



# EARLY CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE

## UNIT – I

# BIRTH & SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

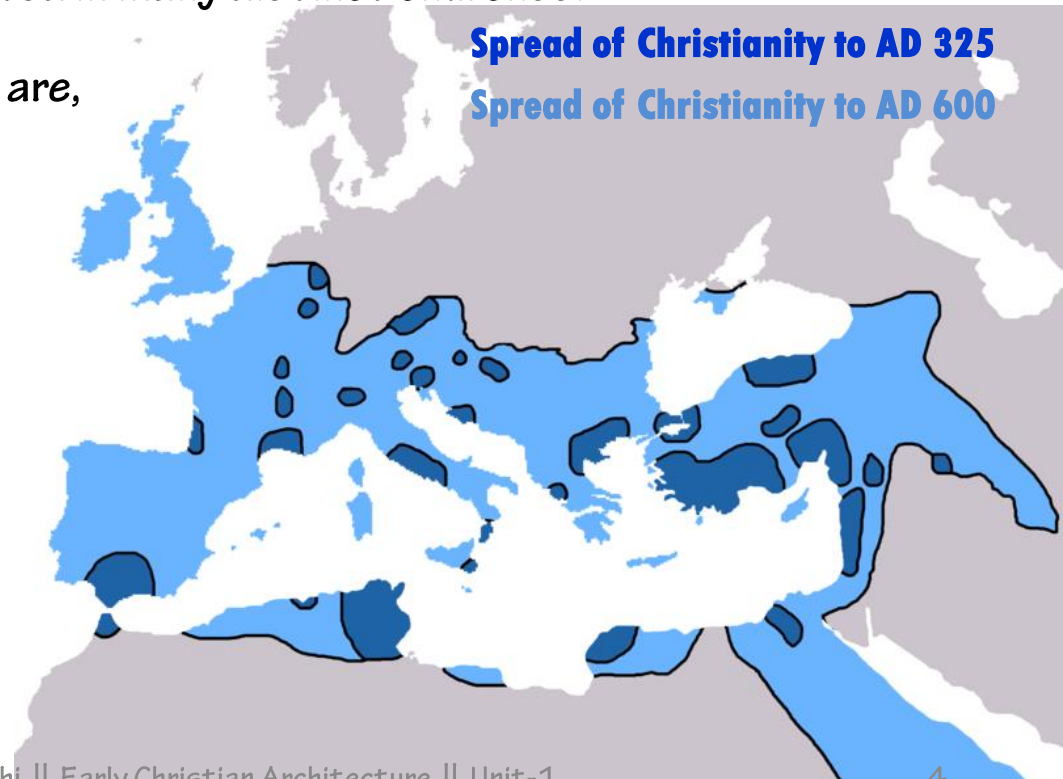
1. When?...Christianity was founded in the 1st century
2. Where?...In the Levant region of the Middle East
3. By?... the followers of [Jesus of Nazareth](#) who they believed to be the [Christ](#) or chosen one of God.
4. The founders of Christianity included those
  - 🍏 who had been [disciples](#) of Jesus such as Peter, Matthew, James and John.
  - 🍏 who may never have met him but influenced by his teachings such as the [Gospel](#) writers Mark and Luke.
  - 🍏 Or who described having mystical revelations of his divine nature, such as [Paul of Tarsus](#) who actively encouraged the founding of Christian communities or "churches" after his [conversion](#).

# BIRTH & SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

1. Christianity spread initially from Jerusalem throughout the Near East, into places such as,
  - 🍏 Syria,
  - 🍏 Assyria,
  - 🍏 Mesopotamia,
  - 🍏 Phoenicia,
  - 🍏 Asia Minor,
  - 🍏 Jordan and Egypt.
2. In the 4th century it was successively adopted as the state religion by
  1. Armenia in 301,
  2. Georgia in 319,
  3. Aksumite Empire in 325, and
  4. Roman Empire in 380.

# BIRTH & SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

1. Christianity became common to all of Europe in the [Middle Ages](#)
2. Expanded throughout the world during Europe's [Age of Exploration](#) from the Renaissance onwards to become the world's largest religion.
3. Throughout its history, Christianity has weathered [persecutions](#), [schisms](#) and theological disputes that have resulted in many distinct churches.
4. The largest branches of Christianity are,
  - 🍏 [Roman Catholic](#),
  - 🍏 [Eastern Orthodox](#),
  - 🍏 [Anglican](#), and
  - 🍏 [Protestant](#) churches.

