

CHURCH HISTORY

Lesson 4 313 A.D. - 476 A.D.

Last week we saw that from approximately 250 A.D. to 305 A.D. the persecution of Christians and the Church reached its most horrible. With the earlier vision of Constantine and his becoming Emperor in 313 A.D. the persecution ended and the Roman Government legally recognized Christianity.

And so we saw that what spurred the growth of the early church was the faith of the early church and the persecution it endured. We also saw that since men and women would be giving their lives it was critical to each of them to have solid evidence that their faith was rooted in truth, thus the importance of the canon of scripture. Through 313 A.D. the official canon circulated by the leading bishops contained the Old Testament, as we know it today, and twenty-two of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. It will not be until later that the canon of the Bible is complete - we'll look at that this week.

We also saw that Apologists were those who defended the Church and its doctrine to non-believers, particularly world and community leaders, and who often suffered death as a result. And we saw that Polemicists were those who took on the heretics inside the Church, keeping scripture pure and Church doctrine sound - these too would often suffer persecution and death.



Our studies will now take us into the period of Church history where the Holy Roman Catholic Church came into being. I want to assure all of you at the outset that our study will look at the history of the Catholic Church and its doctrines – some of which appear to differ from other Christian faiths, but I will not, and do not, see this study as an opportunity to be critical of any Christian faith, Catholic or otherwise.

Before we look at the beginning of the Catholic Church we need to again remind ourselves of the historical context and environment that existed at the time. For example, the order of Bishop, Elder/Presbyter, Deacon as an organized way of leading the Church existed prior, the canon of the Bible was all but complete prior, and meeting in “Church” buildings -- Basilica type structures was already occurring. The culture of the day – idol worship and its love of philosophy -- Socrates, Aristotle, Pythagorean, its language – Latin, its music -- chants for example, and its world view were all impacting the Church prior to the beginning of the Catholic Church.

For this week then lets consider the dates below and some of the early activities that would not only affect the Catholic Church up through today, but also the world wide Christian movement.

1. See what you can find out about the following dates and why they might be important in Church history:
 - a. 324 A.D.
 - b. 325 A.D.
 - c. 331 A.D.
 - d. 340 A.D.

- e. 381 A.D.
 - f. 451 A.D.
 - g. 589 A.D.
2. What does a “Basilica” look like?
 3. What was the city of Constantinople -- and why was it so important?
 4. What does the word “ecumenical” mean?
 5. What does the word “orthodox” mean?
 6. What was Arianism?
 7. What is the Nicene Creed?
 8. What would these five cities all have in common by the end of the fourth century?
 - a. Rome
 - b. Constantinople
 - c. Antioch
 - d. Jerusalem
 - e. Alexandria
 9. In the fourth century what would have been the difference between the Bishops who were given these titles?
 - a. Pope
 - b. Patriarch
 - c. Archbishop
 - d. Metropolitan
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We are now beginning a period in our study where more of your understanding of church history will come in handy as we look at the roots of our faith and the development of doctrine and theology that are with us yet today. We'll see in the days ahead how we came to celebrate certain Church holidays and holy days, the Church ordinances, structure, administration and the development of systematic theology and orthodoxy.

We'll also begin to see the rapid explosion of growth of the Church and the dramatic turn in less than one hundred years from persecution to elevation as the Christian faith and the Holy Roman Catholic Church become the only recognized faith of the Roman Empire by the end of the fourth century.

Thanks to each of you once more for your continued commitment to this study. May God richly bless you this week as you continue to study with us.

In Christ,

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