**The Early Church: The First 500 Years**

Church History Series

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1. The Spread of Christianity
2. From Jerusalem to Rome
3. Jerusalem
4. Antioch
5. Asia Minor
6. Greece
7. Rome
8. From Rome to the Empire
9. Alexandria, Egypt
10. The second largest city in the Roman Empire, built in 331 BC by Alexander the Great, who named the city after himself.
11. Over 1 million Jews live there. The Septuagint was translated there. The largest library in the world.
12. According to tradition, Mark founded the church there. A large and significant church. It produced several famous leaders.
* Clement of Alexandria
* Origen
* Arius
* Athanasius
1. North Africa
2. Carthage - Present day Tunis, Tunisia.
* Tertullian
1. Hippo – northeast Algeria
* Augustine
1. France
2. Called Gaul
3. Irenaeus (~120 - 202 AD). Born in Smyrna (the same as Polycarp) in Asia Minor. Became the Bishop of Lyon before 160.
4. Britain
5. Spain
6. Beyond Europe
7. East of the Empire:
8. Persia
9. India
10. Demographic Growth: from slaves to nobility.
11. What began as a sect of the Jews meeting in a corner in the temple in Jerusalem by the end of the NT is located in capital of the Roman Empire and includes Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, Greeks and Romans, Syrians, and Egyptians.
12. The appeal of the Gospel and the example of the Christians
13. Apologetic Writings
14. Church Life
15. Normal Church Life
16. There meetings many times had to be secret meetings, which led to further suspicion by local authorities.
17. From the literature available, they did what we do. Read the Bible, Sang hymns, Preached, and prayed.
18. The Didache: Jewish Christian Manual
19. Two Ways to live (chapters 1-6) – ethical instruction
20. Baptism was Trinitarian with candidates being catechized first. Triple immersion in running water (stream).
21. Fasting twice a week (Wednesdays and Fridays) with the meeting together on Sunday.
22. On Sunday they shared a meal first and then observed the Lord’s Supper was observed, after they had eaten a meal together.
23. The gifts of the Spirit were encouraged. There were tests for apostles and prophets.
24. There were only two offices in the church: bishop and deacon.

1. A Counter Culture – But there were things about them that were a lot different than us.
2. They were intense in their practice of the Christian life. Idolatry was blatant and all around them. Most notable was the worship of Caesar.
3. They would not participate in the idolatrous cultural activities, from Feast Days to the Gladiatorial contests.
4. Letter to Diognetus:

“Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not theirwives.

They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law. Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they, rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred.

To speak in general terms, we may say that the Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world. As the visible body contains the invisible soul, so Christians are seen living in the world, but their religious life remains unseen. The body hates the soul and wars against it, not because of any injury the soul has done it, but because of the restriction the soul places on its pleasures. Similarly, the world hates the Christians,not because they have done it any wrong, but because they are opposed to its enjoyments.

Christians love those who hate them just as the soul loves the body and all its members despite the body's hatred. It is by the soul, enclosed within the body, that the body is held together, and similarly, it is by the Christians, detained in the world as in a prison, that the world isheld together. The soul, though immortal, has a mortal dwelling place; and Christians also live for a time amidst perishable things, while awaiting the freedom from change and decay that will be theirs in heaven. As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians flourish under persecution. Such is the Christian’s lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.”

1. Persecution
2. Causes:
3. Growth: The Romans at first just thought that the Christians were a sect of the Jews and they had dealt with Jews for a long time. They didn’t require them to worship Caesar. But the Jews, by and large, did not proselytize. We know they did some (Matt 23). But that was in Judea and not throughout the Empire. Being a Jew was racial as well as ideological. Jews stuck to themselves. And so the Romans were wary of them, but mostly left them alone. The Christians, however, did not keep their religious views to themselves. They were excited to share the gospel with anybody, Jew or Gentile. And year after year, in spite of the persecutions, the Christian communities grew. This was more of a threat to the Romans.

The Christians were committed to evangelism. And their message and their life-style spoke powerfully. Even the way they died for Christ was a witness. As Tertullian said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

1. Caesar Worship: And they refused to worship Caesar. For that, they were called atheist. Many choose death rather than to worship any false God.
2. Misunderstanding. A third reason for persecution was misunderstanding. Christians were accused of all manner of criminal activity because of ignorance or slander. They were accused of cannibalism because they ate the body and the blood of Christ. They were accused of incest because the called their wives “sister.”
3. Extent:
4. From the death of Stephen until 312 AD Christians were persecuted. Not continuously, but sporadically.
5. Nero and Domitian 64 to 69 AD Peter and Paul are killed.
6. They were subject to the whims of local magistrates who well might persecute them. Here is part of a letter from one of the governors of the provinces to the emperor Trajan (110-115). Trajan only “moderately” persecuted.
7. But there were also very intense times when the Caesars tried to obliterate Christianity by extreme and universal persecution.

In 249 the emperor Decius Caesar worship was made universal by decree for every race and every nation within the empire expect for the Jews. Every person had to come to the Temple of Caesar and burn incense on the altar and say “Caesar is Lord.”

Again, 50 years later, another universal persecution took place. Diocletian very late in his life decided to eradicate Christianity from the empire. So from 300 to 312, Christians were killed by the thousands. Leaders were imprisoned and tortured unless they renounced Christ. If you did that, you got a certificate from the magistrates.

