

# Church History | First 1000 Years



## Introduction

What was the price one might pay to become a Christian for the first 300 years after Christ?

But as Polycarp was entering the arena, a voice from heaven came to him, saying, 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.' No one saw the one speaking, but those of our people who were present heard the voice. . . . The proconsul was insistent and said: 'Take the oath, and I shall release you. Curse Christ.' Polycarp said: 'Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?'  
--Martyrdom of Polycarp

Why were the creeds developed?

## Persecution

How did the first persecution against Christians come about?

What an artist the world loses in me.  
--Nero's last words

What was it about Christians that irked the Roman Emperor Decius to have them killed?

What caused Diocletian to persecute Christians during the Great Persecution?

Thus, we see that Caesar worship was primarily a test of political loyalty; it was a test of whether or not a man was a good citizen. If a man refused to carry out the ceremony of acknowledging Caesar, he was automatically branded as a traitor and a revolutionary. Exaltation of the emperor, then, created a problem for Christians. They had not failed to pray for the emperor in their meetings, but they would not pray to him in private or in public.  
--Bruce Shelley

## Constantine

What was the sign that Constantine saw and what caused him to convert to Christianity?

Constantine looked upon his success as proof of the power of Christ and the superiority of the Christian religion.

--Bruce Shelley

What price did the Church pay in having the first Christian emperor?

How did the establishment of Constantinople as the New Rome foreshadow the Great Schism of the Church?

## Councils

What was Arianism?

What is the key phrase of the Nicene Creed?

What happened at the Council of Carthage?

## Augustine

What was Augustine's pre-Christian life like?

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

--Romans 13:13-14, the passage that converted Augustine

How was he converted?

What did Augustine teach regarding sin and grace?

## The Papacy

Who was Pope Leo I and what did he do?

Leo raised the status of the bishop's office in Rome once and for all. He carried the papacy as far theoretically as it could go. The dynasty of Peter, Prince of the Church, was established, solemnly, decisively.

--Bruce Shelley

What happened under Gregory the Great?

## The Great Schism

What were the causes and the result of the Great Schism?

## Constantine | The Edict of Milan

When I, Constantine Augustus, as well as I Licinius Augustus ...were considering everything that pertained to the public welfare and security, we thought...that we might grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred. ...And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision we thought to arrange that no one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion, of that religion which he should think best for himself, so that the Supreme Deity, to whose worship we freely yield our hearts may show in all things His usual favor and benevolence. ...We thought it fit to commend these things most fully to your care that you may know that we have given to those Christians free and unrestricted opportunity of religious worship.

## The Nicene Creed

I 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; God of God, 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 for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## Early Christian Fathers | The Martyrdom of Polycarp (Excerpt)

But as Polycarp was entering the arena, a voice from heaven came to him, saying, 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.' No one saw the one speaking, but those of our people who were present heard the voice.

The proconsul was insistent and said: 'Take the oath, and I shall release you. Curse Christ.' Polycarp said: 'Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?'

And when he had said these things and many more besides he was inspired with courage and joy, and his face was full of grace, so that not only did it not fall with dismay at the things said to him, but on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his own herald into the midst of the arena to proclaim three times: 'Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian.'

Then they decided to shout with one accord that he burn Polycarp alive.

Straightway then, they set about him the material prepared for the pyre. And when they were about to nail him also, he said: 'Leave me as I am. For he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved, without the security you desire from the nails.' So they did not nail him, but tied him. And with his hands put behind him and tied, like a noble ram out of a great flock ready for sacrifice, a burnt offering ready and acceptable to God, he looked up to heaven and said: 'Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Servant Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of thee, 'the God of angels and powers and all creation' and of the whole race of the righteous who live in thy presence: I bless thee, because thou hast deemed me worthy of this day and hour, to take my part in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for 'resurrection to eternal life' of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit; among whom may I be received in thy presence this day as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, just as thou hast prepared and revealed beforehand and fulfilled, thou that art the true God without any falsehood. For this and for everything I praise thee, I bless thee, I glorify thee, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Servant, through whom be glory to thee with him and Holy Spirit both now and unto the ages to come. Amen.' And when he had concluded the Amen and finished his prayer, the men attending the fire lighted it.

## Chronology of Significant Events and People

0 AD

Crucifixion/Resurrection/Ascension of Christ; Pentecost (c. 30)  
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (c. 33)

Paul's First Gentile Missionary Journey (c. 47)

Death of Stephen, the first martyr (c. 50)      Writing of the NT

Fire in Rome; Persecution Under Emperor Nero (64)  
Death of Paul & Peter in Rome (c. 65)

Fall of Jerusalem (70)

Persecution Under Emperor Domitian (c. 81)

Persecution Under Emperor Trajan (c. 98)

Ignatius Martyred (c. 110)

Heresy of Gnosticism

Marcion Excommunicated for Teaching Heresy (144)

Polycarp Martyred (155)

Persecution Under Marcus Aurelius (c. 161); Justin Martyred (163)

Tertullian Begins Writing (196)  
Clement of Alexandria Begins Writing (200)

200 AD

200 AD

Persecution Under Septimus Severus (c. 202)

Origen Teaches in Caesarea (c. 230)

Persecution Under Emperor Decius (249)

Novatian Schism Over the Lapsed (c. 255)

Persecution Under Emperor Valerian (257)

Cyprian Martyred (258)

Anthony, the First Monk, Moves to the Desert (269)

The Great Persecution Under Emperor Diocletian (302)

Conversion of Emperor Constantine (312)

Edict of Milan Giving Christians Equal Rights (313)

Council of Nicea (325)

Athanasius Becomes Bishop of Alexandria (328)

Constantinople Founded (330)

Constantine Baptized and Died (337)

Ulfilas Converts to Arian Christianity and Converts Germanic Tribes (340)

Athanasius Publishes List of NT Books (367)

Council of Constantinople Upholds Nicea (381); Christianity Official Religion of Roman Empire (c. 381)

Conversion of Augustine (386)

Augustine Becomes Bishop of Hippo (395)

NT Canon Confirmed at Carthage (397)

Chrysostom Becomes Bishop of Constantinople (398)

400 AD

400 AD

Jerome Completes the Vulgate (406)  
Rome Falls to the Visigoths (410)

Council of Carthage Rules Against Pelagianism (418)

Vandals Occupy North Africa (429)  
Augustine Dies (430)  
Council of Ephesus Rules Against Nestorianism (431)  
Patrick Begins His Mission in Ireland (432)

Leo Becomes Pope (440)

Council of Chalcedon (451); Leo Convinces Attila the Hun to Spare Rome (452)  
Vandals Sack Rome (455)

Patrick and Leo Die (461)

Last Roman Emperor Deposed (476)

Clovis is Baptized (496)

Council of Orange Approves Augustine's Doctrine of Sin and Grace (529)

Benedict Writes His Rule for Monastic Life (540)

Second Council of Constantinople (553)

Gregory the Great Becomes Pope (590)

Augustine of Canterbury's Mission to England (596)

600 AD

600 AD

Conversion of Lombards from Arianism to Orthodoxy (602)

Birth of Islam (c. 622)

Synod of Whitby (663)

Composition of Be Thou My Vision (c. 700)

Islam Controls North Africa (711)

Boniface's Mission to the Germans (716)

Moors Take Spain (720)

Iconoclastic Controversy

Charles Martel Defeats the Muslim at Tours (732)

Second Council of Nicea (787)

Charlemagne Crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (800)

800 AD

800 AD

Vikings Establish Base in Dublin (841)

The Dark Ages

Great Schism Between Eastern & Western Churches (1054)  
1054 AD

## Questions for Discussion & Reflection

Suppose that Peter and Paul were martyred together, and that you were in the cell with them. What do you think they talked about?

Imagine living under Decius or Diocletian and their horrible persecution of Christians. What would you say if you were arrested? Do you think that you would give in to torture and renounce Christ? How does Polycarp's statement affect you: "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

If a persecution broke out in Westerville, how do you suppose our church would handle it? How would the American church be different if it lived under the threat of physical persecution?

What do you think of Constantine's conversion? Was it good for the Church that it eventually became the official religion of the Roman Empire? Or did such power have a corrupting effect on the Church?

What do you think of the papacy? Was Leo right when he declared that the Bishop of Rome is the rightful successor of Peter, the Rock upon whom Christ builds his Church? What hope is there for a Great Reunification between Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches?

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