

History of the Catholic Church

Chapter 3: Conversions (Part I)

Overview

- **Councils:** There are a total of 8 ecumenical councils during this time – 40% (21 total).
- **Key:** They will determine what terms and language Church use to describe Jesus.
- **Doctors:** This period also produces 13 doctors of the Church (bishop theologians)

Constantine

- **Constantius:** Dies in Britain. Maxentius should rule in his place. Army declares Constantine (son of Constantius) emperor. Praetorian guard declares Maxentius emperor. The Western Empire has two men with large troops for emperor (83).
- **Constantine:** Marches on Rome; in Gaul, Constantine and soldiers see a cross mysteriously appear in the sky with a phrase, “In this sign, you will conquer.”
- **Chi-Rho:** Orders first two letters Greek word Christ on the shields of his soldiers.
- **Milvian Bridge:** Engage in Battle; Wooden bridge collapses and Maxentius drowns
- **Sole Emperor:** Constantine gives Lateran Palace to pope (St. John Lateran). He embraces the Faith, receives instruction, receives baptism on deathbed (AD 337).
- **Caesaro-papism:** Emperor reigned supreme in the temporal and spiritual realms.
- **Note:** Crucifixion outlawed, gladiatorial games suspended, temple prostitution was ended, and chastity laws were enacted. *Pater familias* was outlawed (86).
- **Edict of Milan (313):** Gives Christians free and unrestricted opportunity to worship
- **Battle of Adrianople:** Constantine defeats Licinius in 324, becomes sole emperor
- **Constantinople:** Builds new city as capital of the Empire; “New Rome” in 330.

Donatism

- **Rigorists:** *Lapsi* should not be readmitted; clergy *lapsi* not validly celebrate sacraments
- **Carthage:** Ordination of bishop by a lapsi; Donatus elected bishop (now two bishops)
- **Constantine:** Calls council at Arles who condemned and excommunicated Donatists

Heresy & Arianism

- **Key:** The Church no longer attacked from outside, but by heresy for 150 years.
- **Heresy:** False teaching that destroys communion and threatens security of social order
- **Arius:** Priest in Alexandria; dynamic personality, popular teacher, master propagandist
- **Arianism:** Denies the divinity of Christ. There was a time when the Son was not. He was brought into existence by the Father. He is the most perfect creature of the Father. The Spirit was also created and was the second most perfect creature (92).
- **Note:** Arius’ teachings spread because: 1). Empire at peace, 2). Nobility, army, and parts of episcopacy embraced the heresy, while general population remained orthodox (930).
- **Key:** If Arianism succeeded, whole nature of Faith changed and fail; council was needed
- **Lasting:** Arianism affected the Church for about 50 years – Arius to Athanasius.
- **Council:** Constantine calls a council in Nicaea to unite the Empire and the Church

Council of Nicaea

- **Constantine:** Invited all the bishops in the Empire to Nicaea to discuss Arianism
- **Key:** Nicaea (325) is the first time in the Church all the bishops convened to discuss
- **Note:** 318 bishops were present and Constantine himself was there; one attendee noted, "The council looked like an assembled army of martyrs." (94)
- **Irony:** Only 20 years earlier the emperor had tried to destroy the Church!
- **Condemn:** Council Fathers condemn Arius' teaching and use the Greek word *homoousios* or Latin consubstantial (of the same substance) to describe that the *Logos* (the Word of God, the Son) is the same nature as the Father but not the same Person.
- **Nicene Creed:** Bishops drafted a creed and 316 voted in favor; only 2 did not (exiled)
- **Easter:** Church celebrate first Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox (96)
- **Caesaro-papism:** Constantine restored Arius after the heretical priest made an ambiguous profession of faith. Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria refused the order (102).

Athanasius

- **Athanasius:** Deacon at Nicaea and began as Bishop of Alexandria in 328 (for 45 years)
- **Orthodoxy:** Because of his staunch defense of the Faith, Athanasius was exiled 5 times from his see for a total of 20 years. He spent exile in Gaul, Holy Land, and Rome.
- **Accused:** Athanasius was accused of killing bishop Arsenious and cutting off his hand.
- **Arians:** They rushed toward Athanasius, screaming, spitting, possessed by the devil.
- **Key:** Most of the laity and monks faithful, Athanasius almost alone remained orthodox

Constantine and Christians

- **Constantine:** Decided to receive baptism in sixties; confession and baptized by Arian
- **Christians:** Grew from 9 million (15%) in 312 to 30% at Constantine death in 337.
- **Family:** Constantine's siblings/nephews were killed, except for nephew Julian (105).
- **Sons:** Roman Empire divided among three sons; Constantius II become sole ruler
- **Constantius II:** Called council in Milan to condemn Athanasius and word *homoousios*
- **Note:** Begins persecuting bishops who refused, and even tortures and exiles orthodox
- **Crisis:** The Arian crisis plagued the Church, spreading like a cancer such that Jerome famously said, "The whole world groaned, to its astonishment, it discovered that it was Arian...the little ship of the apostles was in peril." Arian struggle – three centuries (108).

The Apostate Emperor

- **Julian:** Lost father and half-brother by Christian members of the imperial household. He grew fond of pagan authors and at age 20, embraced paganism with enthusiasm (108).
- **Emperor:** Begins reign at age 30 (361-363) and singular focus of persecution the Church.
- **Baptism:** Tried to nullify his baptism by bathing in bull's blood. Grew a long beard (109).
- **Temples:** Julian ordered the rebuilding of dismantled pagan temples and public sacrifice
- **Key:** Attempted to organize paganism like the Church with structure, and charitable works; and second, marginalized Catholics from Roman society (governors, law, schools); finally, he tried to rebuild the Jewish Temple, earthquake and fire prevented
- **Battle:** Killed in battle saying, "You have won, O Galilean," as his final words (111).