

Church History I

(Early Church to Scholasticism)

Week 4 – Theology, Augustine, and the Fall of Rome

Introduction: This time frame of History addresses a time of great names, significant needs, and great changes in the empire. To fully understand what is going on, the political and theological landscape must be thoroughly viewed to see how all the pieces fit. From here on out, the story gets bigger and possibly more intricate.

I. The Difficulties of the Roman World

- A. Although Constantine was a wonderful emperor for the empowerment of Christianity, this trend did not continue well.
- B. When Constantine died, he split the empire among his three sons, which created weak treaties and a split kingdom.
- C. Eventually, Constantine's son Constantius II (337-361) gained the lion's share of power and ruled, strengthening and empowering the Arian cause.¹ **PTQ**
 - 1. **325 – Nicaea:** Nicene Creed (*homoousios* affirmed).
 - 2. **327 – Antioch:** Athanasius condemned. (For false nonchurch related items under Constantine)
 - 3. **341 – Antioch (Dedication Council):** Semi-Arian creed (*homoiousios*).
 - 4. **343 – Sardica:** West supports Athanasius; East rejects.
 - 5. **351 – Sirmium I:** Condemnation of Photinus.
 - 6. **357 – Sirmium II:** “Blasphemy of Sirmium,” rejects both *homoousios* and *homoiousios*.
 - 7. **358 – Sirmium III:** Attempt at compromise.
 - 8. **359 – Ariminum (West) & Seleucia (East):** Homoian creeds prevails. **PTQ**
 - Jerome is quoted as saying: “The whole world groaned and was astonished to find itself Arian.”² **PTQ**
- D. After Constantius was dead, the following Emperor was Julian the Apostate.
 - 1. Julian although beginning in the Christian religion (Though likely really an Arian) apostatized at 20 and decided to turn back to the old pagan religion.
 - 2. Julian inflicted damage on the churches by...³ **PTQ**
 - i. He recalled bishops from Exile
 - ii. Taxes were levied on Christians
 - iii. Civil liberties and meeting places were removed
 - iv. Citizenship was stripped and they could not hold public office
 - v. Their kids were no longer allowed to attend public school.
- E. The co-reigning of Valentinian and Valens

¹ William J. Bennett, [*Tried by Fire: The Story of Christianity's First Thousand Years*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 158-162.

² Ibid., 162.

³ Ibid., 163.

1. Valentinian, although he was a Nicene believing Christian decided to remove himself from interacting as much with the faith.
 - i. "I am but one of the laity..."⁴ **PTQ**
2. Valens had other plans
 - i. Valens, however, was a committed Arian and persecuted the church again, specifically in the East.
 - ii. Valens killed church leaders and interrupted worship of churches early and often.
- F. After Valens came Theodosius I (380-395)
 1. Theodosius was a good Nicene emperor and, with co-emperors, put the Nicene faith back into power, outlawing any non-trinitarian faith. (Edict of Thessalonica) **PTQ**
 2. Held the Council of Constantinople in 381.
 3. Theodosius, at times, made decisions that got him in trouble with the Bishops, namely Ambrose.
 4. Divided the empire at his death.
- G. Then Arcadius (395-408) in the East and Honorius (395-423) in the West.
 1. During this time in the West, Rome was sacked by barbarians (Visigoths) under Alaric. (410) **PTQ**
 2. This caused a lot of questions in people's minds about the end of the world and whether Christianity was a mistake for the empire.
- H. Theodosius II (408-450) in the East and Valentinian III (424-455) in the West
 1. During this time came the workings for two ecumenical councils.
 2. Rome suffered two separate invasion forces. Those of Attila the Hun (452), who was talked down, and the Vandals who pillaged for 2 weeks (455). (Pope) Leo I mediated. **PTQ**
 3. In these difficulties, the West came to rely more on the Bishop of Rome than on the Emperor.
- I. Marcian in the east (450-457), a quick succession of emperors in the west for nearly 20 years.
 1. Marcian Consolidated imperial backing for Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the East.
- J. Leo I in the East 457-474, And Augustus Romulus in the West 475-476
 1. In the East, emperors continued to head up and call Councils.
 2. Leo I strengthened the East's independence, while the West spiraled into decline.
 3. Romulus was the last emperor in the West. Deposed by Odoacer, marking the end of the Western Roman Empire (476).
 4. After this, the bishop of Rome increasingly became the central figure of authority in the West, setting the stage for the papacy's medieval role. **PTQ**
- K. This essentially marked the end of the Roman Empire and it became the beginning of the Germanic barbarians led west and the Byzantine Empire of the East.
 1. The Franks and Burgundians lived in France,
 2. England held the Angles, Saxons, and others.
 3. The western empire was full of Huns, Lombards, Vandals, and more.'
 4. The Vandals under Gaiseric had already taken North Africa in 429 and were responsible for the 455 sack of Rome.⁵ **PTQ**
 - The crime of Vandalism comes from its name. **PTQ**

II. The Fight for Orthodoxy

⁴ Bennett, *Tried by Fire*, 162.

⁵ Joseph Early, *A History of Christianity: An Introductory Survey* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2015)

A. Theological difficulties

1. The Fight for orthodoxy continued as we addressed previously against Arianism.
2. The church also found itself fighting about the Deity of the Holy Spirit. – Macedonianism argued that The Holy Spirit was a Created being. **PTQ**
3. One of the other primary debates in this time dealt with how to define Christ in his dual natures.⁶
 - i. This definition aimed to counter two extremes: **PTQ**
 - a) the Alexandrian emphasis on Christ's unity (leaning towards his deity)
 - b) the Antiochene focus on his two natures (emphasizing his humanity)
 - ii. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD attempted to balance these views, affirming Christ as both fully divine and fully human, with two distinct natures united in one person
4. Pelagianism - The monk (Pelagius) denied that human sin is inherited from Adam. Each person, he said, is free to act righteously or sinfully. Moreover, death is not a consequence of Adam's disobedience. Adam, indeed, introduced sin into the world, but only by his corrupting example. There is no direct connection between his sin and the moral condition of each individual. Practically every member of the human race has sinned, but it is possible not to sin, and some people have in fact lived without sin. God predestinates no one, taught Pelagius, except in the sense that he foresees who will believe and who will reject his gracious influences. His forgiveness comes to all who exercise "faith alone," but, once forgiven, each person has the power to live pleasing to God. His idea of the Christian life was practically the Stoic conception of ascetic self-control.⁷ **PTQ**
5. Donatists – "Augustine rejected the Donatists' view of a pure church. Until the day of judgment, he said, the church must be a mixed multitude...Augustine also set forth a different understanding of the sacraments. The Donatists argued that the validity of the sacrament depends on the moral standing of the minister. Augustine said no, the sacrament's validity rests not in the minister but in Christ...Thus Augustine added his considerable influence to the priestly (sacerdotal) view of the church that reached such unfortunate extremes in medieval Catholicism."⁸
 - Interestingly according to Augustine's own theology he didn't believe the eucharist to be anything more than a symbol. As is shown by Dr. Glenn Peoples, in showing that even some of his statements say something is the body and blood of Jesus. is an observance of the sign of Christ and not him itself.⁹ **PTQ**

B. Heroes of the faith ¹⁰

⁶ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 70.

⁷ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, ed. Marshall Shelley, 5th Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 164–165.

⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁹ Glenn Peoples, "Capturing Christianity Got This Wrong! The Church Fathers on the Eucharist," YouTube, January 18, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqQQtCtKrG8&t=2148s>.

¹⁰ Bennett, *Tried by Fire*, 394–405.

1. **Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397)**: Asserted church's independence from imperial control, famously forcing Emperor Theodosius to do public penance for the massacre at Thessalonica (390). **PTQ**
2. **Jerome (347–420)**: Scholar and ascetic; produced the **Latin Vulgate Bible**, the standard Scripture of the West. Advocated monasticism and scriptural study. **PTQ**
3. **Augustine of Hippo (354–430)**: One of the most influential theologians. Writings such as *Confessions* and *The City of God* responded to Rome's being sacked (410) and combated Pelagian and Donatist heresies. His doctrines of grace, church, and history shaped medieval Christianity.
 - Constantine noted something that was important to note for the Romans and would be important for us as well. He showed that "Christians are committed to the eternal city but it is not Rome. Our commitment is to Jesus Christ and his church."¹¹
4. **Leo I "the Great" (440–461)**: First pope to claim strong universal authority. His "Tome" helped define Christology at Chalcedon (451). Politically, he negotiated with Attila and the Vandals, reinforcing the papacy's role as protector of Rome.
5. **Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373)**: Defender of Nicene orthodoxy against Arianism. Exiled multiple times but shaped the outcome of the Arian controversy.
6. **Basil the Great (330–379)**: Bishop of Caesarea; organizer of monastic life, defender of Nicene faith, and advocate for care of the poor through hospital-like institutions.
7. **Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390)**: Brilliant orator ("the Theologian"); defended Trinitarian orthodoxy at Constantinople (381).
8. **Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395)**: Basil's brother; deep thinker on the Trinity, the infinite nature of God, and spiritual progress.
 - Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil the Great are those who are considered the Cappadocian fathers. **PTQ**
9. **John Chrysostom (347–407)**: Renowned preacher ("Golden Mouth"); Archbishop of Constantinople. Challenged imperial luxury and corruption, leading to exile. His sermons influenced Eastern and Western preaching traditions.
- C. Ecumenical Councils and their pronouncements
 1. The main councils during this time frame would include **PTQ**
 - i. Nicaea 325
 - ii. Constantinople 381
 - iii. Ephesus 431
 - iv. Chalcedon 451
 2. Descriptions of these can be found in the chart on the final page.

III. The Division of East and West

A. Theological Disputes **PTQ**

1. **Arian controversy (4th century)**: Both East and West condemned Arianism at Nicaea (325), but the East saw decades of pro-Arian or semi-Arian councils before Constantinople (381). This made the West suspicious of Eastern orthodoxy.
2. **Christological controversies**:
 - i. Nestorianism (condemned at Ephesus, 431).
 - ii. Monophysitism (condemned at Chalcedon, 451).

¹¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *In the Year of Our Lord: Reflections on Twenty Centuries of Church History* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2018), 52.

- iii. Eastern bishops often split from Roman definitions, while Rome insisted on clear Christological boundaries (e.g., *Tome of Leo* at Chalcedon).
- B. Ecclesiastical Authority PTQ**
 - 1. **Papal Primacy vs. Collegiality:**
 - i. Western church (Rome) increasingly claimed universal authority based on Peter's primacy.
 - ii. Eastern bishops (especially Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch) emphasized conciliar decision-making and resisted Rome's claims.
 - 2. **Council of Chalcedon (451):** Canon 28 elevated **Constantinople as "New Rome"**, angering Rome, which saw this as diminishing Petrine primacy.
- C. Political Divisions PTQ**
 - 1. **395:** Permanent division of the empire after Theodosius I — Arcadius in the East (Constantinople) and Honorius in the West (Ravenna).
 - 2. East grew wealthier, more urbanized, and stable; West grew poorer, vulnerable to invasions, and increasingly dependent on the church for leadership.
 - 3. Fall of Rome (476) left the West with no emperor, while the East (Byzantine Empire) continued to function, with emperors exerting authority over the church (caesaropapism).
- D. Cultural and Linguistic Differences PTQ**
 - 1. **Language divide:** Latin dominated in the West; Greek in the East. This hindered communication and theological nuance.
 - 2. **Cultural mindset:**
 - i. West emphasized legal, organizational, and practical aspects of faith (e.g., Augustine's doctrines of sin, grace, and the City of God).
 - ii. East emphasized mystical theology and speculative reflection (e.g., Cappadocian Fathers, emphasis on theosis).
- E. Role of Key Leaders PTQ**
 - 1. **Ambrose of Milan (d. 397):** Asserted church's independence from imperial control — a Western emphasis.
 - 2. **Augustine (d. 430):** Shaped Western views on sin, grace, and the church's role in history, less influential in the East.
 - 3. **Gregory the Great (590–604):** Strengthened papal leadership in the West while Eastern emperors controlled church affairs in Constantinople.
- F. Different Responses to Crisis PTQ**
 - 1. **West:** Invasions by Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths weakened imperial power, but strengthened the papacy and monastic networks as stabilizing forces.
 - 2. **East:** Byzantium maintained stronger imperial authority and tied church more tightly to the emperor (caesaropapism), producing tension with Rome's independent claims.

IV. **Developments in the Church.**

- A. Nicene Christianity became the state religion of Rome. (380)
- B. The Bible was canonized in 397 at the Council of Carthage (Previously noted in 367 under Athanasius)
- C. The nature of Christ (431 and 451), the Trinity (325), and the Holy Spirit (381) were established.
- D. The church became more and more structured towards the modern catholic church with bishops certain of which maintaining larger power especially those over bigger or important areas. (Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople)

- E. The pope picked up the slack of the emperor, becoming to some degree the pontifex maximus.
- F. The most current view of The Bishop of Rome as the Pope was not yet seen and really became well established under Gregory the Great in (590-604).

Conclusion: Before we delve into the Christian Middle Ages, we must address something that already exists in History, but which has had a lasting impact and continues to be present even in the modern day: Monasticism and Missions

Major Ancient Church Doctrinal Controversies				
CONTROVERSY	MAJOR HERETICAL LEADERS	MAJOR ORTHODOX LEADERS	RELEVANT COUNCILS	ACCEPTED CONCLUSIONS
TRINITARIAN CONTROVERSY	Arius Eusebius of Nicomedia	Athanasius Hosius Basil the Great Gregory of Nyssa Gregory of Nazianzus Augustine of Hippo	Nicea (325) Constantinople (381)	Nicene Creed-Christ is “of the same substance with the Father.” Father, Son, and Spirit are “coeternal, consubstantial, and coequal.”
CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY	Apollinarius Nestorius Eutyches	Cyril of Alexandria Theodoret Leo I	Constantinople (381) Ephesus (431) Ephesus (“Robber Synod”) (449) Chalcedon (451)	Chalcedonian Definition-Christ is “one person in two natures, unmixed, unchanged, undivided, inseparable.” Mary is “the Mother of God.”
DONATIST CONTROVERSY	Donatus	Caecilian Augustine of Hippo	Arles (314)	“Outside the church there is no salvation.”
PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY	Pelagius Coelestius John Cassian Caesarius of Arles	Augustine of Hippo Jerome	Ephesus (431) Orange (529)	Semi-Augustinianism; sacramental grace enables people to overcome their innate sinfulness.

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Ancient Church Trinitarian Heresies		
HERESY	MAJOR PROPONENTS	SUMMARY

¹² Robert C. Walton, [*Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*](#), Revised Edition, ZondervanCharts (Zondervan, 2018), 24.

MONARCHIANISM (Adoptionism)	Theodotus of Byzantium Paul of Samosata	Jesus became Christ at his baptism, was adopted by the Father after his death.
SABELLIANISM (Modalism, Patripassionism)	Sabellius Praxeus	One God reveals himself in three ways, or modes, at different times.
ARIANISM	Arius Eusebius of Nicomedia Eudoxius Eunomius	Christ is the first created being.
SEMI-ARIANISM (Eusebianism)	Basil of Ancyra Gregory of Laodicea	Christ is “of similar essence” with the Father, but is subordinate to him.
MACEDONIANISM (Pneumatomachism)	Macedonius	The Holy Spirit is a created being. ¹³

The Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church

LOCATION	DATE	EMPEROR	KEY PEOPLE	MAJOR OUTCOMES
NICEA	325	Constantine	Arius Alexander Eusebius of Nicomedia Eusebius of Caesarea Hosius Athanasius	Declared Son <i>homoousios</i> (coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal) with Father. Condemned Arius. Drafted original form of Nicene Creed.
CONSTANTINOPLE	381	Theodosius	Meletius Gregory of Nazianzus Gregory of Nyssa	Confirmed results of Council of Nicea. Produced revised Nicene Creed. Ended Trinitarian controversy. Affirmed deity of Holy Spirit. Condemned Apollinarianism.
EPHESUS	431	Theodosius II	Cyril Nestorius	Declared Nestorianism heretical. Accepted by implication Alexandrian Christology.

¹³ Walton, [*Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*](#), 25.

				Condemned Pelagius.
CHALCEDON	451	Marcian	Leo I Dioscurus Eutyches	Declared Christ's two natures "unmixed, unchanged, undivided, inseparable." Condemned Eutychianism.
CONSTANTINOPLE	553	Justinian	Eutychius	Condemned "Three Chapters" to gain support of Monophysites. Affirmed Cyrillian interpretation of Chalcedon.
CONSTANTINOPLE	680–681	Constantine IV		Rejected Monothelitism. Condemned Pope Honorius (d.638) as heretical.
NICEA	787	Constantine VI		Declared veneration of icons and statues legitimate.

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¹⁴ Walton, [*Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*](#), 28.