

CHAPTER 5

THE CHURCH IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

This is a very important part of the history of the church. More is known about the church during the years 325-460 than all of church history before that time and 500 years after. This period saw many important issues and leaders emerge. In addition, during the fourth century the church made the major transition from being a persecuted minority to being the favored religion of the Roman state.

Persecution of Diocletian

Diocletian began his reign in the third century, and was tolerant of Christians (284-303). However, in the last two years of his reign and then after that he viciously persecuted the church (303-305 and after).

1. Outbreak of persecution

son-in-law Galerius, “Caesar” in the East, inspired this persecution: (called a “wild beast” by Lactantius); he influenced Diocletian to enforce the state religion, when Diocletian an old man

*First Persecution Edict of 303: nobody killed, churches closed, writings burned (“traitors” turned over writings); Christians dispossessed, made slaves

2. Further persecutions

a Christian (John) tore down edict—roasted; fire broke out in palace in Nicomedia; Galerius accused Christians; slaves tortured, “confessed” (cf. Nero)

*second and third edicts by Diocletian: churches burned, clergy arrested

*April 30, 304, fourth edict by Maximian in West (affected all the empire), worst of all: all the previous persecutions continued, plus, all Christians to sacrifice to gods on pain of death; even Diocletian’s wife and daughters had to sacrifice

305, Diocletian retired; committed suicide in 313; persecution continued on

3. Continuation of Diocletian’s persecution

extensive and intense for eight years; in parts of empire continued ten additional years;

unbelievable tortures used (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8:6, 9-10, 12 [note “Confessors”]); triumph of Christianity to come soon (cf. Durant, p. 652)

4. Death of Galerius

after Diocletian retired, chaos; every strong general wants to be emperor; six claimed to be “Augustus” (“Caesar” title spurned); 10-15 years of political instability

*308, worst edict: Christians forced to eat sacrificial meat; all food marked and sprinkled with sacrificial wine, required “apostasy or starvation”; other tortures, etc., continued; persecution nearly universal until 311; most severe in the East; least persecution in territory of Constantius Chlorus (Gaul, Spain, Britain)

311, Galerius in the East got a bad disease (cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8:16), called off persecution at request of his wife, asked for prayers—Edict of Toleration (Bettenson, p. 15); Galerius died same year

persecution continued in Egypt, Palestine, Syria (by Maximin) and in Italy (by Maxentius, son of Maximian)

Rise and rule of Constantine

(272-337)

1. Early life

son of Constantius Chlorus by concubine Helena; when Constantius Chlorus made a Caesar under Maximian, he had to put away Helena and marry Maximian’s daughter

Constantine joined army, successful there; taken by Galerius as “hostage,” kept in East; escaped back to father in Gaul; loved by soldiers

306, father died in Britain; troops called Constantine “Caesar” and “Augustus”; Constantine claimed only “Caesar”; reluctantly recognized as Caesar by Galerius

2. Rise to supremacy

306, Maxentius, son of Maximian, claimed title “Augustus” in Rome; 307, Galerius appointed Licinius “Augustus” in East; 310, Constantine defeated Maximian in Gaul; 311, Galerius died

312, Constantine crossed Alps to fight Maxentius; Maxentius consulted Sibylline oracles in Rome, “If you march out, the enemy of Rome will perish.”

Constantine had vision of cross in sky: “In this [sign] conquer!” (Lactantius and Eusebius say it was a dream); Constantine had sign of cross placed on shields (note symbol of cross superimposed on Greek letters chi & rho)

*Battle of Milvian Bridge, nine miles north of Rome; defeated Maxentius; entered Rome, welcomed

313, met Licinius (“Augustus” of the East) in Milan; they issued Edict of Milan: more toleration, end of persecution in West (Bettenson, pp. 15-16)

next ten years, fighting between Constantine and Licinius; Licinius persecuted Christians in Asia and Egypt; 323, Constantine defeated Licinius in Thrace; Licinius executed in 324; Constantine sole emperor

324, all Christian exiles recalled, property restored, confessors honored, Constantine proclaimed himself a Christian

3. Schisms during the time of Constantine

a. Melitian schism in Egypt: administrative, not doctrinal

“lapsed” bishop Melitius ordained presbyters while faithful bishop Peter was in prison; Peter martyred; later Melitius exiled

Melitius returned, formed separate church under presbyters he had ordained; thus two churches in each town

Council of Nicea figured compromise solution, only temporary; schism lasted until eighth century

b. Donatist schism in north Africa

bishop Felix in Carthage accused of being a traditor; he ordained bishop Caecilian; others objected, held that the ordination was invalid; they ordained Majorinus, who ordained Donatus (in 313)

Donatists asked Constantine for all the churches; bishops’ committee from France and Italy approved of Caecilian; Donatists then for separation of church and state

Donatists strict, pietistic; similar to Montanists and sect of Novatus; later Augustine wanted them persecuted; they lasted about 200 years; largely destroyed during barbarian and Moorish invasions

c. Arian controversy

only controversy of major doctrinal importance at that time; rocked church and empire during most of fourth century (discussed below)

4. Constantine’s civil accomplishments

a. Unified and preserved the empire

Diocletian and Constantine preserved it 100 years; provided umbrella for civilized life,

four church councils, widespread education, many church fathers

b. Founded Constantinople

A.D. 330, good location (central for war purposes; near Diocletian's Nicomedia); rebuilt small city, called it "New Rome"; no gladiator shows there; stood 1100 years (Turks took it in 1453); now Istanbul

c. Enacted social legislation

repealed much socialism of Diocletian

humane laws—no face-branding, debtors not scourged, prisons improved, no crucifixions, manumission encouraged, outlawed infanticide, etc.; led way to Justinian law code of ca. 530

5. Constantine's relation to the church

a. Enacted laws favorable to the church

taxes, bequests, exemptions, Sunday laws, coins non-pagan (cf. Bettenson, pp. 17-19)

b. Lead at Council of Nicaea (325)

called, presided over, enforced decision (see below); called self "Bishop of Bishops"

c. Encouraged Christian scholarship

(1) *Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea

a confessor; good scholar (not great thinker); headed school there after persecution; refused bishopric of Antioch; wrote *Ecclesiastical History*—*first history after Acts; not great critical judgment

(2) Lactantius

official under Diocletian; wrote a church history, used classical references; this "Christian Cicero" tutored Constantine's sons

(3) Bible copies

ordered fifty copies of Bible on parchment; some think Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (Aleph and B) are two of these (cf. Bruce Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, pp. 7-8); referred to in Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*

(4) Encouraged Study of Palestine

interest in Christ's return declined; mother Helena went there, found traditional sites of Golgotha and tomb of Jesus; grave with three crosses (the "true

cross”)

Eusebius, *Onomasticon* (“Name Book”), first geography, gives many geographical names

d. Alleged *Donation of Constantine*

document used in Middle Ages by popes; says pope Sylvester cured Constantine from leprosy; gives whole Western empire to popes (Bettenson, pp. 98-101, esp. 100-101)

document was questioned by Roman Catholic scholars; proved spurious by papal secretary Lorenzo Valla in 1440, shown to be a forgery from the eighth century; Luther later published the affair; Constantine probably did give the Lateran palace to the popes

e. Constantine’s personal religion and character

a true politician; may have had his son and wife murdered (no proof); publicly a Christian; but performed pagan rites of Pontifex Maximus; surrounded himself with pagan advisors; postponed baptism until dying (to forgive all sins)

During the fourth century, the church witnessed or engaged in many important movements, including these four:

- 1) the conciliar movement
- 2) the missions to the barbarians
- 3) the monastic movement
- 4) the downfall of paganism

These movements largely defined the century and the succeeding centuries. They will be covered in this order in the notes of this century.

Rise of Arianism and the Council of Nicea

1. Rise of Arianism

a. Background

Monarchianism tried to fathom the depths of the reality of God, especially Sabellianism

(Modalism); many over-reacted by separating Jesus from God (e.g., Lucian of Antioch)

b. Arius (d. 336)

Arius a presbyter in Alexandria, under orthodox bishop Alexander; Alexander said Jesus was God; Arius said that was Sabellianism—Jesus was made a god by God, “begotten”; Arius made up song in Alexandria—“There was [‘a time’ purposely omitted] when Jesus was not”; Arianism spread, especially in East; great conflicts

Main tenets about Jesus:

1. a created god
2. not eternal
3. not exact substance as the Father

2. Council of Nicea (325)

a. Introduction

first ecumenical council after Acts 15; all churches recognize it (recognize first four councils); Roman Catholic Church recognizes 23 councils

b. Calling the council

Constantine frustrated by “needless” fighting; called general council to decide issue; expenses paid by empire; 300 from East, only nine from West; bishop of Rome did not attend; most prominent representative from West was Hosius of Cordova (sometimes he presided)

c. Deliberations concerning Arianism

three parties:

Arian—led by Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia; small party of about 15 people
strong orthodox—led by Alexander and his young arch-deacon Athanasius; small group

moderate orthodox—majority; represented by Eusebius of Caesarea

Eusebius of Nicomedia presented an Arian creed, signed by fifteen; not approved

Eusebius of Caesarea presented a good creed which most approved, but could include Arians

strong orthodox party amended statement to include *homo-ousios* (“same substance”) on

suggestion of Hosius of Cordova to Constantine to council; the term had been used by Origen, Sabellius, and Tertullian; this creed then adopted by large majority

Nicean Creed: "True God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father"

Constantine stated the view was official, and he exiled the Arians

d. Other acts of the council

(1) Quartodeciman (Easter date) controversy

adopted spring date used in West; pope of Alexandria to figure and announce the dates

(2) Donatist schism

ordered the Donatists to rejoin the churches under Caecilian (they refused and remained separate)

(3) Melitian schism

Egyptian bishops in communication with Alexander are valid; Melitian bishops are "associates," to take over when others die (this plan was ignored)

(4) Celibacy

Hosius of Cordova and others (mostly from West, also some other ascetics) wanted rule forbidding clerical marriage; ascetic confessor from Egypt, Paphnutius (never touched a woman; lost eye under Diocletian) said celibacy requirement unbiblical and unnatural; action tabled

3. Arian controversy to the death of Constantine (337)

a. Work of Athanasius (296-373), the Father of Orthodoxy

became bishop ("pope") of Alexandria in his early thirties (328); preferred persuasion to force: ("faith should persuade, not force"); controversy-filled life: five exiles, including seventeen years of flight and hiding, sometimes in houses in Alexandria or in desert among hermits, once in Rome

"G. L. Prestige declares that almost single-handedly Athanasius saved the Church from pagan intellectualism, that 'by his tenacity and vision in preaching one God and Savior, he had preserved from dissolution the unity and integrity of the Christian faith.'" (NIDCC, p. 81)

b. Political maneuvers of Arians

Arians first attacked Athanasius' allies of various crimes or heresies, especially

Sabellianism; many were ruined by campaign

influenced Constantine to bring Eusebius of Nicomedia back (he later baptized Constantine just before he died in 337)

c. Exile of Athanasius

brought charges against Athanasius in council at Tyre (Eusebius of Caesarea presided); accused him of murdering Arcinius, a Melitian bishop; difficult to disprove; his hand produced from Athanasius' residence; but Arcinius found later . . . alive; another charge—Athanasius withheld grain ships from Egypt

another council, Arian-controlled, in Constantinople (335); deposed Athanasius; he banished to Treves in Gaul in 336

d. Return and death of Arius

council at Jerusalem (335), influenced Constantine to let Arius return to Egypt after ten years of exile; 336, he died of cholera on way to reception service

Reign of Constantius

(337-361)

1. Sons of Constantine

Constantine divided empire among three sons:

Constantine II (21 years old)—West

Constans (19)—Italy

Constantius (17)—East

soldiers killed rest of family except two little cousins (Julian and Gallus)

2. Rise of Constantius

340, Constantine II killed fighting Constans

Constantius liked Arians, made Eusebius of Nicomedia bishop of Constantinople

Constans sympathized with Athanasius; 350, was killed by rival general, who committed suicide three years later

353, Constantius had whole empire; investigated, determined to make all empire Arian

3. Athanasius and Constantius

340's—empire divided: Arian in East, orthodox in West; Athanasius accepted in West; returned to Alexandria for a while when Constantine died; bishop Julius of Rome vindicated Athanasius; Athanasius there nine years all together

350's—empire united: Arian; Athanasius in trouble; bishop Liberius of Rome forced to sign Arian creed; likewise elderly Hosius of Cordova (ca. 100 years old), who then repudiated it and died

during this time “moderate” Arianism became supreme—*homoi-ousion* (“similar substance”)

“with an extra little *iota*, Christ's full deity was not safeguarded and the trinity was dissolved, making Christianity a new paganism”

Modern pagan, Edward Gibbon, sneered that Christians fought each other over a diphthong!

361, Constantius died; beginning of end for Arianism; Athanasius' tenacity and courage and writing paid off (along with that of other orthodox people)

Reign of Julian

(361-363)

1. Julian's background

young nephew of Constantine who survived; other relative Gallus became a governor; Constantius had him killed; hated uncle Constantius and Christianity; secretly studied neo-Platonism and paganism; became governor of Gaul, repulsed outside attacks; declared himself emperor

Constantius ill, died in 361; Julian had good military and administrative background

2. Julian's religion

recognized old gods of Rome; demythologized through allegorization—an “elevated paganism;” thus called “Julian the Apostate” by both pagans and Christians since this superstitious neo-platonist practiced the ethics of Christianity (golden rule) without the power of Christianity

3. Attitude toward Christianity

prove ridiculous: let all bishops return; but churches grew; allowed Athanasius to return to Alexandria; but when he started converting pagans, he exiled him again, tried twice to have him killed

Christians not permitted to teach classics; other restrictions, like heavy taxes on Christians

tried to rebuild temple to contradict Christ (Matt. 24); got Jews to help, but fiery eruptions from earth scared workers; project abandoned

became more oppressive, confiscated church properties

4. Julian's death (363)

tried to imitate Alexander the Great, conquer Persia; mortally wounded in night skirmish; said Christ had beaten him

soldiers retreated, chose new emperor, orthodox Jovian

Downfall of Arianism

(363-381)

