

Key Events In Church History, Part I

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1. The Destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70

It was in Jerusalem that Jesus completed his saving work by his death and resurrection. The Christian Church was born in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The gospel went out to the nations from Jerusalem. At least in the case of Paul and his coworkers, gospel preaching generally began in the synagogue, where both Jews and proselytes thought of Jerusalem as the City of God to which they journeyed for the high festivals. The Apostle Paul kept the Gentile Christians mindful of Jerusalem and of the Jewish roots of their salvation. The destruction of Jerusalem had profound emotional impact on both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Events leading up to the siege and fall of the city alienated Jewish Christian inhabitants of the city from their countrymen. Jerusalem's destruction contributed to the isolation of Jewish Christians from their Gentile counterparts.

The Spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem.

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled Jesus' disciples with power to be Christ's witnesses. People from all over the Empire heard the good news preached in their native tongues. Three thousand were converted that day. Later, Luke mentions 5,000. Finally, he simply says, "multitudes." Those who went back to their homes in other lands took the gospel with them.

The first concerted persecution of believers followed the stoning of Stephen in Jerusalem. Saul of Tarsus led it. Believers were scattered, but the church did not disappear. On the contrary, the persecution and scattering resulted in the planting of new churches as simple believers shared their faith wherever they might be. Many of those who were forced to flee resettled in Pella, east of the Jordan River, in the predominantly Hellenistic region of the Decapolis.

Meanwhile, Philip proclaimed Christ in Samaria, to a despised people who were not authentic Jews. Peter worked in the area around Jaffa and in the Plain of Sharon. Then, up the Mediterranean coast from Jaffa, Peter baptized the centurion Cornelius, a proselyte of the gate, and his household. The gospel went beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire when the "Ethiopian" eunuch returned rejoicing to his homeland. Anonymous Christians, probably including many refugees from Jerusalem, began to witness to Gentiles in Syrian Antioch, third city of the Empire and an important center of the Jewish dispersion. Here the disciples were first called Christians-Jews unlike other Jews and Gentiles unlike other Gentiles. There must have been a considerable community of followers of the way in Damascus for the persecutor from Tarsus to take note of it and take action against it.

The book of Acts reveals little about the activities of most of the apostles, but their work must have paralleled that of Peter and Paul to some extent. Tradition, not all of it credible, says it did. There is no question, however, that before A.D. 70 the gospel had gone out from Jerusalem to "the ends of the earth."

The Close Ties of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, with Jerusalem.

In the interest of the mission to the Gentiles, out of love for his own people, to observe certain festivals and ceremonies, and to preserve the unity of the church, Paul returned several times to that place where he had once wreaked havoc in the church. On the first visit following his conversion he met Peter. He visited with famine relief funds gathered in Antioch. He discussed the Gentile mission with Peter, and he participated in the Jerusalem Council.

He urged the Gentiles of his mission congregations to gather a relief fund for the poor Christians of the mother church in Jerusalem. Despite the pleas of believers at Tyre and the warning prophecy of Agabus, he

went on to Jerusalem in order to deliver the money the Gentile churches of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece had collected. It was to be his last visit.

The Jewish War and the Destruction of Jerusalem

In A.D. 66, the recently arrived Roman procurator Crassus expropriated 17 talents from the treasury of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some of the city's Jews mocked him by begging in the streets on his behalf. To retaliate, he had a number of them crucified. In July, the daily sacrifice for the Emperor was suspended. Guerrilla warfare broke out, and by September the Jews effectively controlled Palestine. The Romans had lost a legion.

In 67, three Roman legions, about 40,000 men including their auxiliaries, began to round up the revolutionaries. A Jewish army captain, Josephus, survived that campaign to become an intelligence officer for the Roman army. Later, Josephus wrote *The Jewish War*, in which he justified his defection, defended Titus' conduct of the war, and provided a most horrifying history of the fall of the holy city.

The Roman general Vespasian surrounded Jerusalem in 68 after pursuing a scorched earth policy in Judaea in order to starve the city. Civil strife broke out in the city as the various factions argued among themselves over how to conduct the defense, and whether or not to surrender.

General Vespasian left the siege when Emperor Vitellius died. He did not go home to Rome but to the grain docks of Alexandria. There he began to control grain shipments and, with that advantage, to control Roman politics. He became emperor, as Josephus had once foretold. His son Titus took over the siege and brought it to a successful conclusion.

On July 17, A.D. 70, the Temple sacrifices ceased, and they have never been resumed. On August 8, the Temple was set afire, and by August 10 it was razed. On September 7, the battle for the city ended. Some survivors continued to fight in Judaea, and 960 zealots held out at Masada. Josephus writes that 1,197,000 Jews died in this war. Tacitus, in his *Annals*, says that 800,000 perished.

More Complete Alienation of Jewish Christians from their Jewish Countrymen

According to Eusebius's 4th century *History of the Church* [IL23.18], the early Christian chronicler Hegesippus made a cause and effect connection between the murder of James the Just (A.D. 62) and the siege of Jerusalem. Origen in *Against Celsus* [Eusebius, 11.23.201] said that the destruction was divine punishment for the cruel death of James. No doubt such a conviction accounted in part for the fact that Christians in Palestine and especially in Jerusalem refused to make common cause with the Jews in the war of 66-73. It seems clear that Jewish Christians would not have shared the nationalistic spirit of many Jews, and that they remembered Jesus' warning prophecies regarding the destruction of the city. Once again many of them fled beyond the Jordan, particularly to Pella.

There were fewer converts from Judaism to Christianity in the years following the war. Understandably, the synagogues of the diaspora were no longer open to Christian visitors who came with a message concerning Jesus the promised Messiah. Sometime between 70 and 100, the rabbis inserted a malediction against those they called the "Nazarenes" into the "Twelfth Benediction" of the synagogue prayers.

