



Church History, Highlights of The First Five Centuries

The following facts are designed to underline the ever present hand of God in history in the accomplishing of His will on earth. God's sovereignty is seen in many wonderful ways of revelation, inspiration, preservation, etc. This categorical and chronological view of the centuries will express in brief this great supreme concept.

0-100 AD

The Roman Empire dominating the then known world. This is the 4th Great Gentile Power of the book of Daniel.

The Birth of Christ in 4 BC, the entrance of the Messiah on the scene as the Savior of the world. His Crucifixion and Ascension 32 AD.

The Birth of the Church 32 AD and Apostolic Age.

The evangelization of the then known world by the apostles and the writing of Scripture.

The entire revelation of God given with the writing of the Book of Revelation. 96 AD

Localized persecution, mainly from the Jewish leaders, but going to an empire basis by the time of Nero in 64-68 AD.

One of the main heresies in the Church was Gnosticism.

Papyrus rolls were the materials for manuscripts up through the first century.

100-200 AD

The First Organized Persecution of the Church: 112 AD under the influence of Pliny the Younger of Bithynia.

Persecutions were not to be a big part in the life of the Christians in the second century.

One of the characteristics of the second century were the Writings polemical and apologetical of the Church Fathers. The Apologists sought to show Christianity in its supremacy to the other religions by the comparison method in part; while the polemicists sought to refute directly the heresies charged against the Christians.

The second century became the temporal sphere of the two schools of thought which were going to influence the doctrine and policy of the church. These were the Eastern school, the Alexandrian school in Alexandria, and the Western school, the Carthaginian school in Carthage.

The second century, had its heresies also Gnosticism left over from the first century, the Ebionite heresy, about 132-135 and longer; Montanism by Montanism, 135-160 AD.

Probably one of the most singularly important things in the second century is the establishment of the Canon of Scripture. The first canon, the Canon of Marcion, of 140 AD and the second canon, the Muratorian Canon of 170 AD. Actually, Textual Criticism had its birth in this century. The gathering of all the Scriptures was complete by 175 AD and the compilation by 180 AD.

Another major factor was the great amount of literary work done. This was mentioned under the Polemical and Apologetical writings but included many more literary facets than just these general



expressions.

The second century provided one of the leaders in the soon to be developed Episcopate. This was Ignatius in Syria: 107-115 AD.

Papyrus Codices (books) were used in second through fourth centuries.

200-300 AD

In the third century the development of the Episcopacy is going to be a big factor. We find two more important men arising in key locations of power to bring by word and pen a greater development in the power structure of the church. Ireneus in Gaul, 202: and Cyprian in North Africa in 258-AD.

In the third century the persecution of the Church reached the Emperor's level with two major Emperor-directed persecutions. The first by Decius in 250 AD and the second by Diocletian began in 285 AD and climaxing with the Edict of 303 AD, moving into the next century.

The third century had its heresies: Manicheanism, Monarchianism, and also the Easter controversy. Some were philosophical, theological and Christological.

The third century provided the First Christian Systematic Theology written by Origen, a pupil of Clement who was a Christian philosopher in the Eastern Alexandrian school.

The real founder of Textual Criticism, Origen, mentioned above, got the ball rolling on Textual Criticism with his "Hexaple" where he had several Hebrew and Greek versions of the Scriptures arranged in parallel columns. This was designed to produce an accurate Original text of theological thought.

Literature was also a big factor in the third century and much of it coming from the leaders of the two schools of theological thought.

By this time, the Roman Empire was divided into three sections with Antioch being the capital city of the Syrian section: Alexandria, the capital city of Egypt; and Rome the capital of central and lower Italy, and indefinite boundaries. This is going to effect the development of the Episcopacy coming up in the fourth century.

Monasticism began also in the east founded by Anthony: 250-356 AD.

Gospels were divided into long and short sections.

300-400 AD

This fourth century could be called a century of Climactic Action.

The fourth century begins a new chapter of Church History with the Supremacy of the Old Catholic Imperial Church.

The century started off with the persecution of Diocletian in 303 AD who in his edict ordered the cessation of meetings, of Christians, ordered the destructions of the churches, and the deposing of the officials of the churches; resulting in the imprisonment of Christians and the destructions of the Scriptures by fire.

The second great thing was the easing of tension by the next Emperor Galerius in 311 AD who gave toleration to the Christians to worship, as long as they were peace abiding.

The next major factor was the Edict of Milan made by Constantine who brought freedom of worship to



all religions including Christianity in the Empire.

The Church began to be involved directly and openly in two major ways: The first being the development of the Episcopate; and the second, the holding of the Councils to decide issues.

The Development of the Episcopate is seen in the development of the rank system of the bishops during the fourth century. There were basic levels of bishops (pastors). The lowest, the country bishop; the second, the city bishop; next, the bishop of the capital city of the province; the bishop of the apostolic mother church; and lastly the bishops of the three capital cities which were both political capitals as well as apostolic mother churches. These were Antioch, Alexandria and Rome.

Another factor looming in the fourth century was the church “councils” the chronological listing of the Councils of the 4th century and their issues: Council of Nicea in 325 AD - settled the issue on relationship of Christ as the Son to the Father. Council of Laodicea in 363 AD - decreed that only canonical books should be used in the churches. Council of Constantinople in 381 AD - reaffirmed the Council of Nicea’s decision and clarified the Holy Spirit relation, asserted humanity of Christ. Council of Carthage in 397 AD - decreed the 27 books of the present New Testament to be canonical.

The 4th century was a century of evangelistic and missionary endeavors:

Ulfilas missionary to the Goths: 311-381 AD.

Martin of Tours: missionary to the Burgundians, 311-396 AD. Missions had produced the British Celtic Church by the Council of Arles in 314 AD.

In the 4th century there was a great buildup and expression of Church - State relations. The influence of the church on the state was seen in the cessation of the gladiatorial shows, the dignity of woman increased, the slaves received better treatment, Roman legislation was more just and missionary work was speeded up. The effect of the state on the church was seen in the interference in the life of the church by men such as Constantine who as Emperor restored church property, subsidized the church financially, exempted the clergy from public office, banned soothsaying, and set aside Sunday for the Empire as a day of rest, and intervened at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. Julian set the Church back. Theodicius made Christianity the exclusive religion of the Empire in 380 AD and in 395 AD, Christianity was recognized as the official and only religion of the Roman State. Justinian closed the school of Philosophy in Athens, and this was the final stroke at Paganism.

Jerome wrote the Latin Vulgate, a Latin translation of the Bible, 382 AD.

Eusebius founded Church history with an Ecclesiastical history, the survey of the church, 324 AD and a universal history from the time of Abraham to 323 AD.

Monasticism which began with Anthony in the third century continued with Pachomius organizing the first monastery about 320 AD at Tabinnisi (Sometimes spelled Tabinna).

After 313 AD, pilgrimages became a part of worship. Christmas was officially accepted and cleansed of pagan significance by 350 AD.

The fourth century provided two more canonical book lists the African list of 360 AD and the Athanasius list of 367 AD.

After 313 AD, the Christians met in buildings built on the style of the Roman Basilica, an oblong building.

Visigoths defeat the eastern part of the Roman Empire in 378 AD at Battle of Adrianople.



Century of the writing of Siniatic and Vatican manuscripts, possibly Washinton manuscript also.

Vellum and parchment used as material for printing - fourth through eighth centuries.

In 381 AD, The Council of Constantinople gave primacy to Bishop of Rome, placing him in primacy.

400-500 AD

Visigoths sack Rome in 410 AD.

Visigoths founded the kingdom of Spain in 426 AD,

Lombards, Burgundians, and Franks crossed the Rhine and settled in modern France, in fifth century.

By 458 AD, the Epistles of Paul were divided into sections for public reading.

The fifth century is the time of the writing of the Alexandrian and the Ephraem Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

Missionary during this time - Patrick to the Celts of Ireland, 432-461 AD.

Church Council continued to meet. Council of Hippo verified the same decree of the Council of Carthage accepting the 27 present books of the New Testament as Canonical, 419 AD. Council of Ephesus unity of Christ's personality, refuted Pelagianism, 451 AD. Council of Chalcedon decided on the Monophysite controversy.

The Emperor Valentinian III in 445 AD recognized the primacy of the Roman bishop in spiritual matters.

One of the predominant factors of the fifth century was the fall in 476 AD of Rome. By 500 AD the Roman empire in the west no longer existed. There are many reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire.