

# AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

PAUL HAHN  
THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
UNIVERSITY OF ST THOMAS  
HOUSTON TX 77006

*Within centuries, subdivisions are always in this order, though not every century has all of them:*

1. cultural background and Church-state relations
2. heresies and councils
3. other internal developments
4. clergy
5. territorial organization
6. architecture
7. religious orders
8. theology
9. sacraments (baptism, reconciliation, Eucharist)
10. feast days
11. fasts
12. devotions (Mary, saints, relics, pilgrimages, liturgy of the hours, catacombs, sign of the cross)
13. arts (church furnishings, painting, sculpture, music, vestments)
14. morals of the clergy
15. morals of the laity

## 30-100

1. **prolegomena: essential first-century dates**
  - a. 4 BC: Jesus
  - b. c. AD 30: Jesus' crucifixion
  - c. c. 36: Paul converts
2. **cultural background and Church-state relations**
  - a. 64-68: Nero's persecution (only in Rome)
  - b. c. 90: distinct from Judaism, Christianity becomes a *religio illicita* (illegal religion)
3. **heresies and councils**
  - a. c. 49: the Apostolic Council (Paul and the Twelve, see Acts 15, Gal 2; also called the "Jerusalem Council") condemns the Judaizers, Jewish Christians who say Christians must obey the Mosaic Law (circumcision, dietary laws, etc.)
4. **clergy**
  - a. Peter is head of the apostles (Matt 16:18-19, John 21:15-17, etc.)
    - 1) first-century bishops of Rome are Peter, Linus, Anacletus, Clement, Evaristus (Irenaeus, c. 180, *Adversus Haereses* 3.3.3)
  - b. bishops, priests, laity (Acts 15)
    - 1) priests are farmers, tradesmen, craftsmen
  - c. deacons (Acts 7)

- d. deacons and deaconesses organize care for the poor, widows and orphans, the sick and weak, slaves and captives, strangers and travelers
- 5. **territorial organization**
  - a. 30-c. 200: a congregation is called a *paroikia* (“parish”), from *paroikos* (“neighbor,” but used by Christians to mean “sojourner”; so a congregation is a group of pilgrims on their way to heaven)
- 6. **architecture**
  - a. 30-c. 200: only house churches exist
- 7. **theology**
  - a. origin of the creed: see 1 Cor 15:3-5 (“I handed on to you ... what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve”)
- 8. **sacraments: Eucharist**
  - a. from Jewish-diaspora services, Christians adopted prayers, scripture readings, psalms, and homily; Christian hymns were added early
  - b. 30-36: the Jerusalem congregation celebrates communion daily, since the agape meal was daily (Acts 2:46, “Day by day ... they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts”)
  - c. the agape meal
    - 1) 30-c. 300: the agape meal (love feast) was donations of food; it was accompanied by prayer, psalm singing, and perhaps a homily
    - 2) “Its purpose was to foster ... harmony and to aid the poor, widows, and orphans. Relief of the poor eventually became the main purpose” (Bihlmeyer)
    - 3) bread blessed at an agape meal (called *eulogia*, not *eucharistia*) was given at the end of Mass to those not receiving communion; the Orthodox and some churches in France still do this
    - 4) 300s: the agape meal is repeatedly forbidden, because of abuses connected with it (see 1 Cor 11:20-27, “When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. <sup>21</sup>For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk”)
  - d. 30-c. 100: the sermon was in the morning; the agape meal followed by the Eucharist, in the evening
  - e. c. 100: the Eucharist switched to the morning and joined the sermon
  - f. 30-c. 350: scripture readings are consecutive (they begin where the previous day’s reading stopped and continue as far as the bishop wishes)
  - g. in cities, the bishop consecrated, then dispensed under both species, with the host put on the open right palm and all drinking from one chalice; hosts were then taken to other city churches
  - h. congregants took hosts home for daily consumption
  - i. viaticum (Latin for “provision for the journey”) for the sick and imprisoned was the host only
- 9. **feast days**
  - a. having feast days derived from Judaism: Easter and Pentecost occurred during Passover and the Feast of Weeks (“For a long time they remained the only feasts celebrated annually,” Bihlmeyer)
  - b. the Venerable Bede says “Easter” is from *Ostara*, Teutonic goddess of spring and of light
  - c. “Individual congregations commemorated the death (birthday) of their martyrs by hold-

ing divine service at the martyr's grave" (Bihlmeyer)