Before A.D. 70 Romans in high places recognized that there was a difference between Christians and Jews. Tacitus tells us that Titus himself hoped to abolish both religions by striking at their common root. As Christians and Jews associated less and less and as Jewish antipathy against Christians increased, it became clearer to some Roman officials that Christians and Jews were really separate entities. Those who, in practice, might have extended the Jews' status of *religio licita* to Christians were less likely to do so after 70. Of course, neither religion perished as a result of the destruction of the Temple and the city.

A new spiritual center for Judaism in Judaea was established at Javneh (Latin Jamnia), near modern Tel Aviv. Johanan ben Zakkai (d. ca. 80) did not found a new temple with priests and sacrifices, but an academy. There the Sanhedrin had its headquarters for some years and at Javneh work on the Mishnah, the first part of the *Talmud*, began.

Gentile Christians had already learned some very useful things from the synagogue that stood them in good stead after the mother church vanished from the mother city. Among them was (and is) the Old Testament as an authoritative book, to which they would add an authoritative New Testament. They learned the importance of regular meeting for worship and a pattern for worship - with ready-made hymns in the Book of Psalms. They learned the importance of instruction, in the service as well as at other times and places. There was a pattern for corporate works of charity in Judaism that carried over into the Gentile churches.

The Isolation of Jewish Christians

Pella, the destination of many Jewish Christians who fled Jerusalem between A.D. 35 and 70, lay on one of the trade routes of Trans-Jordan. If, however, it maintained contact with other churches in other places, it seems not to have been much influenced by them. The Jewish Christians increased in numbers, at least for a time, but they did not grow in the knowledge of God. The Nazarenes and the Ebionites originated in Perea, particularly in the neighborhood of Pella. They developed peculiar doctrines while trying to maintain their Jewish identity - perhaps *because* they tried to maintain their Jewish identity.

Nazarenes, Jewish Christians who traced their roots to the beginnings of the gospel work in Jerusalem, continued to observe Jewish ritual requirements. They were taught to regard Gentile Christians as fellow believers, but in time they became increasingly legalistic and separatistic. From his hermitage at Bethlehem, Jerome would later offer the observation that in trying to be both Jews and Christians the Nazarenes finally were neither the one nor the other.

The Ebionites (*Ebionim*) were the self-designated "poor." In time, if not at once, they denied the virgin birth of Jesus and his divinity. They regarded Paul as an apostate and identified him with Simon Magus.

Around the year 100, the Ebionite Elkesai (one of several spellings) claimed to have received a book from heaven. His book was a mixture of Jewish theism, Stoic pantheism, and Christian salvation history. Elkesai taught that Jesus was a prophet, like Moses, come to preach true moral precepts and gather the righteous. The teachings of this cult later influenced Mohammed, and much of what the Koran says about Jesus derives directly or indirectly from Elkesai's ideas about Christ.

All in all, it must be said that the fall of Jerusalem ultimately reduced Jewish Christianity to an insignificant role in the continuing growth and development of the church. The church of Israel's Messiah, originating in Israel's ancient capital, reading Israel's Scriptures and with a new Scripture written by Jews, became a church in which Gentiles predominated and led.

Aelia Capitolina

A second fall of Jerusalem is also part of the story of Gentile hegemony in the Christian Church. In 117, Emperor Hadrian toured the eastern reaches of the Roman Empire and decided to make a Roman city of Jerusalem. He renamed it Aelia Capitolina, in honor of his Aelian *gens* and Capitoline Zeus.

A Jewish zealot, Simon Bar-Kosba, took the name Bar-Kokhba, "Son of the Star." His adopted name referred to Balaam's prophecy about the star that should come out of Jacob. Simon gained the endorsement of the renowned Rabbi ben Akiba, and led a campaign against the Romans in Judaea between 132 and 135.

After the inevitable failure of this uprising, Hadrian declared circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and the study of Torah to be capital crimes. Judaism was thus declared *religio illicita*. All Jews and Christians of Jewish birth were banished from Jerusalem. It became a pagan Gentile city. A temple of Venus was built over the supposed site of Golgotha and a heroic statue of Hadrian was erected on the Temple Mount. Whatever had remained of Jewish Christianity now disappeared, virtually if not absolutely.

Judaea became a Roman colony, no longer a client state. Caesarea became the provincial capital. In time, Christians settled in Jerusalem. To the extent that Jerusalem eventually became a Christian city in the time of the Christian Empire Church (the Byzantine Era), it was not a successor to Jewish Jerusalem. It was, rather, a converted pagan city.

2. Constantine: Steps Toward Establishment of the Church

Constantine the Great (ca. 247-337) was born in Nio in what is now Serbia. He was the son of Constantius Chloros, Roman emperor of the West. His mother Helena was either the concubine or the wife of Constantius. When the father died at York in 306 during a campaign against the Picts and Scots, the army acclaimed the 18-year-old son as emperor.

Emperor Constantine played a definite role in making Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire. By his involvement in church affairs he began the process whereby Christianity replaced emperor worship as the official religion. By his policies and actions he played an essential role in the development of caesaropapism, a Christian theocracy in which the emperor was God's anointed representative at the head of the church.

Toleration

It may be said that Constantine's first official act relative to the Christian Church occurred in 307, when he and Maxentius, co-ruler with him in the West, suspended the persecution of Christians in their respective domains. In 312, after his famous "vision" of the sign of the cross, Constantine eliminated his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge and became sole ruler in the West. The next year, on June 13, 313, Constantine joined his brother-in-law Licinius, sole ruler in the East, in decreeing toleration of all religions in the Empire. Freedom of conscience and equality before the law were granted to all religions. Confiscated church property was to be restored. Christian houses of worship were returned to the churches, and in some cases rebuilt. Strictly speaking this decree was not an official edict, nor was it issued at Milan, but it is remembered as the Edict of Toleration or the Edict of Milan.

Favoritism

Probably in the same year (313), Constantine sent aid to the Catholic churches of North Africa. In 314, he convoked the Synod of Arles to settle the question of whether the Catholic or the Donatist Church was the true church in North Africa. That was meant to settle the issue of which church should receive the aid he had sent. The Catholic Church of North Africa thus gained imperial as well as ecclesiastical recognition.

In that same year, imperial coins were minted on which the cross appeared - along with representations of Mars Conservator and Sol Invictus. That the cross did not appear alone was in large part a concession to the legions, where Mars was patron and where the cult of Sol Invictus was popular. It was also an indication that Constantine was not yet fully committed to Christianity.

From the year 315 onward, the Emperor granted a number of favors to the church. Church lands were exempted from taxation (a provision that is not included in the United States Constitution, but which religious institutions and other organizations in this country have enjoyed by tradition and the good graces of governmental units). Soon Constantine also granted the church the right to inherit property and money.

Constantine declared the clergy exempt from certain civic duties. Then he limited the number of aristocrats who could become clergymen, because some of them were entering the ministry in order to avoid performing civic duties. He granted bishops the right to serve as civil magistrates in certain civil suits, including cases in family law such as divorce. They could also preside over the manumission of slaves. He proclaimed Sunday ("the day of the venerable sun") a legal holiday in 321, partly to please devotees of Sol Invictus.

In 320 Constantine concurred with the deposition and excommunication of the Alexandrine presbyter Arius, on the advice of Hosius (or Ossius) of Cordoba and other bishops. On the advice of his friend Hosius he confirmed the decision of the Synod of Arles (324) with regard to the Donatists of North Africa. Those schismatics had appealed to Hosius because they knew he had influence with the Emperor and because they thought he would favor their cause. Only after they lost their appeal did they ask, *Quid imperator cum ecclesia?* It was a good question, and should have been asked more often by the Catholic Church as well.

Constantine's elimination of his last rival for sole rule of the Empire in 324 was not exclusively a political act. Licinius, emperor in the East, had been reneging on the decree of universal religious toleration of 313. He had, in fact, been pursuing a policy of active persecution. Although his basic motive was political, Constantine did act in the interest of the Christians. Constantine did not, it is thought, favor Christians during these years in order to gain their favor. Rather, he wanted to cultivate the good will of the Christian's God. In the view of some historians, he was taking quite a risk because so many of the aristocratic and powerful resented what he was doing on behalf of the church.

In 324 the Emperor donated the palace of his late wife Fausta to Bishop Sylvester I of Rome. This building came to be known as the Lateran Palace, later a papal residence and the site of five councils of the Western Church. This was Constantine's only recorded donation to Sylvester.

Beginning in 325 Constantine sponsored the construction of great church edifices: St. Peter's in Rome, the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem (called Church of the Holy Sepulcher by the Latin Church), and the Church of the Holy Peace (*Hagia Eirene*) in Constantinople.

He moved the capital to Byzantium in 326, at a place where Europe and Asia meet, a site much closer to the Empire's center of population than Rome was. He said he wanted to leave all of the pagan associations and memories of Rome behind and to develop a Christian capital for the Christian Empire. He called Byzantium "New Rome," but it was not long before people began calling it Constantine's City, *Konstantinou Polis*, Constantinople. One far-reaching consequence of this move was that the bishop of Rome was left as the most important and powerful personage in the old capital, which was the only metropolis in the West. That was one of several important factors in the eventual domination of all western Christianity by the popes.

In all of this church-favoring activity Constantine's understanding of the gospel was really quite weak. He sometimes gave evidence that he thought of Jesus Christ and Sol Invictus as two equally valid ways of representing and worshiping the Supreme Being. His delay in being baptized, however, probably had more to do with the fact that rulers do bad and bloody things, and the church taught that baptism is the washing away only of *past* sins.

In 326, the Emperor decreed toleration for the schismatic Novatianists in Constantinople. Their life style - they called themselves the *Cathari*, the pure - had won his respect.

Council of Nicaea, Arius, and Athanasius

Though he would not be baptized for another twelve years, Constantine convoked the Synod of Nicaea (325) and served as honorary president of what is recognized as the First Ecumenical Council. He announced to the assembled leaders of the church that while God had made them bishops, the Almighty had made him bishop of bishops.

Because he thought it was in the best interest of church and state, Constantine deposed and exiled Athanasius as a divisive person in 335. He was influenced in this action by Eusebius of Nicomedia, who had been exiled because of his Arian views after the Council of Nicaea. Other bishops suffered a fate similar to that of Athanasius, often without being heard or tried by their peers. Thus Constantine moved from universal toleration in 313 to the suppression of the church's greatest living theologian in 335.

In 333 the Emperor had ordered all the writings of Arius to be burned. He reinstated Arius in 336, however, on the basis of a statement of faith by the latter that did not honestly address the issue.

Constantine's Successors

Constantine was baptized on Easter in 337. He died on Pentecost of that same year. This "first Christian Emperor" had retained the old Roman title *Pontifex Maximus*, perhaps because he thought the title appropriate to his role in the church. He was also, however, still referred to as *divus Constantinus*, perhaps for the same reason. Eastern Orthodoxy regards him as a saint and honors him as *Isapostolos* - equal to an apostle, or "peer

of the apostles." His work did profoundly affect the course of the church's history, but certainly not in the positive manner of the men who wrote the New Testament.

The ideal for which Constantine had striven was a united church to serve as a unifying force for the Empire. In order to prevent civil strife after his death he divided the Empire among his three sons. The sons, however, emulated their father in trying to eliminate one another and all other potential rivals. All three brothers used force against pagans, heretics, and schismatics. That is, they persecuted those who disagreed with their personal views. They reasoned that just as Joshua had been commanded to exterminate the Canaanites, so God wanted the extermination of all who were not truly catholic. It complicated matters that, despite the Council of Nicaea of 325, there was no agreement on what the catholic faith is.

The survivor among the brothers, Constantius II, was pro-Arian and anti-Nicene. He ruled as sole emperor from 351 to 361, at which time he was killed in a battle against his cousin Julian. Julian was dubbed "the apostate," but it is doubtful that he ever had any Christian faith to fall away from. He scourged the church by taking away most of what Constantine had granted. He favored the Jews and attempted to revive paganism in the Empire. In the providence of God, he reigned only 18 months, during which time he inadvertently helped motivate the Christians of both anti-Nicene and pro-Nicene conviction to work toward reconciliation. Julian's death marked the end of Constantine's family, since no son survived either the Apostate or any of Constantine's sons.

The succeeding emperors, Jovian, Valentinian, and Valens vacillated in their views on the eternal deity of the Son. Their motives were more political than theological. The Council of Constantinople, convoked in 381 by Emperors Gratian and Theodosius I, equated the catholic orthodox faith with the faith of Nicaea and affirmed the Creed of Nicaea. In 392, Theodosius outlawed any and all practice of pagan rites or religion. In 395, he declared that Nicene Christianity was the only *religio licita* in the Roman Empire.

Caesaropapism

The literal meaning of caesaropapism is that Caesar is the pope. In practice, the degree to which an emperor played an active role in the administration of the church's affairs depended on how interested and able he was. The Empire Church was never a caesaropapism in an absolute sense, partly because Catholic bishops, especially the bishops of Rome and a few men like Ambrose of Milan, resisted it as much as they were able. It was Ambrose who told Emperor Theodosius (reigned 379-395), who was under discipline for a massacre in Thessalonica: "The emperor is in the church, not above it."

Constantine (ca. 274-337) believed that the word of the bishops was the very word of God. Only once did he reject the election of a bishop, suggesting names of two other men to the clergy of Antioch. Later emperors sometimes hand picked bishops for the most important cities, particularly Constantinople itself. The emperor convoked synods and his signature validated their decisions. The church's doctrine and discipline were imperial law, enforceable by the imperial power. Emperors often packed synods with people who agreed with them, and they often influenced decisions. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, the state got its way over a majority of the church's bishops. In that instance the state, in the providence of God, happened to be correct.

The emperor as the head of the church enjoyed certain liturgical privileges. As the Lord's anointed he could commune himself, preach, and give the benediction. He could enter the chancel, but he could not say mass or grant absolution. Following the precedent of Constantine, the emperor (and only he) could convoke a general synod or council.

One negative effect on the church, almost immediate, was that converts came in for reasons of social and political expediency rather than by conviction. The catechumenate broke down under the sheer numbers, and the spiritual and moral tone of the church suffered. No longer was the church a "counterculture."

In the Middle Ages, in the Western Church, the strongest political popes would turn the thing around by exercising when they could a kind of "papocaesarism." In the Reformation, Luther returned the leadership of the church in administrative matters to the secular rulers, as the leading laymen of the church. In many cases, unfortunately, that resulted in a new caesaropapism. In a number of Protestant states, including England,

Erastianism prevailed in the 17th century. The Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus had not favored total subjection of the church to the state, but some rulers, with their court theologians, took his views to an extreme. Even some Roman Catholic kings in Europe regarded their national churches as arms of the government and exploited them accordingly.

The history of the church has demonstrated that while favor and establishment may give the church security and outward prosperity, the price of such privilege is the loss of independence and freedom of conscience.

3. Athanasius and the Trinitarian Solution: Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381)

Arius and His Heresy

Arius (ca. 256-336) was a presbyter of Alexandria, renowned for his skill in logic. He prided himself in doing literal exegesis, as opposed to the allegorical treatment of Scripture that Origen (ca. 185-254) had introduced. His desire to "protect" the absolute transcendence and the immutability of God, however, led him to deny that the essential Deity could become man.

Arius accused his superior, Bishop Alexander, of Sabellian modalism for saying that the Son is of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the Father. When Arius persisted in his charges and began to propagandize his views, the Synod of Alexandria (320) declared him a heretic, deposed him from his priestly office, and excommunicated him. Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia protested this action, and there was a danger of schism. Meanwhile, on the advice of Bishop Hosius of Cordoba, Emperor Constantine agreed that the action of the Synod of Alexandria was just.

What did Arius teach? He said concerning the Second Person, "There was once when he was not." He believed that since the Son was begotten he must have had a beginning and cannot be eternal. He is God's highest creature, created out of nothing before time began, and therefore not equal with God nor of the same divine essence. Arius used popular jingles to spread his views among the laity.

The brilliant Origen (ca. 185-254) had contributed to the problem by some of the things he said about the Son in the previous century. He spoke of the Logos as a separate being (*ousia*), subordinate to the Father, and as a "second God." Origen avoided calling the Son a creature (*ktisis*), but spoke of him as something God "did," a *poiema*.

The Council of Nicaea (325)

Hosius of Cordoba presided over a synod at Antioch that repudiated the teaching of Arius. This gave Emperor Constantine the idea of convoking a council of bishops from all over the Empire to settle the doctrinal issue. Southeast of Constantinople (modern Istanbul), at Nicaea (modern Iznik), 318 bishops convened on May 25, 325. Their number included about one sixth of the total number of bishops in the Empire. Western representatives included only one bishop, from Gaul. Two presbyters from Rome were present, representing the bishop of that city as observers. The Bishop of Rome did not believe that an emperor had the right to convoke a council of the church. Furthermore, the church in the West had not really been troubled by the controversy.

Thus, the council was not truly ecumenical in the sense that bishops from all parts of the Empire were present. It came to be regarded as ecumenical because of its doctrinal decision, accepted by the entire church.

Three schools of thought were represented at Nicaea. All three groups included men who had been mutilated or crippled under torture during the years of persecution under Diocletian and Galerius. That is to say, they were earnest Christians, however defective the theology of some might have been. A minority party agreed with the Arian doctrine for the most part. Their leader was Eusebius of Nicomedia. The majority of bishops did not understand the issue or realize its importance. Foremost among them was Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, who later wrote *History of the Church* and *Life of Constantine*. Archdeacon Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 293-373)

influenced the third party, a small minority. Since he was not at the time a bishop and thus lacked voice and vote, he worked behind the scenes to persuade men who did have a voice and a vote in the council.