1. Emperors between Julian and Theodosius

a. Jovian (363-364)

orthodox; elected by army; restored Athanasius; suffocated in tent from gases from stove

b. Valens (East, 364-378)

when Jovian died, empire split again between East and West; emperors appointed by Senate and the army—two brothers, Valentinian (West) and Valens (East)

in the West— Valentinian (364-375)

Gratian

Valentinian II

Valens tried to reinforce Arianism, exiled orthodox leaders, including Athanasius; by popular demand, Athanasius brought back

378, attack from north Rumania; Valens killed in Battle of Adrianople; the last Arian emperor

2. The trials and exiles of Athanasius

328-336, bishop of Alexandria

336, exiled by Constantine (grain ships)

339, brought back to Alexandria by Constantius (influence of brothers); council at Tyre (Arcinius); exiled to Rome

341, Constantius brought him back (influence of Constans); nine years in Alexandria

350, Constans killed

353, Constantius had whole empire; called council; new governor; Athanasius escaped to desert; lived with hermits four years

361, Constantius died; Jovian friendly; back in Alexandria

364, Valens exiled him a few months; returned; nine years of peace in Alexandria; died 373

thus, out of 46 years as bishop, spent 20 years in exile

during last days:

Apollinarius, bishop of Laodicea in Syria and friend of Athanasius, tried to write Christian classics; Apollinarius had theory on person of Christ based on trichotomy view of man's nature; Athanasius opposed the theory, but did not use name of Apollinarius

Greek term for "person" = *hupostasis*, but Latin *persona* = "masks"; not a very good choice for clarity

Athanasius died before complete victory of orthodoxy

voluminous writer; Syriac translation of many festal letters found

3. Other orthodox leaders

Other great church fathers arose to help defend orthodoxy and defeat Arianism.

a. Hilary of Poitiers (315-368)

born in good family in Poitiers, Gaul; converted when about 35 years old; studied Bible, convinced about the Trinity without reading Nicene creed; three years after conversion, elected bishop of Poitiers

leader of orthodox party in Gaul; condemned by several church councils; banished by Constantius several times; wrote *The Trinity* in twelve books

Cappadocian Fathers

b. Basil the Great (329-379)

one of the three "Cappadocian Fathers": Basil of Caesarea (in Cappadocia), his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and his close friend Gregory of Nazianzus

*The Cappadocians represented post-Nicene orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity. While critics asked, "How can one God be three persons?" The Cappadocians turned the question to, "How can three divine Persons be one God?"

Basil was born in Christian family in Caesarea in Cappadocia; studied classics, etc., in Athens, along with Julian (later to become emperor) and with Gregory (of Nazianzus); great success in studies; returned to Caesarea and taught

gave up teaching to be a Christian ascetic; visited monastic outposts throughout East; returned home, started a "community;" beginning of groups of ascetics

helped his orthodox bishop by writing against Arianism; elected bishop in 370; outstanding organizer; emperor Valens visited area, tried to enforce Arianism:

"When Emperor Valens visited the province eager to impose Arianism upon a defiant Catholic Church, he was outclassed by the eloquent, forceful arguments of a dignified Basil." (NIDCC, p. 110)

Valens left, threatening Basil; but Valens died in 378; Basil died in 379; only 50 years old, but health ruined by asceticism

c. Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389)

father was bishop of Nazianzus; studied with Basil in Caesarea, then in Athens; taught and helped father in Nazianzus; Basil used his influence to get him appointed bishop of Sasima (little town); but some resentment there, and Gregory never went there; retired to monastic life

called to speak in Constantinople when Valens died, to pastor small orthodox congregation; brilliant oratory drew great crowds, changed climate of city; elected bishop

381, council of Constantinople; disputed his election as bishop of Constantinople; he withdrew; successor Nectarius weak; emperor overshadowed bishop of Constantinople from then on; returned home, retired

wrote "*Defense of the Trinity*"

d. Gregory of Nyssa (330-395)

younger brother of Basil; overshadowed by Basil in practical affairs, but most intellectual and speculative of the three Cappadocian Fathers

Basil had him appointed bishop of Nyssa (Gregory reluctant, retiring scholar type); as time went on, his reputation increased, big influence in council of Constantinople (381)

wrote much, defended orthodoxy: against Appolinarianism, for deity of Christ, deity of Holy Spirit; among first to distinguish between *ousia* (“substance”) and *hypostasis* = *prosopon* (“subsistence,” “person”) when talking about persons of the Trinity [God is one substance, but three persons]
but somewhat over-influenced by Origen (allegorism, final universal salvation)

e. Elevation of Ambrose in Milan (339-397; elevated in 374)

son of Christian, praetorian prefect of Gaul; trained in law and administration; 370, appointed governor of province, with Milan as its biggest city; father advised him: “Go not as a ruler, but as a bishop”

374, bishop of Milan died; people could not decide on successor; Ambrose came to encourage them; popular outcry—”Ambrose is bishop!”; at this point, Ambrose only an unbaptized catechumen

after one month preparation, Ambrose baptized, ordained, consecrated; sold his goods, gave to poor; took office with all seriousness

outstanding preacher and teacher (used in conversion of Augustine); encouraged congregational singing vs. growing usurpation of choirs. (See his hymn in *Trinity Hymnal*, #339)

375, western emperor Valentinian died; Ambrose opposed efforts of his widow and two sons to make West Arian; Ambrose said he had a vision: two martyrs buried under a church—found bones; queen mother gave up efforts

390, emperor Theodosius massacred 7,000 men, women, children in Thessalonica (in retaliation for mob attacking and killing his governor and aides); Ambrose refused to serve Theodosius communion until public penance; Theodosius finally gave in
*Ambrose: “The emperor is within the church, not over it.”

4. Accession of Theodosius (ruled 379-395)

when Valens, emperor of East, died in 378, Gratian, emperor of West, appointed Spanish general Theodosius as emperor of East; Theodosius a successful general in Spain, Britain, Thrace; new policy: Goths join army; ruled East by 379

Christianity becomes the Official Religion of the empire in 380

intolerantly orthodox; baptized in 380; gave up pagan title of pontifex maximus (along with Gratian in West); 381, outlawed heretical (Arian) churches, gave their properties to orthodox leaders

381, called council of Constantinople
390, humbled by Ambrose

394, made his weak son Honorius emperor of West
395, died of physical exhaustion

First council of Constantinople (381)

—second general council

1. Calling of the council

by Theodosius, to impose orthodoxy; only two years to prepare realm (not enough time); Goths had won at Adrianople; only 150 bishops, all from East (no pope of Rome); but recognized by church because of results

2. End of Arianism

*refined Nicene creed (present form) to include and protect the deity of the Holy Spirit; overwhelmingly approved (Bettenson, p. 26)

3. Macedonianism condemned: said “HS made by Christ, and Christ by the Father”

Macedonius, a moderate semi-Arian, had been bishop of Constantinople, driven out by strong Arians; after 362, his followers called Macedonians

even Hilary, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus unclear about deity and place of Holy Spirit; Macedonius said Holy Spirit created by Son

gradually orthodox leaders rejected Macedonianism: Athanasius (early), Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose

note amplified phrase in Nicene Creed on Holy Spirit: “*proceeds from the Father, and is worshiped together with the Father and the Son*” (cf. Bettenson p. 25 with 26; comparison in Greek in Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom* 3:667-669)

4. Apollinarianism condemned

Apollinarius bishop of Laodicea in Syria; loved classics; when Julian outlawed Christians teaching classics, Apollinarius restyled parts of the Bible as poetry or as philosophical dialogues

defended *homo-ousian* doctrine; but in unorthodox manner:

Apollinarius a trichotomist (belief that people have distinct body, soul, and spirit; based on verses like I Thess. 5:23); said Jesus’ body and soul were human, but his spirit was divine; thus denied full humanity of Jesus (no human spirit)

Apollinarianism opposed on the one hand "...the Arian view of the mutability of the Logos, and [on the other hand] the complete union of the full human and divine natures.... In the incarnation, the Logos was taking the place of the rational human soul in Christ" (Baker *Dictionary of Theology*).

Athanasius had disproved this doctrine, without naming his friend Apollinarius; council condemned Apollinarianism

thus Trinitarian controversy ended, but now Christological controversy began

5. Gregory of Nazianzus and Nectarius

council denied Gregory's election as bishop of Constantinople, because he already bishop of Sasima (technical reason); Gregory withdrew his request (should have fought for the post—good administrator, force for orthodoxy, public demand)

council chose layman Nectarius—good administrator, but subservient to Theodosius

by this time Constantinople a very important bishopric:

Nicea council: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem

Constantinople council: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem

6. A glance at the next two councils (held in fifth century)

Nicea	325	
		(56 years)
Constantinople	381	
		(50 years)
Ephesus	431	
		(20 years)
Chalcedon	451	

The third council will address Nestorianism and Pelagianism

The fourth council will address Nestorianism and Eutychianism

Nestorianism—Nestorius bishop of Constantinople; accused of holding view that Christ has two persons; Ephesus council declared him fully God, fully man, one person

Eutychianism (Monophysitism)—Eutyches, monastery leader in Constantinople; view that Christ has one nature, a mixed nature; Chalcedon council declared him to have complete divine and complete human natures

both these councils led to big defections, with many members leaving the church; but they

preserved the true Christian doctrines

The conciliar movement was the first great movement seen in the fourth century. The second was the sending of Christian missionaries to the barbarian nations around the Roman empire. This was especially important since those barbarians were soon to conquer the empire and take over its institutions. This movement began in the fourth century with Ulfilas as its most famous missionary.

Ulfilas

(311-381)

grandparents from Cappadocia, captured by Goths; parents Christians; Ulfilas reared among Goths, north of Danube

came to Constantinople for ten years of schooling; learned Greek and Hebrew; Constantius there at that time, thus Ulfilas basically an Arian

It is estimated that only 15% of the empire was Christian in the year 315.

Ulfilas sparks the need for a vision to reach the barbarians.

341, returned to Goths as a missionary; later called "Bishop of the Goths;" Gothic Christians persecuted by pagan Goths; Ulfilas got permission to move Christian Goths to present Romania, within the empire

Ulfilas made a 24-letter Gothic alphabet, *translated the Bible into Gothic (left out Kings because people too warlike already); his translation used until ninth century, when Goths were assimilated into other tribes

under his leadership other missionaries were sent through Germany

although an Arian, he got along well with orthodox emperor Theodosius (379)

the conquering Arian Goths spared churches and clergy; but did not mix with orthodox Romans

newer barbarian tribes converted to orthodoxy, over-shadowed Arian Goths and were in charge during the Middle Ages

A third major movement that began in the fourth century was the monastic movement. This movement had important theological and historical implications, which are felt even today.

Beginnings of monasticism

Monasticism was practically non-existent before AD 300. It experienced great growth in the fourth century.

1. Causes of this development

a. Biblical examples

unbalanced admiration of examples of Jesus and Paul (single, no permanent property)

Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

b. Desire to escape sin in world

worldliness of Roman empire; wars; taxes; social oppression; slavery; moral pollution (common adultery, theaters, etc.)

Encroaching barbarian culture without order or skills prompted monasteries as oases for preserving civilized Roman culture

c. Church worldliness

reaction to worldliness, even among church leaders; cf. Gregory of Nazianzus (Schaff 3:127-128)

d. Personal escapism: desire to escape difficulties or responsibilities

a factor in some cases; many desire quietness, solitude; many desire victory over desires of the flesh

e. Admiration for earlier hermits

great prestige in church for hermits; replaced martyrdom as sacrifice for Christ; "asceticism" derives from ασκειν "to exercise or train" as an athlete

f. Conducive geography

Egyptian and Syrian deserts provided a good climate for the hermit life

2. Paul of Thebes (d. ca. 340)

traditionally, first Christian hermit; born in Egypt; fled to cave near Red Sea during Decian persecution (250); lived there in prayer and penitence about 100 years; tradition: Anthony visited him when Paul was 113 years old

3. St. Anthony (251-356)

born in Coma, middle Egypt, a Copt; intelligent, but too shy for school; barely could read or write; but memorized much Scripture

(Coptic Christianity still uses the Coptic alphabet. This alphabet is based on the Greek alphabet with the addition of seven letters to represent Egyptian guttural sounds. Coptic preserves the last form of the Egyptian language before Arabic prevailed with the onslaught of Islam in the VII.)

when his parents, who were wealthy Christians, died, he gave away all their possessions (Mt. 6:34; 19:21), put sister in convent; fled to wilderness (Greek *anachoreo* = “flee,” thus “anchorite”)

kept moving farther into wilderness; much fasting, never washed; tried to overcome evil thoughts

people came to him for advice, etc.; Athanasius met him while in exile, wrote his biography (*Life of Anthony*), claimed many miracles; this book widely circulated and translated; great impetus to movement (even women became hermits)

Anthony created colonies of hermit cells (*monasteria*, “alone places,” from *monas*, “alone”)

4. Influence of Athanasius and Basil

Athanasius popularized St. Anthony, especially in Europe during his several exiles; Basil had ascetics stay in his house, organized large monastic communities (*koinobios*, “living in community;” thus “cenobites”)

5. Pachomius (287-346)

pagan soldier under Constantine; converted through kindness of Christians when he was captured; became a hermit in his homeland of Egypt

organized hermits into communities along Nile—several for men, two for women; manual labor in these communities had a two-fold benefit: 1) helped discipline the thought-life (“idle hands are...”) and 2) made the communes self-supporting through agriculture, thus more people possible; regimen for Scripture memorization, eucharist, etc.

several thousand hermits in Egypt by end of fourth century; led way for Basil’s work in Cappadocia

6. Jerome

the strongest promoter of monasticism (see below)

The fourth great movement in the fourth century was the victory of Christianity over paganism, and its becoming the prevailing religion of the Roman empire. Of course, the price for this was its loss of much of its spiritual center and character.

Downfall of paganism

“paganism” = “peasantism;” before 400, most Christians were Roman and urban while most farmers were pagan

390, much paganism; 400, almost no paganism; tremendous trend

from Augustus on, emperor had pagan title Pontifex Maximus (“chief bridge builder”); coins had had pagan signs

under Valentinian in West (364-375) name *paganism* given to old Roman religion, now mostly practiced in the countryside, away from Rome and the big cities; word from *pagus* (“village”); also in Gaul, *heathens* (from German *heath*, “village”); Valentinian persecuted pagan magicians and soothsayers, but generally favored toleration

Gratian in the West (375-383) laid aside pagan title Pontifex Maximus, stopped state support of Rome’s pagan system; thus its death unavoidable; removed victory statue (Victoria) from senate building in Rome; all this under the influence of Ambrose; the title Pontifex Maximus was unclaimed until pope Boniface III accepted it for himself in 607

Theodosius in East (378-392) and then over the united empire (392-395); after council of Constantinople (381) made Christianity official state religion; rigid laws against heretics and schismatics; outlawed all observance of pagan religion, public (391) or private (392); when he entered Rome in 392, six hundred most distinguished patrician families in Rome were “converted” to Christian religion (*note: practitioners of paganism not willing to suffer persecution as Christians had been)

took longer to convert rural areas (cf. names “paganism,” “heathenism”)

John Chrysostom

(ca. 347-407)

1. Background

born of wealthy Christian parents in Antioch; taught by famous Libanius in literature; his best scholar: when Libanius asked at his death (395) who his successor should be, he said, “John, if only the Christians had not carried him away;” but John felt rhetoric not enough

2. His hermitage

received three years instruction, then baptized; began as reader in the church; when mother died, went to monastery in Syrian desert for six years; great study of Bible; mortifications undermined health; returned to Antioch in 380

3. His preaching as Bishop of Antioch

for next 17 years, preached; became deacon, then presbyter; wildly applauded for eloquence and piety; combined classical oratory with Oriental homilies; careful preparation by Bible study, prayer, meditation; preached long sections, through books; followed hermeneutics of *“Antiochan school”—literal, grammatical

many sermons survive: Genesis, Psalms, Matthew, John, Acts, all Paul’s epistles, Hebrews, other sections

from ca. A.D. 600, called *Chrysostomos*, “Golden-mouthed”; most well-known sermons: “On the Statues”—21 homilies (387) when mob broke into Antioch city hall and broke statues of emperor Theodosius and dead wife and two sons; Theodosius severely punished city leaders, determined to destroy city; bishop Flavian interceded; John’s sermons calmed and saved the city

4. John as bishop

when Nectarius died in 397, John chosen as patriarch of Constantinople; Theodosius had died in 395; kingdom thereafter divided (West, Honorius; East, Arcadius); for four years, preached with success in Constantinople; criticized vices in court (e.g., empress Eudoxia, wife of Arcadius); jealous patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria opposed him; Theophilus banished all monks from Egypt who admired Origen; Chrysostom received some in 401 (did not agree with their theology, an act of charity); Theophilus came to Antioch, stirred up Eudoxia against Chrysostom

5. His exile and death

secret council (led by Eudoxia and supported by Theophilus) held against him in 403; deposed and banished on false charges; then earthquake, popular demand for him; brought back in three days. John said the quake shook hardest in the empress’ bedroom!

Eudoxia sponsored silver statue of herself and theater performances in the public square in front of what is now Church of St. Sophia; John preached against her (Mk. 6:17ff), “Again Herodia rages, again she raves, again she dances, and again she demands the head of John upon a charger” (Schaff 3:704)

exiled again to Armenia, but still could communicate; 407 (now 60 years old), exiled farther away, to Black Sea; must travel through remote desert; two soldiers forced him to march, no covering for his head; he died on the way

Church of Rome broke communication with East until Theodosius II brought back John’s bones

25 years later

after Augustine, Chrysostom the most quoted father, especially by the Reformers

Jerome

(ca. 340-420)

famous on two counts: 1) scholar, 2) promoter of monasticism

1. Early life

name Hieronymus; born in northeast Italy; Christian family, upper middle class; educated in Rome in classics, language, rhetoric and law; gathered big library; on Sundays, visited catacombs, translated inscriptions; 19 years old, baptized; became an ascetic; traveled in Gaul visiting monastery in Treves; companion of Rufinus

2. In the Syrian desert

ca. 30 years old, fled Rome for the East; stopped in Antioch to hear young Apollinarius preach; visited anchorites in desert

settled in desert for about ten years; endured difficult sensual temptations (dreams of Roman banquets, dances of women); took up study of Hebrew to discipline himself; became strong propagandist for monasticism (Schaff 3:209)

famous dream: standing before judgment of Christ; “You are not a Christian, but a Ciceronian”; severely beaten, scourged; angels intercede; dream concluded with solemn vow never to take worldly books into his hands again

referred to this dream when writing against study of classics (Schaff 3:207); but inconsistent in practice—many classical references in his works, had his monks copy Cicero, and explained Virgil when he lived in Bethlehem; said (in answer to Rufinus) that he could not help remembering the classics, and that dream vows do not count

ca. 380, went to Antioch, where ordained a presbyter, but took no church; went to Constantinople; heard anti-Arian sermons of Gregory of Nazianzus; translated Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* and some commentaries of Origen

got involved in Meletian schism; went to Rome with Epiphanius (anti-Origen)

3. In Rome

became assistant and secretary to bishop Damasus; commissioned by Damasus to *revise the Old Latin Bible; started with LXX (Septuagint), but abandoned it, wanted to use the Hebrew, but needed more study; while in Rome, only revised Psalms, according to the LXX

spent much time promoting monasticism among former Roman nobility; especially successful with ladies—prominent widows (e.g., Paula) and many virgins

Jerome chastised Roman clergy; was in return blasted, accused (falsely) of scandal with his women followers; pope Damasus died in 384; Jerome moved to Palestine, leaving “Nebuchadnezzar in Rome for Jesus in Jerusalem”

4. Jerome in Bethlehem (385-420)

Paula and two daughters met him in Palestine; they supported him; for one to two years Jerome traveled around Palestine, visited Alexandria; translated Eusebius’ *Onomasticon*; settled down in Bethlehem; founded a monastery for men, three for women (under Paula); visited a rabbi at night to learn more Hebrew, was suspected for this

spent rest of life in Bethlehem; mostly studied: translation and commentaries and letters (150 survive); involved in many controversies; bitter and antagonistic disposition

5. The Vulgate

soon saw need, not for revision of Old Latin, but whole new translation

not classical Latin (as Cicero), but common speech (hence *Vulgate*, “vulgar” language of the people); translation took 40 years; revised Psalms again, using Origen’s *Hexapla* in Caesarea; parts of poetical books remain this way in the Vulgate; for most of OT, abandoned LXX, started from Hebrew (but with caution)

first: Kings; preface lists canon, *rejects Apocrypha; Judith and Tobit included by public demand—translated in only one day

Augustine opposed Hebrew, favored LXX as base; Vulgate generally accepted, became “Textus Receptus” of Roman Catholic Church (even though no longer “vulgar;” cf. WCF I.8); other apocryphal books translated by others; one problem in this translation—*metanoeo* translated by “do penance” instead of “repent,” led to abuses later

6. Jerome’s commentaries

sometime allegorical, but not often; generally very good; e.g., bishop = elder; based on languages and knowledge of geography; most learned commentator in ancient times; his commentary on Daniel recently translated into English

7. The Origenistic controversy

parties in controversy:

Epiphanius of Egypt (and monk Pachomius) rabidly against Origen

“Tall Brethren”—Egyptian monks who closely followed Origen

most people admired and used Origen, realized his weaknesses

Epiphanius led campaign to get Origen’s bones desecrated; came to Palestine and converted Jerome to cause; Jerome’s friend Rufinus favored Origen, translated his works into Latin (accommodated); violent arguments; finally, Origen condemned by several councils, declared a heretic (Schaff makes this controversy the end of theological development of the Eastern church)

8. Monastic controversies

by end of fourth century, church in general accepted the superiority of celibacy, the perpetual virginity of Mary (as a corollary), the superiority of asceticism in general (fasting, etc.), and the veneration of martyrs and their relics

four men (considered heretics later by the Roman Catholic Church) stood against these doctrines and practices, more or less consistently:

Jovinian—a monk himself; supported marriage as being as good as celibacy (Heb. 13:4); and eating as good as fasting (I Tim. 6:17; 4:3; Ecclesiastes)

Helvidius—defended the idea that Mary had more children after Jesus (Mt. 1:18, 24-25; 13:55,56 = “brothers and sisters”)

Vigilantius—opposed all night vigils (tended to immorality) and veneration of relics; “superstition and idolatry” (Col. 2:23)

Aerius—an ascetic himself, but opposed laws requiring fasting at certain times (against Christian freedom), and prayers for the dead (Heb. 9:27); persecuted by hierarchy; lived in fields and caves

Jerome himself wrote scathing replies to the first three of these men; upheld all the contested points

The church of Rome in the fourth century

by this time, office of pope highly sought (riches and luxury); no outstanding popes before 440 (Leo)

examples of some popes

1. Marcellinus (296-304)

accused of denying faith during Diocletian's persecution; chair then vacant three years (cf. Roman Catholic Encyclopedia 9:638)

2. Sylvester (314-335)

given Lateran Palace by Constantine, when he moved to Constantinople (ca. 330)

3. Liberius (352-366)

orthodox, driven into exile, replaced by Arian pope Felix, signed an Arian statement ("through weakness"); returned to chair and replaced Felix

4. Damasus (366-384)

had supported Felix; anti-pope Ursinus had supported Liberius; hotly contested election; repeated bloody encounters (once 137 men killed in a church); Damasus finally got aid of emperor Valentinian I; opposition squashed; best remembered for commission to Jerome to revise Old Latin Bible