#### 10. fasts

- a. a strict fast on the 2 or 3 days before Easter is from the earliest Church (see Matt 9:15, "when the bridegroom is taken . . . , then they will fast")
- b. Jews fasted Monday and Thursday; Christians fasted Wednesday and Friday till 3 P.M., followed by the liturgy of the word (in some places) or the full Mass (in others)

#### 11. morals of the laity

- a. disallowed professions: painter, sculptor, actor, schoolteacher (pagan myths had to be taught), gladiator, temple watchman, magician, soothsayer; some added politician, soldier

### 100s

#### 1. cultural background and Church-state relations

- a. 112: Trajan's rescript permits persecutions of individual Christians
- b. growth of Christianity:
  - 1) 100: ½ million
  - 2) 200: 2 million
  - 3) 300: 5 million (out of 50 million)
  - 4) 450: 10 million

#### 2. heresies and councils

- a. c. 100s-400s: Ebionites
  - 1) probably the Judaizers evolved into the Ebionites
  - 2) c. 140: Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 47) distinguishes two types
    - a) those who observe the Mosaic Law but do not require others to do so
    - b) those who hold that everyone must observe the Mosaic Law
  - 3) 172: first use of the word "Ebionites" (from Aramaic *ebion*, for "poor man")
  - 4) c. 180: Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* 1.26.2) describes the Ebionites
    - a) they observe the Mosaic Law
    - b) they deny the virgin birth and Christ's divinity
    - c) they say that Paul was an apostate
    - d) they use only the gospel of Matthew
  - 5) c. 400s: small communities still exist in Syria and Palestine, but soon disappear
- b. Gnosticism: knowledge, not faith, saves; matter is evil; Christ gave secret revelations; docetism (*dokein*, to seem: Jesus only appeared to be human, his human appearance was a product of mass hallucination)
- c. c. 170: Montanism: Montanus says he is the Holy Spirit; the prophetesses Prisca and Maximilla accompany him; they proclaim new revelations (the second coming will be soon, in Phrygia); they espouse rigorism (a demanding, ascetic morality)
- d. 180: Theodotus founds adoptionism (also called "dynamic monarchianism," a misnomer)
  - 1) though born of a virgin, Jesus was just a man
  - 2) at Jesus' baptism the Christ (Theodotus' name for the Holy Spirit) came upon him (but this did not make him God)
  - 3) 190s: Victor I (189-198) excommunicates Theodotus
  - 4) c. 250: never very numerous, the sect dies out
- e. quartodeciman ("14th") controversy