Athanasius's concern was very practical and had to do with salvation itself. Quite simply, he said that salvation is divine work, something only one who is essentially God could accomplish. Also, for the Scriptures to call Jesus Christ God, for the liturgy to address him as God, and for Christians to pray to him as God would be idolatry if he were not in fact God.

The debate at Nicaea finally came down to two words. *Homoousios* means "of the same essence (being)." *Homoiousios* means "of like essence (being)." This term was proposed as a compromise. The modalist Sabellius had used *homoousios* to express his heretical view that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simply modes or masks of God in his various activities and manifestations. The same word, in Athanasius's thinking, expressed the truth that Christ is essentially true eternal God, of the same essence as the Father. Athanasius succeeded in persuading Constantine (or someone close to Constantine), and *homoousios* won the day at Nicaea.

The Creed of Nicaea

To express what the church's teaching ought to be, the assembled bishops adapted and expanded the baptismal creed of Caesarea. They included the word *homoousios*: "begotten, not made; *homoousios* with the Father." The Third Article of the Creed of Nicaea was succinct, to say the least: "and in the Holy Spirit." The deity of the Third Person was not in question at the time.

The Fathers at Nicaea added an anathema, directed against Arius and his teaching:

But those who say there was when he was not, and before being begotten he was not, and he was made out things that were not, or those who say that the Son of God was from a different *hypostasis* or *ousia* or a creature, or capable of change or alteration, these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

There are a number of things to note regarding the Creed of Nicaea. First and most obvious is that the Creed of Nicaea is not identical with what we call "the Nicene Creed." Then recall that *homoousios* was used in a false sense by the modalist Sabellius, although Dionysius of Rome. (bishop of that city from 259 to 269) had used the word *homoousios* in a proper sense. Because of its use by Sabellius *homoousios* was unacceptable to many in the East. On the insistence of the Emperor, the East had to acquiesce to language that was really unacceptable to it.

Notice that in the anathema clause *hypostasis* and *ousia* are used as synonyms. This caused problems until separate and more precise meanings were attached to, each of the words at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

This was a bishop's creed, not a people's creed to be used at baptism or as a simple confession of faith in worship. Once the bishops subscribed it, as they were required to do, it was not one among many local creeds that summarized the rule of faith for the church in a given locale. It was intended to be a universal creed, universally binding.

The council deposed and excommunicated Arius and three bishops, including Eusebius of Nicomedia. Although Eusebius had subscribed the creed, the Emperor exiled him with the others because he had been most outspoken in his defense of Arius and against *homoousios*.

Aftermath of Nicaea

Council and creed did not result in a final settlement of the Arian Controversy. During the ten years that followed Eusebius managed to become a friend and confidant of Constantine, influencing him against Athanasius and the Nicene doctrine. He persuaded the Emperor to depose and exile a number of bishops. Then he began a campaign of slander against Athanasius himself, who had become Patriarch of Alexandria in 328.

Among other things, Eusebius repeated rumors that Athanasius had murdered a schismatic bishop (who was soon found to be alive and well). Other unfounded charges were brought against the patriarch as he stood before a court of his peers at Tyre in 335. None of them could be substantiated. Athanasius was exiled to Trier nevertheless, because the Emperor had come to the conclusion that the hero of the Council of Nicaea was a "divisive person." Athanasius would be banished and then recalled four more times during his lifetime.

Refusing to repudiate the decision of Nicaea, Constantine nevertheless reinstated Arius as presbyter in Alexandria in 336, influenced by Eusebius of Nicomedia. Before he could be formally installed, Arius died of a massive intestinal hemorrhage. Constantine himself died the next year, leaving the Empire to two pro-Nicene sons (Constantine and Constans) and one pro-Arian, anti-Nicene son (Constantius).

The bishops of the East remained divided over the issue of Christ's eternal deity. In many cases the disagreement on the part of orthodox men was with the language used to express it. There were men who affirmed the eternal deity and equality of the Son with the Father but still rejected the word *homoousios*. There were Arians, Semi-Arians, Palaeo-Nicenes, and later a Neo-Nicene party. Four creeds from various locales were accepted as compromise documents at Antioch in 341. All of them rejected Arianism, but they all also avoided saying *homoousios*.

Under Constantine's Successors

Constantius had become emperor in the East, and he decreed Athanasius's second exile in 343. Athanasius took refuge with Bishop Julius of Rome. A Formula of Antioch, officially adopted in 344, contained an expression acceptable to all three co-emperors that now became (for a time) the confession of the church and the law of the realm: *kata panta homoios*: in all things similar. Not in essence, but only in attributes, Christ is "like God in all things." Athanasius's concern and dictum that salvation is divine work was either forgotten or dismissed as irrelevant. After the death of two brothers, Constantius became sole emperor in 351. Under his rule there were recurring cycles of persecution and toleration. Both Hosius of Cordoba, by now a very old man, and Bishop Liberius of Rome signed an Arian confession of faith under duress. Constantius again exiled Athanasius in 356, recognizing that the aging patriarch was still the key person in the controversy. Others, too, were exiled.

To please the anti-Nicene Constantius, Eunomius of Cyzicus declared that Christ is *exoukontian* (out of that which was not), *anhomian* (not like God), and *heterousian* (of another essence). This crassly Arian formulation did not become the doctrine of the church, but in 361 a Second Nicene Formula was officially adopted. It said that the Logos is *homoios* (like) the Father in attributes, but not in essence. The use of the word *homoousios* was banned and *homoiousios*, the proposed compromise at Nicaea in 325, was also rejected. Forty years later, Jerome (ca. 340-ca. 420) would say of this period that the world (the Empire) had gone to sleep and awoke to find it had become Arian.

Later in 361, Constantius died in battle against his cousin Julian, called "the Apostate." Because they no longer needed to contend against the word *homoousios* and because Julian was attempting to restore paganism in the Empire, many erstwhile "anti-Nicenes" now moved in the direction of the more orthodox churchmen.

The Neo-Nicene Party

A group of young bishops and theologians who had not been at Nicaea in 325 now arose as the Neo-Nicene Party. They included Ephraem Syrus and the three "Great Cappadocians." Basil the Great of Caesarea was a monastic, a bishop, and had been a fellow student of Emperor Julian at Athens in their younger days. Gregory Nazianzus fits the same description. Basil's younger brother, after his wife died, became a bishop at his brother's insistence. He is remembered as Gregory of Nyssa. In 362, these three men of aristocratic stock met with Athanasius and others about midway through the brief reign of Julian the Apostate. Meeting at Alexandria, they agreed that Cyril of Jerusalem's revision of the Creed of Jerusalem was a suitable expression of the faith of Nicaea.

At the meeting in Alexandria the Cappadocians made clear to Athanasius why the East had found the word *homoousios* unacceptable. Athanasius and the West understood and used the word to safeguard the deity of Christ and his unity of essence with the Father. The Cappadocians and much of the East believed in the unity of essence and the deity of Son, but they feared that the use of *homoousios* suggested or would lead to modalism. To paraphrase Athanasius, "We use the word to express the equality of Persons without denying the differentiation of Persons, in order not to surrender the unity of essence." To paraphrase the Cappadocians, "We have always believed in the unity of essence without using the word *homoousios* to express it."

Neither side had ever wanted to deny the unity or the trinity of the Godhead. The same could not, of course, be said for Arians and Semi-Arians.

Now the Cappadocians were ready to convince the rest of the East. They used the word *hypostasis* instead of *prosopon* to express the distinction of the three Persons. They used the word *ousia* to express essence and to stress that God is a single Being. Recall that the two words, *hypostasis* and *ousia*, had been used as synonyms at Nicaea in 325. Now they were used for two different concepts.

Other Problems

Full agreement among the churches was delayed by further controversies among the "Old Nicenes." The schismatic Eustathians were outside the Catholic Church because of a jurisdictional dispute. About 35 Egyptian bishops, led by Macedonius, denied the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. They regarded the Third Person as simply a superior angel. They earned for themselves the sobriquet "Pneumatomachians," those who fight against the Spirit.

In his attempt to understand and explain the incarnation Apollinaris of Laodicea denied the full humanity of Christ. First he suggested that the Logos had replaced the human soul in Christ. When it was pointed out that this diminished Christ's true humanity, he modified his position and said that the Holy Spirit had replaced the human spirit in Christ. This still, of course, diminished the Savior's true humanity. It was in this connection that Gregory Nazianzus pointed out that whatever of our humanity the divine Son has not assumed he has also not redeemed. Just as redemption is divine work, so it also took a Redeemer who is truly human to rescue the human race as our representative.

Contemporary with Apollinaris of Laodicea was Marcellus of Ancyra, who said that there is one God who expanded to three gods in carrying out the work of creation, redemption, and sanctification and then contracted again. God is one from eternity, he said, but God hasn't always been one in history.

The Council of Constantinople (381)

Athanasius died in 373 and Basil in 379. The two Gregorians lived to participate in the Council of Constantinople, the second "ecumenical council," in 381. Emperors Theodosius and Gratian, the first emperors to discard the title "Pontifex Maximus," convoked an Eastern synod. There were no Western bishops present because all the controversies involved only the Eastern Church. The Emperors expected the synod to address the errors of Apollinaris, Marcellus, and the Pneumatomachians. They also wanted the assembled bishops to reaffirm the faith of Nicaea. This was done. Many older and newer heresies were condemned and their proponents or adherents were anathematized. The Holy Spirit was confessed as *homoousios* with the Father and the Son.

The *Symbolum Constantinopolitanum*, our Nicene Creed, was not drafted at the Council of Constantinople. It existed prior to the council, based on Cyril's revision of the Creed of Jerusalem, which the neoNicenes and Athanasius had agreed upon at Alexandria in 362. It is almost verbatim the creed formulated by Epiphanius, of Salamis for his churches in 374. The symbol uses the word *hypostasis* in the sense of person, not as another word for essence or being. It uses *ousia* in the sense of essence or being.

Two other items of interest and importance should be mentioned. First, never during the Trinitarian Controversy did anyone quote 1 John 5:7, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word

and the Holy Spirit" (NIV). No one knew the verse, because it is a very late reading. Second, the confession did not say concerning the Holy Spirit that he "proceeds from the Father and the Son," There was no *filioque*.

Postscript

Arianism in high places died out in the Empire with the death of the dowager Empress Justina in 388. In 395, Theodosius issued a decree that declared the faith of Nicaea to be the catholic faith, with no other religion having legal status in the Empire. Only Trinitarian Christianity had standing in law. Outside the Empire, Arianism continued among Germanic tribes that had been evangelized by Arian bishops and missionaries. It survives today in Unitarianism, in the cult of Jehovah's Witness, and in mainline Protestant churches that remain officially Trinitarian.

It took another 70 years of controversy and conflict before the bishops could formulate a satisfactory confession to express the relationship of the divine and human in the Person of Jesus Christ. Even after the Council of Chalcedon (451) and its definition of faith, controversy continued, resulting in the disintegration of that united and unifying church that Constantine had tried to preserve when he convoked the first council. There are still Nestorian and Monophysite Christians today, not satisfied with the "one Person, two natures" doctrine of *The Definition of the Faith of Chalcedon*.

Athanasius was a very short man and a Copt. His enemies regularly referred to him as "the black dwarf." He demonstrated, however, that he was a very big man. Not only through many years of struggle and five exiles, but especially in his conversations with the Cappadocians at Alexandria in 362, his greatness was evident. Not by laxity or in what we today would call a "unionistic" spirit, but by his willingness to stand in other men's shoes and listen to younger orthodox theologians, he helped overcome a problem in semantics. He saw that the Neo-Nicenes were in fact orthodox in their doctrine of the Trinity. The Cappadocians demonstrated their greatness in making this clear to him.

J. P. Koehler reminds us in his *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* that an important lesson from this period of controversy and the outcome is that we must try to understand other Christians as they want to be understood. It is an arduous task to find just the right words to express the truth while avoiding false or ambiguous expressions, but always a necessary undertaking.

4. Monasticism: Anthony, Basil, and Benedict

Although Anthony of Thebes is sometimes referred to as the first Christian monk, there were catholic Christians living in isolation as early as the late second century. Then as now, it was difficult to live the Christian life in a worldly society. Not to escape persecution but to escape from the corruption and materialism of heathen society certain earnest believers chose to live a life of meditation and prayer in some uninhabited place. Some of them were also disappointed by the worldliness of their fellow Christians.

Monasticism began as a lay movement. Obviously, ministers of the church can not live in isolation. The first hermits seem to have appeared in Egypt, at Leontopolis, not far from Alexandria. There were also reports that located the earliest hermits on the shores of the Red Sea, at least some of them fugitives from persecution. These zealous Christians were called anchorites, from the Greek *anachoreo*, "I separate (myself)." They were also called monks, from the Greek *monochomai*, "I keep myself alone." They were also called eremites or hermits, from the Greek *eremites*, "desert dweller."

Anthony of Thebes (ca. 251-ca. 350)

Not the first monk, but the monk who had Athanasius for his biographer, was Anthony of Thebes. He was born in Memphis of well-to-do parents. His parents died when he was about 18, leaving him 300 acres of rich farmland. In the church service one Sunday he took one sentence of the Gospel reading in a very personal and dramatic way: "Sell all and give it to the poor." Anthony did that, except for setting aside a sum of money

for the support of his younger sister. Later, he heard Jesus' words, "Take no thought for tomorrow," and also gave his sister's portion away. He placed her in the care of a group of virgins who were living in community.

Anthony retreated to a solitary life in the desert. That did not mean he never had contact with other human beings. Athanasius tells us that Anthony visited other devout men in order to be inspired and instructed by their devotion, zeal, and self-denial. Deacons as well as lay people came to him for advice, and he was willing to learn from them as well as teach them. Because sinners sometimes went to the holy men in the desert to confess and to seek absolution, there was often tension between monks and clergy. Athanasius tells us in his *Life of Anthony* that the gracious and courteous hermit always deferred to the priests and bishops in such matters. In time of persecution he entered Alexandria to encourage the faithful and to intercede for them with the authorities. He was never harmed. Late in life, he made common cause with Athanasius in the struggle against Arianism.

Athanasius's biography of Anthony came to be used as a kind of recruiting pamphlet for the monastic life. That was most likely the author's intention in writing. To some who read the book the monastic life seemed so desirable that many monastic communities had to turn recruits away. Some postulants arrived uninstructed and not baptized.

Further Developments

Once government persecution ended there were no longer any martyrs. The idea took hold in the monastic movement that leaving all to live a life of deprivation constituted a new form of martyrdom. Since the time of Ignatius of Antioch (martyred in 110), martyrdom had been regarded as a "second baptism," a guarantee of eternal life. Thomas Aquinas did not invent the notion, "A monastic vow is equal to baptism," but he gave it respectability in *Summa Theologica*, Part II, q. 198, a. 3 ad 3.

Some hermits conceived the idea of joining in a small community that they called a *laura*, literally a necklace. A number of hermits occupied their individual huts or caves in a circle or cluster but spent some of their time in joint activity. Some historians credit Hilarion with founding the first monastic community, in Palestine around 315. That may be true, but it is certain that about 322, Pachomius combined nine *laurae* into one larger community at Tabenna, on the Nile River near Thebes. Pachomius drew up a rule for cenobitic living. The word derives from the Greek *koinos bios*, common life, living in community. The idea caught on, and during Pachomius's lifetime there were 3,000 men living in communities such as his. By the year 420, there were 8,300, including 1,300 at Tabenna. Pachomius's sister Mary was the founder of the first known nunnery, a cenobitic community for women.

While many individual Christians were drawn to or at least admired the monks and nuns, the reaction of the institutional church was mixed at best. Local pastors were not pleased with the loss of some of their most zealous and conscientious laity. Bishops resented the fact that they had no control over those who departed for the desert. They came to regard the monks as a rival force.

The government raised objections to the monastic movement for similar reasons. It was aware that many upright citizens were removing themselves from service to the larger society.

In addition to the important work of defining the relationship of the divine and human in Christ, the Council of Chalcedon (451) addressed the matter of monasticism. In part because monks had been vocally and sometimes violently involved in the Nestorian and Eutychian Controversies, the council limited the activity of monks to religious contemplation. It legislated that they must remain in their cloisters. It required that vows be perpetual, because some people had entered the cenobitic life in order to escape temporal responsibilities and then left when it was convenient. It required that ordained clergy who entered the monastic life after ordination must continue to function as priests, either in the monastery or in a neighboring church. It decreed that in principle only a bishop could found a monastic community, and that such communities must remain under episcopal supervision.

Basil the Great (ca. 330-379)

About 90 years before the Council of Chalcedon Basil of Caesarea Mazaca, one of the Great Cappadocians, devised a monastic rule that serves as the standard for monasticism in the Eastern Church to this day. The Rule of Basil may well have undergone some revision since the day he designed his formula for the monastic life. Nevertheless, Basil already addressed some of the concerns with which the Council of Chalcedon occupied itself. He and his rule provided an outstanding example of a monastic life that balances contemplation and service to church and society.

