



9th discussion for “Family Night” 01/17/09

“History of the Church”

Part 1

B.C. is the English abbreviation for Before Christ; A.D. is the Latin abbreviation for Anno Domini and literally means "in the year of our Lord," and is a designation used to number years in the Julian and Gregorian calendars. Years may be also specified as Anno Domini Nostri Iesu (Jesu) Christi ("In the Year of Our Lord Jesus Christ").

Christ is the English term for the Greek (Khristós) meaning "the anointed"

When was The Church Founded?

The Bible narrates that Jesus instructed His disciples thus: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of time." (Matthew 28:18-20). Ten days later (on the day of Pentecost), Peter gave the first sermon, inspiring 3,000 people to be baptized. From this point onwards, the teachings of Jesus spread throughout the Roman Empire (Western Europe) and beyond, in churches led by the Apostles. Christian tradition records that the Church in Rome was jointly founded by Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and that Peter was its first bishop.

The apostles then traveled to northern Africa, Asia Minor, Arabia, Greece, and Rome to found the first Christian communities. Christianity spread quickly through the Roman Empire, and by the second century there were many established bishoprics within the Empire (including Northern Africa, France, Italy, Syria, and Asia Minor), and twenty bishoprics outside the empire, mainly in Armenia.

History of the Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is the largest united body of Christians. The name “Roman” is derived from the fact that Rome is its center of unity. The word “Catholic” (Gr. Katholikos) means “Universal” and refers to the comprehensive nature of the Church that Jesus founded for all peoples.

The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church traces its foundation to Jesus Christ and the twelve Apostles. It sees the bishops of the Church as the successors of the Apostles, and the pope in particular as the successor of Peter, whom Jesus named as leader of the Apostles. Catholics cite Jesus' words in the Gospel according to Matthew, “And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter (which means “rock”), and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19). The Catholic Church traces an unbroken line of popes from St. Peter in the 1st century AD to the present bishop of Rome.

St. Peter, of Bethsaida in Galilee, received from Christ the name of Cepha, an Aramaic word which means “rock.” Prince of the Apostles, was the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church. He lived first in Antioch and then in Rome for 25 years. In A.D. 67, he was martyred by being crucified, head downward, in Rome by Nero. St. Linus became the second Pope.



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The Mission and Doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is characterized by its uniform, highly developed doctrinal and organizational structure. It defines its mission as spreading the message of Jesus Christ, administering the sacraments and exercising charity. It operates social programs and institutions throughout the world, including schools, universities, hospitals, missions and shelters, as well as organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, and Catholic Charities that help the poor, families, the elderly and the sick.

It has defined its doctrines through various ecumenical councils, following the example set by the first Apostles in the Council of Jerusalem (The Council of Jerusalem, convened by the apostles around the year 50 to clarify Church teachings, set the example for later councils of the Church). On the basis of promises made by Jesus to his apostles, described in the Gospels, the Church believes that it is guided by the Holy Spirit and so is protected from falling into doctrinal error. Catholic beliefs are based on the Bible and Apostolic Tradition, interpreted by the Church’s teaching authority. Those beliefs are summarized in the Nicene Creed, formulated at the First Ecumenical Church Council held in AD 325 in Nicaea in Bithynia, present-day Iznik in Turkey. Formal Catholic worship, termed the liturgy, is regulated by Church authority. The Eucharist, one of seven Church sacraments and the key part of every Catholic Mass, is the center of Catholic worship.

At the end of the third century, there were five patriarchates, that is, regions ruled by patriarchs. These centered in the great cities of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Among the patriarchs, the patriarchs of Rome were almost universally accorded precedence in honor, dignity, authority and jurisdiction. By mid-seventh century, the invasion of Islam devastated three of the five sees, capturing Jerusalem first, then Alexandria, and then in the mid-eighth century, Antioch.

For nearly a thousand years, the Christians remained practically one great community until the break with the Eastern church in 1054 and the break with the Protestant churches in the sixteenth century. Although the Catholic Church maintains that it is the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" founded by Jesus, and that it is Christ’s instrument of salvation, it also acknowledges that the Holy Spirit can make use of other Christian communities to bring people to salvation. It believes that it is called by the Holy Spirit to work for unity among all Christians, a movement known as ecumenism. Modern challenges facing the Church include the rise of secularism and opposition to its pro-life stance on abortion, contraception and euthanasia.

The Eastern Orthodox Church

The Eastern Orthodox Church is the second largest single Christian communion in the world. It is considered by its adherents to be the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church established by Christ and His Apostles nearly 2000 years ago.

Eastern Christianity refers collectively to the Christian traditions and churches which developed in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, the Middle East, Northeastern Africa and southern India over several centuries of religious antiquity. The Greek term “Orthodox” means “Correctly Believing” or "Correctly Glorifying God" (from orthos = correct, right & either dokeo = I see, I believe; or the noun doxa = glory) and was originally used to distinguish apostolic teaching from that of heretics. Later, it was adopted by the Eastern Church in order to distinguish itself from other Christian denominations.



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Early history

Stachys was the first bishop of Byzantium, from AD 38 to AD 54. He seemed to be closely connected to Saint Andrew and Saint Paul. Eusebius quotes Origen as saying that Andrew preached in Asia Minor and Scythia, along the Black Sea as far as the Volga and Kyiv. He founded the See of Byzantium in 38, installing Stachys as bishop (the only bishopric in that neighborhood). This See would later develop into the Patriarchate of Constantinople, having the Apostle Andrew as its patron saint. In AD 330, after Constantine the Great had transferred the capitol of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium, enlarging it to make it into a new city named after himself (Constantinople, the New Rome), the bishopric was elevated to an archbishopric. It was thought appropriate that its bishop, ranking as *primus inter pares* (first among equals) in the Eastern Orthodox communion, should become second only to the Bishop of Old Rome (called the "First Among Equals"). Since Constantinople was considered the "New Rome," the First Council of Constantinople (the second ecumenical council) in 381 declared that the Patriarch of Constantinople should be given the honor of second in rank. This was supported by later councils as well. Though Constantinople is not in Greece, the Patriarch of Constantinople came to be known as the Greek Patriarch.

Important Years in the History of the Church

- AD 33 Birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost, after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ
- AD 50 Council of Jerusalem- converted Gentiles were accepted as valid Christians and were not required following the Mosaic Law.
- AD 64 Christian persecution begins under Emperor Nero. Persecution continues intermittently until 313 A.D
- AD 96 Traditional date of First Epistle of Clement, written to the church of Corinth, attributed to Pope Clement I as evidence of a presiding Roman cleric who exercised authority over other churches.
- AD 110 Ignatius of Antioch (also known as Theophorus -"God Bearer") was among the Apostolic Fathers, was the third Bishop and Patriarch of Antioch, and was possibly a student of John the Apostle. En route to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius wrote a series of letters in which occurs the first known use of the Greek word *katholikos* ("Catholic"), meaning "universal," "complete" and "whole" to describe the Church. Important topics addressed in these letters include ecclesiology (what pertains to the Church), the sacraments, and the role of bishops.
- AD180 St. Irenaeus - Bishop of Lyons and Father of the Church, defended the Apostolic Tradition, which can be safeguarded only with the central primacy of Rome.
- AD 312 Emperor Constantine (Constantine I) leads the forces of the Roman Empire to victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge. Tradition has it that the night before the battle, Constantine had a vision that he would achieve victory if he fought under the Symbol of the Cross of Christ; accordingly, his soldiers bore on their shields the Chi-Rho sign composed of the first two letters of the Greek word for "Christ" (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ). After winning the battle, Constantine legalized Christianity. He himself was not baptized until shortly before his death-AD337.



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AD 318 Arius, responsible for the Arian controversy over the nature of Jesus in relationship to the Father (in particular, whether Jesus was of the same substance as God the Father or merely of similar substance), did not believe that Christ was God. He was condemned and excommunicated by a council convened by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria.