



The Roman Catholic Church

A Brief History

Pax Romana

- “Cradle of Christianity”
 - Common Language - Greek and Latin
 - Infrastructure for transportation and trade
 - Military Stability
- The Church thrived for 30 years under the protective umbrella of Judaism
 - Rome allowed for “lawful religion” (religio licita)
- The Church grew at a rate of 40% each decade
 - A.D. 40 - 1000 (<1% of total population of Roman Empire)
 - A.D. 350 - 34 Million (over 50% of the population)

Emperor Julian 332-363

“Atheism has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”

Persecution

- Accused of Cannibalism because of the Eucharist
- Incest (“brothers” and “sisters” greeting with holy kiss)
- Atheism (only worshiped Jesus and not the civic gods) – Christians were called “enemies of humanity”
- A.D. 64 and the Great Fire of Rome. Nero blamed the Christians.
- Large numbers of Christians suffered under the maniac, Nero
- Decius (A.D. 250) and Valarian (A.D. 257-258) – Required sacrifice to state gods and forbade Christians to gather for worship
- Diocletian and Galerius (A.D. 303-313) sought to destroy Christianity. This was referred to as the Great Persecution

The Age of Constantine

- Constantine Converted to Christianity in A.D.312.
 - Wanted to seek divine help in battle, but which god?
 - Had a vision of a shining Chi Rho
 - He had a cross (Chi Rho) of gold and precious stones made and had it carried at the front of his armies into battle
 - He was victorious in battle and attributed that victory to his conversion
- Edict of Milan in A.D.313
 - Ended persecution by the state
 - Allowed for religious freedom

The Rise of Christianity

- Constantine believed that Church and State should be as close as possible.
- He provided Christianizing legislations (observance of Sunday worship, confiscation of temple treasures, and exemption of clergy from taxes).
- He was called in by the clergy of the church to rule on matters of faith – Donatist Heresy
- He presided over the Council of Nicea which was called to deal with the Arian Heresy
- Theodosius became Emperor and eventually established Christianity as the official state religion (A.D. 380)

The Rise of Christianity

- Many Christians believed the millennial kingdom had arrived.
- Moved from 6 million to 34 million Christians in 37 years (Between A.D. 300 and 337)
- Attention could now be turned to developing Theology

Results of the Edict of Milan

- Clergy exempt from public obligations: taxes, military service, manual labor. *Some entered the ministry to avoid paying taxes*
- Christians “reimbursed” from imperial treasury for previous persecutions.
- Church received grants of money and soon became wealthy with extensive land holdings. *By the Middle Ages, the Church owned as much as 40% of all land in Christian Europe.*
- Clergy received fixed income from the state. *Often, rather than freeing clergy to focus on their office, it led to an appetite for luxury and virtually stopped the exercise of free giving among the people.*

Results of the Edict of Milan

- Christianity became a matter of fashion and hypocrisy increased. If you weren't a Christian, you could not get ahead.
- Many undesirables entered the ministry to take advantage of state funding.
- Syncretistic worship. Little to distinguish genuine the Christian from the cultural Christian
- In matters of Church:
 - Confusion over who had the final say in theological disputes
 - Difficulty in maintaining her prophetic witness in culture
 - Temptations to use the military might of state to enforce personal agendas

“ The difference between the age after Constantine and the age before consists, therefore, not at all in the cessation of true Christianity and the entrance of false, but in the preponderance of the one over the other. The field of the church was now much larger, but with much good soil it included far more that was stony, barren, and overgrown with weeds. The line between church and world, between regenerate and unregenerate, between those who were Christians in name and those who were Christians in heart, was more or less obliterated, and in place of the former hostility between the two parties there came a fusion of them in the same outward communion of baptism and confession.”

- Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol 3

The Origin of the Papacy

- Bishop/overseer (episkopos) and elder (presbuteros) are used synonymously in the NT (Acts 20:17 & 28; Titus 1:5 & 7; I Timothy 3:1 and 5:17)
- Paul established these pastoral leaders to care for the spiritual needs of the body in each place where a church was planted

The Origin of the Papacy

- Four men influenced a move to a “monarchial” bishop.
 - **Ignatius** (d. A.D. 108) made a distinction between the elder and bishop and gave more authority to the office of bishop. He did **not** affirm however that the bishop was in direct succession from the apostles.
 - **Clement of Rome** (d. A.D. 100) does not distinguish between elder and overseer, but affirms the doctrine of apostolic succession and claims their authority is from the apostles.
 - **Irenaeus** (d. A.D. 200) increased the power of the monarchial bishop by merging Ignatius’ and Clement’s ideas.
 - **Cyprian** (d. A.D.) said “The bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop and if anyone is not with the bishop he is not with the Church.”

Reasons for Centralized Authority

- The threat of the Montanists and their commitment to prophetic utterances
- Natural tendency for one person to rise as the primary leader.
- A desire for a tangible outward expression of connection between the people and God
- The uneasiness and insecurity that developed after the death of the first apostles.
- A need to centralize the church's authority and instruction in view of the rapid growth after 313
- Wide spread heresy called for a single voice from within the church to uphold the truth.

The Birth of the Papacy

- A single authoritative voice had evolved in the Church leadership structure.
 - Threatened by “prophetic utterances” and extreme behavior
 - Rapid growth lead to the need to centralize authority
 - In the face of persecution, the church needed examples to follow
 - Rise of heresies called for a singular voice to rise from the Church
- While Cyprian and others supported the idea of a monarchical bishop, they refused to acknowledge any one bishop over all other bishops
- Rome was given honorary status as “first among equals”
 - Population
 - Wealth / Giving

The Birth of the Papacy

- The universal authority of the Roman papacy was not claimed officially until mid 5th century.
- Leo I preaches a message from Matthew 16:17-19
 - Peter is the bedrock of the Church
 - Peter's apostolic authority lives on in the Roman Bishop
- Leo I faces Attila the Hun – He saves Rome from destruction.
- Leo I faces Gaiseric, the Vandal King, at the gates of Rome – He “saves” Rome from destruction.