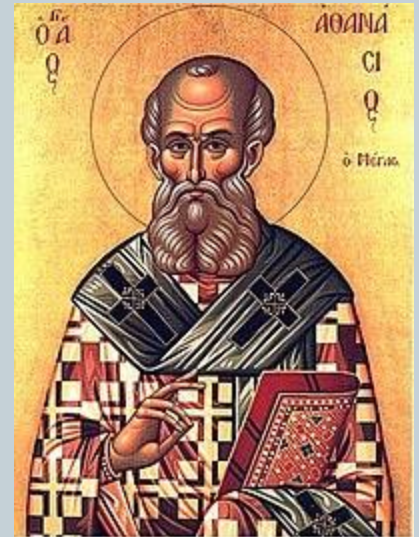


- **After the Council of Nicaea.**
  - The Nicenean formula was not well understood and was attacked by the Origenist party (Christ a lesser deity).
  - Athanasius of Alexandria was the chief leader of the Nicene party. Was exiled five times, but prevailed through his patient teaching of God's Word.
  - Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus developed theological terminology and provided persuasive biblical teaching.
    - ✦ Key terms: *Essence* or *Being* -- ousia; *Person* -- hypostasis; *3 hypostases in 1 ousios*. Persuasively taught the deity of the Holy Spirit. Brought together the Nicenes and the Origenists.
    - ✦ Incarnate, but not eternal subordination

# The Council of Nicaea



- After Nicaea, cont.
  - The emperors became entangled in civil wars, in part based on Nicene vs. Arian faith. In 378, the Arian emperor Valens died in battle, allowing the Nicene emperor Gratian to consolidate power. He chose his co-emperor on a theological basis: Theodosius, who banned Arianism completely from the Empire.
  - Council of Constantinople, 381, revised and confirmed the Nicene Creed.



THE FOURTH CENTURY

# The Nicene Creed



- **Strong emphasis on the Father**
  - We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
- **Strong emphasis on the divine being of the Son**
  - We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father
    - ✦ “eternally begotten... begotten not made,” fencing in the meaning of “begotten”
    - ✦ “being of one substance with the Father” – *homoousios*
    - ✦ No eternal subordination: “God from God, light from light... very God of very God.”



# The Nicene Creed



- **Summary of the work of Christ**

- “By whom 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 at 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.”

# The Nicene Creed



- **Divine person and work of the Spirit**
  - 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 spoke by the prophets.
- **Strong view of the Church**
  - 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.

# The Deity of Christ



## Biblical Support for the Deity of Christ:

- **Direct statements of Christ's deity**
  - Hebrews 1:8, "But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.'"
  - John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
  - Philippians 2:6, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped."
  - Titus 2:13, "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."
  - 2 Peter 1:1, "by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."

# The Deity of Christ



- **Prophecies as to His Deity**
  - Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”
  - Isaiah 9:6, “His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”
- **Jesus accepted worship as God**
  - John 20:28, “Thomas answered him, My Lord and my God!”

# The Deity of Christ



## Biblical Support for the Deity of Christ, cont.:

- **New Testament Fulfillment of Old Testament “Lord”**
  - Ps. 102: 25-26, “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain.” Applied to Jesus in Heb. 1:10-12.
  - Joel 2:32, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Applied to Jesus in Acts 2:21, 36; Rom. 10:13).
- **Old Testament titles for God applied to Christ**
  - The Great “I Am” – Ex. 3:13-14 / Jn. 8:57-59
  - Lord of Lords – Dt. 10:17 / Rev. 17:14
  - Lord of Glory – Ps. 24:10; 29:3 / 1 Cor. 2:8
  - Alpha and Omega – Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12 / Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13