

# 4—The Christianization of Rome

“The Story of the Church”

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## 1. Worship in the Early Church

- A. Irenaeus called it “Catholic” (Grk, *kát holóos*) = universal
- B. The canon of Scripture was not completed
  - 1) There were no printing presses
  - 2) 90% of the population could not read
- C. Communion became a presentation of the “Word of God”
  - 1) Originally part of the “Agape Feast” (see Fractio Panis)
  - 2) Represented the “real” body and blood of Christ
  - 3) Tied to the authority of the Bishop, separated clergy from laity
  - 4) Communion of the Saints, both past and present
- D. Baptism brought you into the Christian community
  - 1) Infant baptism virtually universal until Anabaptists (16 c.)
  - 2) Prayer “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” led to the doctrine
  - 3) Not about verbal ascent until the Enlightenment

## 2. Persecution of the Early Church

- A. Decian & Valarian Persecutions (249-260)
  - 1) Roman citizens required to perform a sacrifice to the Roman gods
  - 2) Written certificate called a “*libellus*” signed by the magistrate
  - 3) Jews are exempt under Julius Caesar’s “*religio licita*” (permitted)
  - 4) Many Christians are executed, flee, or go into hiding
  - 5) Some handed over Scriptures as a repudiation of their faith
- B. Gallienus ends the persecution (260) and the Church experiences peace
  - 1) Many churches are built for the first time
  - 2) Monastic movement begins
- C. Diocletian & Maximian Persecutions (303-311)
  - 1) Romans adopt an official policy of Persecution of Christians
  - 2) Many Christians are killed, tortured, imprisoned, or dislocated
  - 3) Galarius ends persecution in the East with Edict of Toleration (311)
  - 4) Donatists split over whether “*traditores*” should be accepted
    - a) Those who “handed over” the sacred things
    - b) Mostly from poorer class (*libellus* could be bought)
    - c) Reject any sacraments done by traitor priests
    - d) “Endulgences” eventually adopted as a compromise

### **3. Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity (312)**

- A. Named Roman Emperor (306)
- B. Seeks to unify Christianity with Paganism
  - 1) Dreamt of a heavenly symbol on his shields (Chi Rho)
  - 2) “én toúto níka” (in this conquer)
  - 3) Wins the Battle of Milvian Bridge against Maxentius (312)
- C. Converts to Christianity and is baptized (312)
- D. Edict of Milan (313) legalizes Christianity and ends persecution
- E. Builds many basilicas and appoints Christians to office
- F. Builds a new capital at Byzantium called Constantinople (330)
- G. Sends mother Helena to build churches in Israel (Holy Sepulchre)
  - 1) Helena is eventually canonized as a saint
  - 2) St. Helens church is built in Bishopsgate, London (1150)
  - 3) Alleyne FitzHerbert appointed Baron St. Helens (1791)
  - 4) Explorer George Vancouver names a mountain after him (1792)
  - 5) Henry Knighten names St. Helens after the mountain (1850)

### **4. Churches are given the status of legal institutions (320)**

- A. Sunday is made a national holiday for rest  
(Resurrection Day + Roman sun god Sol Invictus)
- B. Church properties declared tax exempt
- C. Clergy exempt from hard manual labor
- D. Clerical aristocracy develops from new-found wealth
- E. Bishops given authority as local judges
- F. Women play less of a role when church leaves the home
- G. Pastors become more like chaplains than missionaries