

Lesson 8
The Early Church To
Early Reformation

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Class Schedule

- **The Ancient Church (100 – 313 A.D.)**
- 1. Historical Backgrounds and the World of the Early Church
- 2. The Church in Jerusalem and the Mission to the Gentiles
- 3. 1st & 2nd Century Conflicts with the State
- 4. Early Apologists
- 5. Defining the Faith
- 6. Christian Life

Class Outline

- The Imperial Church (313 to 476 A.D.)
- 7. The End of Persecution and Beginnings of the Imperial Church
- 8. **The New Order**
- 9. Reactions to the New Order
- 10. The Arian Controversy and the Council of Nicea

The New Order

Lesson 8

“Looking westward or eastward, looking over the whole earth, and even looking at heaven, always and everywhere I see blessed Constantine leading the same empire.”

- Eusebius of Caesarea

The New Order

The New Order

- Constantine's rule was certainly a turning point for the church. But, He did not make Christianity the official religion of the Empire.
- His sons Constantine II, Constantius, and Constans were baptized, and several of their edicts favored the church.
- At this time Christianity & paganism were generally on equal footing before the State.

Christian Dominance

- It was not until late in the co-rule of Gratian (375-383) & Theodosius (379-395) that paganism was placed at a disadvantage.
- In 382 Gratian decreed an end to governmental financial support for paganism & its priests. He ordered the alter to the goddess Victory to be removed from the Senate House.
- In 391 Theodosius outlawed pagan scarifies & ordered the temples closed or devoted to public use.
- In 392 all pagan worship, public or private, was forbidden.

Christian Reaction

- The greatest threat to ancient religions was in the manner in which overzealous bishops & mobs took these decrees as license to use force against paganism & Jews.
- The use of force against pagans & Jews were seldom punished.
- There is ample evidence of violence committed by Christians against pagans, and of pagans' resistance to the new order of things.

Impact of the New Order

- A series of imperial edicts granted the church and its leaders preference. Some still can be seen in the 21st century.
- Tax exemption of church properties
- Making it legal to bequeath property to the church
- Bishops (about 1,800 of them) & other clergy was granted exemption from taxes, military conscription, & from the labor that others were forced to devote to public works
- Bishops were granted free access to the Imperial Posts

The Less Noble Side of Man

- Privileges, prestige & power soon led to acts of arrogance & even corruption:
- Some bishops bought their position.
- Some bishops came to have judicial powers, & bribes were offered & accepted.
- While this was far from general practice it pointed to the new dangers facing the church.
- As for the laity, there is no doubt that the experience of conversion became less dramatic or faithful than it had in the earlier times. There is ample evidence of increasingly differing opinions on principles & superstitions.

Changes in Worship

- Until Constantine Christian worship had been a relatively simple affair.
- The influence of civil ceremonies and pomp influenced Christian worship. These changes was the point that which most rank & file probably saw the impact of the new order.
- Christian worship began to be influenced by imperial protocol. Incense, which was used as a sign of respect for the Emperor, began appearing in churches.
- Officiating ministers began dressing in more luxurious garments. Earlier they wore everyday close.
- Officiating ministers being to be called “priests,” in imitation of their pagan counterparts.

Changes in Worship

- The communion table became an “alter.”
- Gestures indicating respect, which normally was made before the Emperor, now became part of worship.
- In earlier times it was not customary to kneel in prayer. Children do not kneel to their father. During this time kneeling became the custom as petitioners knelt before the Emperor.

Changes in Worship

- A processional was introduced.
- Choirs were developed, partly in order to give body to the processional.
- Over time the congregation came to have a less active role in the service.

Changes in Worship

- By the 2nd century it had become customary to commemorate the anniversary of a martyr's death by celebrating communion where the martyr was buried. Now churches were built in many of those places. Some began to unearth the buried martyrs in order to place them, or part of them, under the altar as a church was being built.
- Eventually, the relics of saints & of NT times were said to have miraculous powers.
- Many church leaders tried to prevent these superstitious extremes.

Changes in Practice

- When the mother of Constantine, Empress Helena, made a trip to the Holy Land she claimed to discover the actual cross of Christ. Soon this cross was claimed to have miraculous power and pieces of wood claiming to come from it was found all over the Empire.

Changes in Practice

- People began flocking into the church in such numbers that there was little time to prepare them for baptism, & even less time to guide them in the Christian life once they were baptized.
- Many of these new converts brought with them their beliefs & customs that the earlier church would have found unacceptable.

Changes in Practice

- Constantine built the Church of Saint Irene in Constantinople.
- His mother built the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and another on the Mount of Olives.
- This policy continued under Constantine's successors. Most simply sought to perpetuate their own memory by building greater churches.
- "Basilica" was an ancient word referring to the great public, sometimes private, buildings whose main part was a great room divided lengthwise into naves by 2 or more rows of columns.

Baptism

- Near a basilica stood other buildings, the most important one of these being the baptistery.
- The baptismal pool was at the center.
- Baptism was celebrated normally by immersion, or by kneeling while large quantities of water were poured, or a combination of the two.
- A new convert was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit.
- Baptism by dabbing water was reserved for extreme conditions of poor health, deathbed or scarcity of water.
- In the middle of the baptistery a great curtain separated the room into two, one side for men & the other for women. In the 4th century one still descended into the water naked, and was given a white robe on rising from the baptistery.

Baptism

- Baptism by emersion remained the normal way of baptism until the 9th century.
- During the 9th century in the colder areas of western Europe sprinkling became an alternate form of baptism.
- In Italy baptism by immersion was continued until the 13th century.
- The Eastern churches (Greek, Russian, etc.) continued baptizing by immersion.