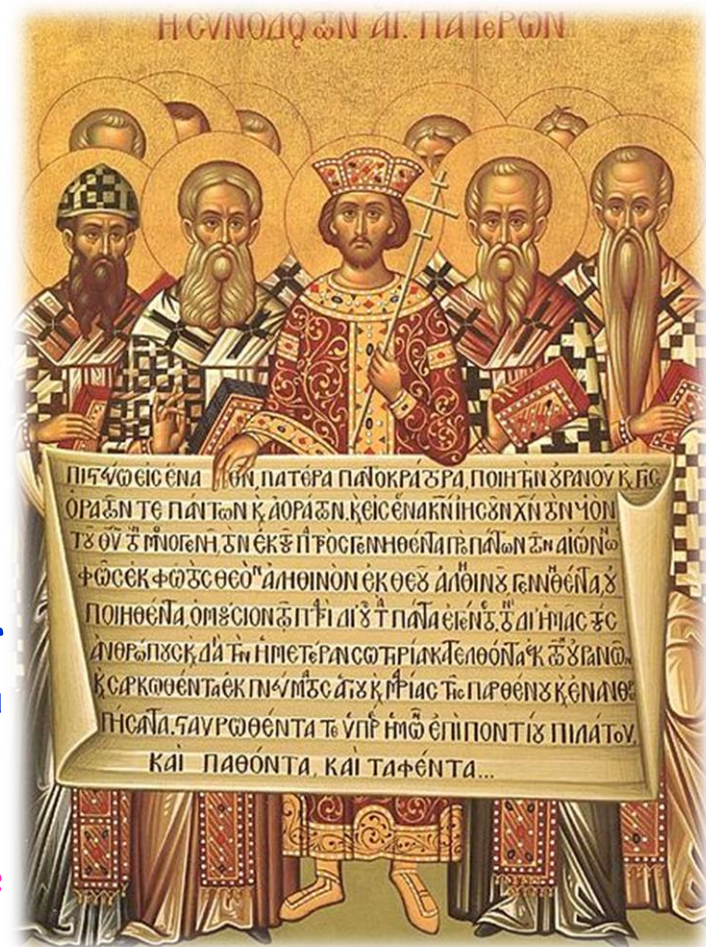


# TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN EMPIRE

## 1. Before & during 3<sup>rd</sup> Century,

1. Christianity was not recognised.
2. They met secretly in tombs and private houses
3. Gradually, it spread and became widely accepted in Asia minor and in Rome.
4. The religion was tolerated but it was still illegal.
5. It was a period of political instability and decline for the Roman Empire, which was split into as Western and Eastern Empires.

## 2. In A.D. 313, the Emperor Constantine issued the EDICT OF MILAN making Christianity legal, & adopted it as a state religion



Icon depicting the Emperor Constantine (centre) and the bishops of the First Council of Nicaea (325) holding the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381.



# TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN EMPIRE

1. Constantine became the first Christian emperor .
2. The Roman **BISHOP** of the newly recognized religion (Christianity) took charge of **temporal** as well as of **spiritual affairs**.
3. In course of time they **secured the absolute dictatorship** of the state.
4. It also led to the early development of places of worship for the new religion.
5. The acceptance of the religion by the emperor fueled its expansion.



Bronze statue of CONSTANTINE THE GREAT outside York Minster, England.

# TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN EMPIRE

1. Constantine was able to unite the Roman Empire during his reign
2. He *established the capital* of the new empire at *Byzantium*.
3. *Renamed it as Constantinople* or the city of Constantine
4. After his death, the Empire was again split.
5. By now Christianity was widely accepted as a state religion in Rome.



Head of Constantine's colossal statue  
at the [Capitoline Museums](#).

# TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN EMPIRE

1. 3rd Century was one of political confusion, civil wars, barbarian inroads on the frontiers, and economic instability brought about partly by the costs of maintaining large armies.
2. After another rapid sequence of emperors, relative stability was restored by North African SEPTIMUS SEVERUS (193-211) and his son CARACALLA (211-17), but this did not last after Caracalla's murder.
3. From **C 230** the pressure on the frontiers dominated the affairs of government.
4. A long succession of **SOLDIER EMPERORS** followed who were proclaimed so in the field, by their armies. The economy continued to decline and social life was increasingly disrupted
5. This decline was stemmed by drastic reforms of Illyrian, Diocletian (283-305)



# TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN EMPIRE

1. The reforms included **DECENTRALISATION**, which greatly weakened the power of Rome by setting up 4 new capitals at Nicomedia, Sirmium, Salonika, Milan and Trier.
2. This **TETRARCHY** system did not outlive Diocletian
3. Rivalries between his successors led to civil wars.
4. Constantine finally emerged victorious by defeating Maxentius in 312 and Licinius in 324
5. Thus from 324 to his death in 337 he was a single emperor; took all powers into his own hands & exercised it in a more eastern or traditionally Roman manner and established a new dynasty.
6. He took over Tetrarchy system of administration
7. He took 2 other decisions that proved more momentous
  - 🍏 In 313, he recognised Christianity and began to favor it
  - 🍏 In 324, he chose to rule from east in Byzantium and formally inaugurated it in 330 as New Rome or Constantinople – City of Constantine.

# TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN EMPIRE

1. Again the system did not long survive intact after the death of its founder.
2. Inroads on the frontiers presented ever increasing problems, particularly in the West
3. Effective control by single emperor proved impracticable.
4. The 1st formal partition of empire took place in 364 when Valentinian became emperor in West and his brother in East.
5. Theodosius (379-95) attempted to rule the whole empire alone
6. But after his death West was separated from East.
7. After Theodosius, the first Emperor to emerge into prominence was Justinian (A.D. 527-565), who codified the Roman laws.

# TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN EMPIRE

1. He was a great patron of architecture, and was responsible not only for the rebuilding of S. Sophia, but also for many other churches in the city and in Syria and Palestine.
2. During the Macedonian dynasty (A.D. 867-1057) and the Comnenian dynasty (A.D. 1057-1185) there was a remarkable outburst of building activity.
3. Decay from within facilitated defeat from without.
4. For during its later period society was a tangled skein of treachery, immorality, and luxury.
5. The final crash came when the capital was captured by the Ottoman Turks in A.D. 1453

# EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND BURIAL

1. With Christianity widely accepted as a state religion in Rome, the **first great need** of the Christians was for **places of worship**
2. It was necessary for architecture to respond to the demands of the religion for worship space
3. Mode of worship was the most important determinant of the form of the church
4. Requirement for **church design was centered on worship and burial**
5. The requirements include:
  - 🍏 **A path for PROCESSIONAL ENTRY AND EXIT** of the clergy
  - 🍏 **AN ALTAR** area, where the clergy celebrate mass
  - 🍏 **A SPACE FOR THE SEGREGATION** of the clergy from the congregation during procession and communion
  - 🍏 **BURIAL SPACE**

# EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND BURIAL

1. To fill this need several of the *basilicas, or law courts of Romans, were converted* to serve the purpose, becoming thereby the basis for Christian church architecture
2. These *basilicas, or kingly courts*, from where the emperors dispensed justice from a throne at one end of an unroofed enclosure, belonged architecturally to the early Classic.
3. The first *basilicas* were unroofed except for an aisle down each side, along which ran rows of columns. The throne at the end, of course, was handsomely protected on three sides and above.
4. The *basilica*, consisting of a nave flanked by lower aisles and terminated by an apse, was adopted as the standard structure in Christian congregational worship
5. More centralized plans which were of round, polygonal, or cruciform shapes were adopted occasionally
6. *Martyria* were erected on sites connected with certain events in the life of Jesus and other places held to be sanctified by the sacrifice of the martyrs



# **EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND BURIAL**

# BASILICAN CONCEPT

1. The Christians did not, develop ideas of their own in the matter of buildings and all the other early basilican churches. They were just adaptation of roman kingly courts.
2. Features of a Basilica
3. ROOF : The churches were covered with wooden roofs, with the trusses, purlins, and rafters.
4. APSE : The enclosure for the king's throne, flanked by seats for his chief counsellors, became the Apse, containing the altar and the bishop's chairs.
5. CHOIR : Outside the apse, with seats for the assisting priests, was the Choir.
6. SIDE AISLES : The row of columns dividing the central area from the side aisles was retained, being increased in many cases, as in Constantine's basilica, to two rows of columns on either side, making a five-aisled building.

# BASILICAN CONCEPT

1. **TRANSEPT**: Crosses in front of the altar - is purely Christian - being an evident though later attempt to incorporate the Christian symbol of the cross into the ground-plan of the structure - as indeed it does with greatly added beauty and majesty. The churches in the East took the form of the Greek cross at a comparatively early period. It is quite probable that the Roman Christian architects adopted this ancient symbol from the mystic East.
2. The symbolism did not become established until the Church had developed into a powerful and wide-spread organization.
3. The differentiation of the two forms, now known as the Roman and Greek crosses, is odd, and had much to do with the division of types in the two branches of Christian architecture, the basilican of Rome, which culminated in the Gothic, and the Byzantine of the East.

# BASILICAN CONCEPT

1. CONTRASTS BETWEEN BASILICAN AND BYZANTINE ARCHITECTURE
2. The Byzantine church - building was wringing marvels of intricate beauty from the creative imaginations of the men of the North.
3. But so slight were the changes made in Basilican churches of Italy that it is often difficult to tell a church's age within several centuries.
4. Basilican - there is no transept .
5. Byzantine churches were domed.
6. The basilican roof was much like that of a modern barn, heavy and simple, structurally, because of the use of wood.
7. The style resembles the Eastern, but has no entablature—architrave, frieze, and cornice.
8. The basilicas, were oblong, though many of them are either round or octagonal. Ex. St. Vitalis, in Ravenna.

# HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE

