**Church History**

**Lesson Two – The Imperial Church Era (300 AD – 600 AD)**

1. The era begins:
   1. **Persecution** is still ongoing – However, even many Romans were starting to lose interest. Christians had died bravely and even with a desire for martyrdom.
   2. The **office of bishop** is becoming more pronounced
   3. **The NT canon** is recognized and accepted
2. **The Battle of Milvian Bridge and Aftermath** (Oct 312)
   1. Constantine’s and his rival Maxentius were battling for control of Roman Empire.
   2. Before the battle, Constantine had a vision of the Christian cross with the words, “by this sign conquer.” He ordered the “labrum” displayed on Roman shields – which was the first two Greek letters of “Christ.” ☧
   3. Constantine wins and converts to Christianity, but isn’t baptized until near this death.
   4. Constantine’s conversion to Christianity puts a number of things in motion:
      1. Persecution ends with the Edict of Milan (313AD).
      2. Christianity becomes popular
      3. Churches were tax exempt
      4. Poor were helped
      5. Clergy were given military exemption
      6. Constantine builds basilicas for the church
      7. Soon, bishops are given some political power
      8. Constantine influence may have introduced a number of different ideas like, veneration of Mary, and prayers to the Saints, statutes and icons.
      9. Orthodoxy became defended by the state
      10. Monastic Christianity became increasingly popular. This is largely due to the fact that Christians were discontent with the increasingly institutional church and because they could no longer be martyrs.
3. **Monastic Christianity** began to become more popular because:
   1. Martyrdom was no longer a possibility
   2. Christians were becoming discontent with the institutional church.
   3. The word “monk” or “monastic” comes from a Greek word meaning “solitude.” The word “hermit” comes from the Greek word meaning “desert.” These monks would soon become the next generation of heroes.
      1. Anthony - (b. ~261-~d. 365) is believed to be the father of the monastic movement. According to Athanasius he read the story of the rich young ruler and felt compelled to sell his belonging and move to the desert – where he taught be someone who was already living the life. Reportedly, he was constantly harassed by demons and by people who sought him
      2. Benedict - (b.480 – c. 547): At age 20 went to live as a hermit in a cave. His extreme asceticism drew fame to him and he gathered some disciples.
      * He founded a monastery in Cassino, Italy
      * Unlike Pachomius, he allowed two cooked meals per day and a little wine, a bed and a pillow.
      * His followers met eight times each day for prayer and study
      * They became excellent copiests
      * His ideas became known as Benedicts Rule
4. **The Council of Nicaea** (325)
   1. Arius (250 ? AD – 336 AD) – was a presbyter from Alexandria in 318. He began to teach that Jesus was a created being and not God in the same sense that the Father was God.
   2. Arius’ teachings were popular and set some of them to music. We don’t have his writings. His teaching began to tear up the empire.
   3. Example: Church History, page 99
   4. Constantine called for the Council to fix the issue and paid for bishops to gather in Nicaea. In attendance were bishops who bore scars from persecution:
      1. Paphnutius of Thebes: This bishop from Egypt had his right eye removed and his hamstrings cut.
      2. Potamon of Heraclea: This attendee had been crippled as a result of torture.
      3. Paul of Neocaesarea: He bore scars on his hands from being tortured with red-hot pokers.
   5. It is noteworthy that Constantine did not call the Bishop of Rome to decide the issue. In 1870, at Vatican 1, the Roman Church declared that the pontiff of Rome was given complete jurisdiction of the church “as it has ever been understood by the Catholic Church.” There is no ante-Nicaean Father who recorded his believe that the bishop of Rome had complete jurisdiction.
   6. Athanasius of Alexandria was a young man who became a champion at the Council.
   7. The Council decided in favor of the Trinity and created The Nicaean Creed:
5. In 380 AD, Christianity became the state religion in Rome. At the close of the century, Christians were known to attack pagan temples and even kill pagan worshippers.
6. This era produced some influential Christian writers in the West and in the East. In the West, theologians tended to lean toward an allegorical approach to Scripture, while the theologians in the East used a more literal approach. Here are a few:
   1. Western Theologians:
      1. **Jerome** - (345-420): One of the greatest Western Theologians
      * Baptized at age 19 he studied in Rome and excelled at language
      * He encouraged celibacy and asceticism
      * To deal with sexual urges he threw himself into his studies and translated the Bible into Latin (Vulgate), and wrote commentaries for nearly every book of the Bible.
      * If he didn’t understand a passage he generally used the allegorical approach to interpret it
      * Updated Eusebius’ history of the church by filling in from 325 - 378
      1. **Ambrose** - (374-397): known was the father of hymnody
         * Wrote extensive Bible commentaries
         * Introduced to the Western church the signing of the Psalms and chanting
         * It is said that when the empress Justina tried to arrest him that the soldiers came and found the church signing. They were so impressed that they joined in and didn’t arrest him.
         * Greatest contribution to the Church was the conversion of Augustine of Hippo

iii **Augustine of Hippo** - (354 -430) probably the most influential Christian writer of all time – even over Paul!

* + - Was raised by a Christian mother but lived an early sinful life
    - He was a Greek philosopher who did not check in all of his baggage when he became a Christian
    - He is popular among Roman Catholics because of his emphasis on Church Authority, Tradition, and Creeds. He is popular among Protestants because of his emphasis on salvation and God’s sovereignty
    - He came to light when he began a series of debates with Pelagius
    - Pelagius taught that man is not influenced by sin, and that he does not need help from God to become a Christian. He also taught that God does not know the future.
    - Augustine reacted by bringing to the stage what is now known as Calvinism
    - Augustine accepted infant baptism (didn’t invent it) and the Apocryphal Books that RC Church uses today
    - He began a monastic community
  1. **Eastern Theologians**
     1. This school of thought arose in the Eastern Roman Empire. These teachers emphasized a more literal understanding of scripture. This is known as the “grammatical-historical” approach. Some of these teachers were condemned by the Western Theologians – though these eastern teachers did not altogether condemn the western ones.
        + **Basil the Great** - (330-379): He was a bishop in modern-day Turkey. He was a brilliant monk who was called upon to defend the Church against the rise of Arianism
        + **Gregory of Nyssa** - ( 332-398): Brother of Basil the Great, considered one of the founders of the Eastern Orthodox Church. He was the champion of orthodoxy at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. Like his brother he attempted to show Christian philosophy as greater than Greek philosophy. His great contribution was defining what we believe about the Trinity.

**Nicaean Creed**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

*But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to altera on or change – these the Catholic Church anathematizes.*