Basil had chosen the monastic life in order to escape the distractions and anxieties that hindered him in prayer and meditation. At the same time, he was conscious of the need for contact with fellow Christians and fellow human beings. In effect, he challenged other monks: "How can you love your neighbor if you don't have any neighbors?" He counted pagans and Jews among his "neighbors." In addition to meditation and prayer, Basil's monks carried on hospital and hospice work, agriculture, and what we today call social work. He wanted his monks to be what he called "complete Christians." He dedicated a group of buildings on his own property near Caesarea as "The New City" to house travelers, the sick, and the poor. As a very able bishop, Neo-Nicene theologian, and dispenser of charity Basil was anything but a hermit.

Benedict of Nursia

Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480-ca. 547) is the man who brought order and organization to Western monasticism. He was a layman, born to a family of means and position in central Italy. He discontinued studies in Rome and chose a hermit existence after seeing the corruption in the capital of Western Christianity. He lived for three years in a cave, in an uninhabited area. As was the case with Anthony of Thebes, his reputation as a saintly man attracted many visitors, and a group of monks in northern Italy invited him to be their abbot. Dissatisfied with his regimen, the monks tried to poison Benedict. He discovered the plot, left the monastery, and in 529 founded a new community at Monte Cassino near Naples.

The rule (*Regula Monachorum*) that Benedict prepared for his monks in 515 became the standard according to which all other monastic rules in Western Christianity are measured and with which they are compared. The most significant innovation in Benedict's approach to the monastic life is the requirement of *stabilitas loci*, "stability of place." The monk must remain where he is unless his superior sends him to another house. This was to counteract the monks whom Benedict called "gyrovagues," vagrants or wanderers. These were monks who, growing dissatisfied or restless, would move from community to community, never settling into the disciplined and structured life that is such an important feature of monasticism. He regarded them as worse than "sarabaites," independent or "private" monks.

For a thousand years or more, Benedictines themselves have understood the founder's second tenet to be *conversio morum*, "conversion of morals," or "moral conversion." The requirements of celibacy and poverty are included in this second stipulation. Recent scholarship has concluded that Benedict's choice of words was not *conversio* but *conversatio*, and that *conversatio morum* really means something like "a moral way of life." Benedict seems to be calling for a lifelong process rather than an abrupt and onetime event.

The third requirement is *obedientia*, submission to the abbot and other superiors within the community. The very first word in Benedict's Rule is "Listen." The novice, especially, must keep his mouth closed and his ears open so that he can gain knowledge and wisdom from the Lord's representatives. On the other hand, even the most junior members of the community are expected to join in discussion when important decisions are to be made.

One notable aspect of the Benedictine life is that working with one's hands is not something only slaves and peasants do. Like prayer and worship, it is regarded as service to God. The Benedictine community was to be self-contained and self-sufficient and that required work. In addition to keeping the hours of worship and reading spiritual matter, Benedictine monks occupied themselves with agriculture, housekeeping, crafts, hospitality, and almsgiving. Although Benedict renounced classical education when he left Rome in disgust and had no intention of establishing schools, the Benedictine educational enterprise began when children were left at

the door as "oblates." By no means were all of these children sincere offerings to God, but the monks accepted responsibility for teaching them.

The first archbishop of Canterbury was the Benedictine Augustine, ordained in 598. From Britain Anglo-Saxon Benedictine monks, including Winfrid (Boniface, ca. 675-754), went as missionaries to their Germanic cousins on the Continent. Gregory I, who sent Augustine to Britain, was the first Benedictine to become pope. Forty-nine other members of the Order of Saint Benedict have worn the papal crown. With their practical work ethic, their discipline, and their mission zeal, the Benedictines played a considerable role in civilizing Europe. John Henry Cardinal Newman commented in the early 19th century that in those centuries those who had forsaken the world served it best. The earliest known instance of women using the Benedictine Rule occurred around 640.

Monasticism Briefly Evaluated

Martin of Tours (ca. 316-November 11, 397) concentrated on evangelizing the rural population of Gaul and trained missionary monks to expand and continue his work. From his time until another monk named Martin sent forth the gospel from Wittenberg, virtually every positive accomplishment or development in the Western Church and in Western civilization is traceable to men and women who had taken monastic vows, or to people who had learned from them.

The Venerable Bede (ca. 673-735) wrote five volumes of the Ecclesiastical History of England, documenting and interpreting the story of Christianity on the island from the time of Roman occupation to 731. The mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), remembered for her poetry and devotional songs, classified 213 herbs for medical use in her *Causes and Cures*. The early thirteenth century saw the rise of the two greatest mendicant orders, the Franciscans to preach repentance and hear confessions and the Dominicans to counter heresies and teach in universities.

Perhaps the greatest service rendered by monks during all that time was the preservation, copying, and studying of Holy Scripture. (Copying the entire Bible was about one year's work for a diligent monk.) Jerome (ca. 347-420), working on the basis of the original languages, produced the Vulgate. Besides writing a history of the Ostrogoths' rule in Italy and developing a curriculum for monastery education, the erstwhile Roman statesman Cassiodorus (ca. 440-532) established a scriptorium where his monks copied the Scriptures and many of the classics. Like Jerome before him, he wrote biblical commentaries. Especially in his earliest lecture, Martin Luther drew heavily on the Old Testament commentaries of Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1340).

Despite their many positive contributions, it must be said that from the beginning the spirit of monasticism was in conflict with the spirit of the gospel at several key points. Monasticism fostered work-righteousness. The church never officially declared that virginity was better than the married state. Inevitably, however, ordinary people and monks deduced that special holiness and higher rewards must follow from the life of greater devotion. It tended toward legalism, as evidenced by the fact that many of these people could not endure living with their fellow Christians. Monks tended to be anti-material. That is, they not only avoided luxury and devotion to material things but, influenced by various philosophies and pagan religions, they also despised the body itself as a prison of the soul. The monastic life might be characterized as following the required steps of penance at a more intense level: contrition in the heart, confession from the mouth, and satisfaction in works.

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