Martyrs and Confessors were highly thought of by the early church. The many Christians who were willing to be tortured and even killed for confessing Christ. But not all did, and this became problematic

1. Repercussions
2. There were many who did deny the faith in order to save their own lives and the lives of their family. And when the persecution ended many of those wanted back in the church.
3. Many of the bishops did let them back in. And the response to that was for some stricter folks was to have churches that were pure; not tainted by apostasy.

Two notable leaders who did that were Novatian and Donatus. Novatian after the Decian persecution and Donatus after the Diocletian persecution. They formed their churches and movements.

1. An Edict of Toleration: 312 AD
2. Constantine’s conversion October 27, 312 on the eve of the battle Milvian Bridge. In this sign conquer.
3. As a result of his victory, he issues an edict of Toleration.
4. You can imagine the incredible change that took place. Christians came out of hiding. They were released from prison. It was a miracle.
5. But it was also problematic. Because of Constantine’s uniting the empire under his control and him, if not professing Christ immediately, he was indebted he felt to the Christian God and was favorable to Christianity and its leaders. Suddenly it became cool to be Christian. And politically advantageous. A lot of people suddenly wanted to join the church for other than the right reason. Were these people really born again. The church was blessed, but it many ways weakened, by Toleration.
6. And then you had all the folks who had succumbed to the pressure to renounce Christ who now wanted back in the church. While no one said that God could not forgive apostasy, he did to Peter, neither was there a rush to let everyone in carte blanche. Some said God could forgive apostasy but the church couldn’t (Novatian and Donatus). But again, most church leaders did it on a case by case basis with the Bishop deciding each case. This put the Bishop in an incredibly powerful position. He sat on seat of judgment; the bishop’s chair was called a cathedra. A cathedral is a church building in which the bishop’s cathedra was located. And when the bishop spoke from his cathedra, the decision was binding. He spoke Ex Cathedra. You can see were all this is leading.
7. Ecclesiastical Structure
8. Apostles planting and overseeing churches.
9. Local churches were started everywhere the gospel. Some were small some were large. There were many churches and many elders, or presbyters or Bishops.
10. Monarchial Episcopacy – a shift takes place in the early 2nd century.
11. Ignatius of Antioch (35-108)
12. Reasons:
* Gifted leaders in large churches and a seemingly growing resistance to call people apostles. So what to call those who oversee multiple churches.
* The pattern of secular government.
1. Special bishops in these important cities: Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, Rome, Constantinople, and Jerusalem (honor).
2. Church Leaders:
* Ignatius of Antioch (35-108)
* Polycarp (69-155)
* Justin Martyr (100-165) – secular Jew was converted later in life who defended Christianity on the basis of its morality and its philosophical superiority.
* Tertullian (155-240) – from Carthage. A Latin speaker. A brilliant man who also was converted from paganism later in life. A Charismatic. Gets a bad rapt because of that. Some of the charismatics in those days calls Montanists got a little carried away and assumed that the Holy Spirit spoke uniquely through them and that their prophecies were better than yours. Tertullian didn’t do that. But he encourage spiritual gifts and women prophesying. But Tertullian is first to use the word Trinity and his development of Trinitarian theology was crucial at the time.
* Origen (184-253) – Alexandria. An enthusiastic young Christian whose father was martyred. A brilliant defender of Christianity. Against the Gnostics. Imprisoned and tortured under Decian persecution. He was released but was badly damaged physically and died a couple of years earlier. Alexandrians: Clement, Origen, & Athanasius
* Arius (256-336) – Also from Alexandria. not a hero. Denied the deity of Jesus. A real problem.
* Athanasius (297-373) – A young man who ably fought for the Doctrine of Christ against Arius and has he said, at one point, it was Athanasius Against the World.
* Augustine (359-430) – The great Augustine. Converted from paganism and Manichean philosophy under the preaching of Ambrose in Milan. Read about his conversion in The Confessions of Augustine.
1. Theological Controversy – particularly Christological Controversy.
2. The Difficulty: The incarnation and the Trinity
3. Heresies:

1. Docetism: Christ was divine but he didn’t really have a body; he just seemed to. Referenced in 1 John and Colossians.
2. Gnosticism: Greater and lesser gods; radical dualism; special “knowledge”. Christ is not the supreme God.
3. Arianism: Christ is the Son of God, but he is different in essence from the Father and was created by the Father. There was a time with the Son was not; i.e., he is a finite being. He had no human nature.
4. Apollinarianism: Emphasized the deity of Christ; Christ did not have a human nature.
5. Nestorianism: Christ was divine and human, and that Christ was actually two persons.
6. Modalism (Sabellianism): The is one God and one person, but he manifest himself to us as father, and then as Son, and then as Holy Spirit.
7. Ecumenical Councils:
8. The Council of Nicaea, 325 AD
9. Convened by Constantine himself, who humbly recused himself from the actual debate.
10. To deal with Arianism.
11. The Nicene Creed

**WE BELIEVE** in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

1. The First Constantinople Council
2. 381
3. Condemned Apollinarianism and Arianism (again).
4. Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (aeons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

1. The Council of Ephesus
2. 431
3. Upheld the Nicene and Constantinople Creed.
4. Condemned Nestorius and Pelagius
5. Reaffirmed the two natures of Christ: one person with two natures.
6. The Council of Chalcedon
7. 451
8. Made Jerusalem a See
9. Condemned monophysitism (one nature)
10. Eutyches taught that Christ nature was a merger of the divine and human.
11. Chalcedonian Creed:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.