- 1) in the east, Easter is always the 14 day of the Jewish month *Nisan*; in the west, it is the Sunday after the first new moon after March 20
  - 2) 196: Pope Victor demands that the east adopt western practice
  - 3) 200s: the east gradually submits (today, if the date is not after Passover, the Orthodox churches delay Easter, sometimes by as much as a month)
3. **clergy**
    - a. c. 170: bishops in Asia Minor meet regularly (the beginning of church councils/synods)
  4. **theology**
    - a. the biblical canon develops
    - b. Apostolic Fathers (*Didache*, *1 Clement*, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Letter to Diognetus*, Papias, the *Shepherd of Hermas*)
    - c. Apologists (three Athenians: Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras; also Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Melito of Sardis, Minucius Felix)
    - d. major early theologians: the Africans Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen; Irenaeus of Lyons
  5. **sacraments: baptism**
    - a. 30-200: no catechumenate; baptism is right after profession of faith (see Acts 2:41, “those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added”)
    - b. c. 150: a 2-3 year catechumenate arises (*katēkein*, teach orally); it dies out in the 400s
    - c. c. 150: Justin is first to mention the *disciplina arcana* (discipline of the secret): catechumens must withdraw after the homily; instruction about sacraments is only after the catechumenate (post-baptismal instructions are called “mystagogical catecheses” in the east)
    - d. 30-300: baptisms are on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost (except for necessity), by triple immersion
      - 1) the *Didache* 7.1 specifies “living” (i.e., flowing) water
      - 2) baptisms are in springs, rivers, or the sea
    - e. 300s on: baptisms are in small circular buildings specifically for baptisms (baptisteries); the floor had a centered pool for immersion, replaced after 400 (when infant baptisms are usual) by our font
    - f. c. 200: sponsors for baptismal candidates are first mentioned (Tertullian)
    - g. c. 200: acts added before baptism are: signing with the cross, renunciation of Satan, anointing with exorcism, profession of faith, baptismal vows, anointing with the “oil of thanksgiving”
    - h. c. 200: acts added after baptism are: confirmation, communion, eating milk and honey (the food of newborns); wearing the white robe for eight days
    - i. c. 200: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Origen defend infant baptism as an apostolic tradition; but penances are so severe that most children are baptized as adults or near death (e.g., Constantine)
    - j. c. 200: Tertullian mentions baptism of blood
    - k. c. 250: bestowing a special Christian name in baptism becomes a custom
  6. **sacraments: reconciliation**
    - a. the entire process was called *exomologēsis*, “confession”
    - b. the three mortal sins were apostasy or idolatry, murder, and fornication or adultery
    - c. the early Church’s *antiqua severitas* (ancient severity)
      - 1) absolution was available only once after baptism (for some bishops, not even once)

- 2) public offenses were confessed publicly, private offenses were confessed to a bishop or priest
- 3) but penance was always public: penitents had to pray, fast, give alms, shave heads, wear hair shirt and monk's garb, abandon jobs, not marry (if single) or not have intercourse (if married)
- 4) penance lasted for a long time (years), often to the end of life
- d. Africa was more severe (it was "overrun with Montanists," Bihlmeyer); Rome was less rigorous
- e. intercession by confessors or about-to-be martyrs usually reduced the period of penance
- f. absolution: the bishop or a priest imposed hands before the congregation
- 7. **devotions: sign of the cross**
  - a. the sign of the cross was a protection against demons (so Tertullian, Hippolytus); Yves Congar says it is an apostolic tradition (Congar)

## 200s

### 1. cultural background and Church-state relations

- a. persecutions
  - 1) c. 200: an edict of Septimius Severus (193-211) forbids conversion to Judaism and Christianity
    - a) c. 200: at Alexandria, 6 of Origen's pupils are killed, and teachers at the Christian school flee
    - b) 203: at Carthage, a group of catechumens (including Perpetua, her slave Felicitas, and their teacher) are killed
  - 2) 202-11: Roman officials or the pagan populace used the rescript of Trajan to cause individual persecutions
    - a) at Carthage, 3 Christians die at the stake and another in prison
    - b) at Alexandria, 2 prefects torture and execute Christians (e.g., Origen's father, Potamiaina, and a soldier converted by Potamiaina's example)
  - 3) 235-38: Maximinus Thrax (235-38) eliminates Christians from court and banishes Pope Pontianus and Hippolytus of Rome to Sardinia, where they die
  - 4) 250-51: Decius' (249-51) persecution
    - a) reasons
      - 1. 247: Christians refuse to participate in pagan services celebrating Rome's millennium
      - 2. 248: Gothic invasions coincide with rebellions and mutinies; hostility to Christians rises sharply
      - 3. 249: an Alexandrian mob stages an anti-Christian pogrom
      - 4. Decius hopes to restore the declining empire's glory by restoring its ancient religion; he also wants to determine the number of Christians in the empire
    - b) Decius' edict demands that, by a certain date, everyone sacrifice to the gods for the empire's protection
    - c) apostates (*lapsi*) are *sacrificati* (sacrificers), *thurificati* (incense burners), or *libellatici* (bribers of a *libellus*, a certificate)
    - d) the number of lapsed far exceeded the number of refusers; many Christians died of cold and hunger while fleeing persecution

- 5) 257-58: Valerian's persecution
    - a) his motives are to gain church property and pacify the party hostile to Christians
    - b) 257: his rescript says bishops, priests, and deacons must sacrifice, and Christians holding assemblies in cemeteries or entering catacombs must die
    - c) 258: a new rescript says bishops, priests, and deacons must die; nobles must lose possessions and, if they refuse to offer pagan sacrifice, must die
    - d) martyrs include Pope Sixtus; the Roman deacon Lawrence; Cyprian (Carthage); Origen (Alexandria); many African Christians are sent to the mines
  - 6) emperors favorable to Christianity
    - a) Commodus' (180-92) Christian wife, Marcia, makes him receptive enough to let some Christians hold offices in his court
    - b) Caracalla (211-17) is very tolerant: Christians are again at court
    - c) Alexander Severus (222-35) has close Christian associates
    - d) 244-47: Philip the Arab (244-249) has Christian high officials and even corresponds with Origen
    - e) 260s: Gallienus (260-68) restores church property, initiating 40 years of peace; Christians build churches, preach to barbarians and Greeks, occupy high offices, and enjoy popular sympathy
  - b. 248: barbarian invasions begin (excepting sporadic incursions that had occurred even BC)
    - 1) 248: Goths invade northern Italy
    - 2) 258: the Alemanni and Franks settle on the upper bank of the Rhine
    - 3) they begin to infiltrate into Gaul and Italy
    - 4) "Everywhere within the empire, towns were fortified, even Rome itself ... and for the next three centuries incursions by Germanic peoples were the scourge of the Western Empire" (Aubin)
  - c. 293: Diocletian restructures the Empire into Western and Eastern; each has an emperor, and under each emperor is a caesar (who will become emperor)
2. **heresies and councils**
- a. 220-60: antipopes
    - 1) 217: Hippolytus of Rome (??-c. 236)
      - a) 217: a small group elects Hippolytus antipope when Callistus is elected pope (Hippolytus believes Callistus is a monarchian and too lax)
      - b) c. 235: exiled with Pope Pontianus to Sardinia, he reconciles with the Church
    - 2) Novatian (@)
  - b. modalism
    - 1) c. 200-205: modalism reaches Rome from Smyrnea
    - 2) because of God's unity (*monarchia*), there is no Trinity
      - a) God is one person in one substance
      - b) the Father appears in the modes of the Son and the Spirit (*modus*, manifestation)
    - 3) other names are modalistic monarchianism, Sabellianism (Pope Callistus excommunicates Sabellius c. 220), and Patripassianism (*pater* Father + *passio* suffer: the Father suffered on the cross)
    - 4) other major modalists include Praxeas, Photinus, Marcellus of Ancyra, and Priscillian
  - c. baptismal controversy (rebaptism of heretics)
    - 1) 220-56: north Africans (Tertullian, 3 synods of Carthage) say baptism by a heretic is invalid

- 2) 257: Pope Stephen, holding “fast to the principle of the objective efficacy of the sacraments” (Bihlmeyer), excommunicates the north Africans
3. **clergy**
- a. 30-300: for clerical celibacy “there was no ecclesiastical legislation ... and still less an apostolic ordinance” (Bihlmeyer)
  - b. c. 225: the *Didascalia* says bishops must be 50 years old and priests, 30
  - c. minor orders
    - 1) in the east
      - a) 30-c. 600s: references are found to porters and exorcists (but not acolytes)
      - b) 692: the Synod in Trullo (canon 6) limits minor orders to lectors and cantors
      - c) today in the east the subdiaconate is also a minor order
    - 2) in the west
      - a) c. 252: Pope Cornelius mentions (in addition to bishops, priests, and deacons) subdeacons and four minor orders: acolyte, porter, lector, exorcist
      - b) 1207: Innocent III includes the subdiaconate in the major orders, making subdeacons (like priests and deacons) eligible to become bishops
      - c) 1563: Trent allows bishops to confer the minor orders simultaneously, and that is almost always done today
      - d) those in minor orders can marry, but they then forfeit clerical privileges
    - 3) the minor orders do not confer the sacrament of holy orders
4. **territorial organization**
- a. donated homes in cities became titular churches (the “title” at first is the donor, later it is a saint)
  - b. 200s: churches (not house churches) now exist (they have been excavated at Edessa [c. 201], Rome, Dura-Europos, Palestine)
  - c. 200s: rural congregations develop; they are called the bishop’s “parish” (Latin *paroichia*, from Greek *para* beside + *oikos* house, his “house beside” his city church); bishops in the capitals of Roman provinces now become “metropolitans” over other bishops in their provinces
5. **religious orders**
- a. 200s: “there were virgins ... who obliged themselves by vow to ascetical practices ... [but] the vow was not always solemn nor for life” (Bihlmeyer)
  - b. “spiritual marriage”: “a male ascetic or cleric lived with a consecrated virgin or widow in a sort of spiritual marriage for the mutual fostering of their religious life” (Bihlmeyer)
  - c. 271: Anthony of Egypt (c. 250-356) begins monasticism
    - 1) in addition to commandments, Christ gave three “evangelical counsels” (“evangelical” because found in the gospels; “counsels” because, unlike *commandments* required of all, *counsels*, though not necessary for salvation, are necessary for perfection)
      - a) *poverty*: Matt 19:16-22, “Then someone came to him and said, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”<sup>17</sup> And he said to him, . . . “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”<sup>18</sup> He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness;<sup>19</sup> Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, “I have kept all these; what do I still lack?”<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”<sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

- b) *chastity*: Matt 19:12, “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.”
  - c) *obedience*: Mark 14:36, “yet, not what I want, but what you want.” John 5:30, “I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” John 6:38, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.” Phil 2:5-7, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . .” See also Rom 5:19, 16:19, 2 Cor 7:15, 9:13, 10:6, Philem 1:21.
- 2) 260-301: state acceptance of Christianity reduced opportunities for witness by martyrdom and induced lukewarmness
  - 3) 271: Anthony, the first hermit, withdraws to the Egyptian desert
    - a) he wants to escape the world and be an example of successful struggle with the devil
    - b) he practices prayer, memorizing of the scriptures, penance, self-denial, and fasting
    - c) “The hermit waged a spiritual war against the evil spirits and a physical war against temptation by subjecting his body to the most rigorous testing” (Holmes and Bickers 42)
6. **theology**
- a. 200: Rome’s baptismal creed becomes the Apostles Creed; it and similar summaries of faith are called a “rule of faith” or, later, a “symbol”
7. **sacraments: reconciliation**
- a. 200s-300s: in the east, penitents were divided into classes
    - 1) the lowest class (worst sinners) stand at the church door and plead for prayers as others enter
    - 2) the next highest have to leave Mass, like catechumens, after the homily
    - 3) the next highest have to leave just before communion, after receiving the bishop’s blessing
    - 4) the highest stand near the door throughout Mass, but do not take communion
  - b. in the west there was no classification: all penitents were like the east’s highest class
  - c. schisms over penance
    - 1) 251: Pope Cornelius grants absolution to the *lapsi*
      - a) Novatian is outraged: he denies absolution even to dying *lapsi*; his followers elect him anti-pope
      - b) many Montanists became Novatians; churches existed in the east till the 600s
    - 2) 251: Cyprian of Carthage insists that *lapsi* endure a long penance; opponents, led by deacon Felicissimus, choose Fortunatus as anti-bishop
    - 3) c. 300: the bishop of Alexandria is mild with penitents; Melitius (bishop of Lycopolis) favors severity; the Melitians elect an anti-bishop, and the schism lasts for a century
    - 4) eventually the practice of Rome (absolution even to the *lapsi*) is adopted everywhere
8. **sacraments: Eucharist**
- a. the kiss of peace
    - 1) Rome and the east have the kiss of peace before the offertory
    - 2) the rest of the west has it after the offertory
    - 3) c. 350-400: Rome puts it before communion
  - b. Eucharistic prayers (offertory to communion) develop
    - 1) the east calls them *anaphora* (repeated)
    - 2) the west calls them *canōn* (norm or rule)



9. **devotions: catacombs**

- a. pagans often cremated, but Christians buried
- b. c. 100-500: the catacombs at Rome are in use
- c. 30-c. 800: Roman Christians' burial crypts were called "ceteries" (from *koimē* sleep); after 800, they are called "catacombs" (*kata* down + *kymbē* hollow)
- d. space did not allow Masses to be held in the catacombs