

A Brief History of the Roman Catholic Church (Latin Rite)

I. Historic Roots:

The Roman Catholic Church *is rooted in the history* of the Jewish people. Pope John Paul 2nd called the Jewish people “our elder brothers and sisters.” Our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, was Jewish. He can be proven to have existed through Roman Empire legal and historical documents - documents specifying that “he was put to death by Pontius Pilate the Roman procurator of Judea, Palestine” (Roman historian, Tacitus).

II. Chronology: Remember we come “down” the ladder in BC time!

- A. Origins of the Jewish People: Abraham (Mesopotamian), his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob, approximately 1800 BC.
- B. God changes Jacob’s name to “Israel”; Jacob (Israel) has 12 sons; they develop into the “12 tribes of Israel.”
- C. His own brothers sell Joseph, a son of Jacob (Israel), into slavery. He is taken to Egypt. Eventually, his brothers are reunited with him; the 12 tribes are welcomed to come to Egypt, which they appreciate, because there is a great famine in Palestine.
- D. Egyptians eventually enslave the Hebrews, circa 1500 BC; Moses leads them out of slavery, receives the 10 Commandments, and the (Torah) from God.
- E. The Hebrews develop into the Israelite culture in the area of Canaan = Israel/Palestine.
- F. The first kings of Israel are Saul (1020 – 1000 BC); David (1000 –961 BC); David’s son, Solomon (961 – 922 BC). Solomon builds the first great temple in the Israelite capital – Jerusalem (in what is today called the Temple Mount area).
- G. Prophets: Elijah (circa 900 BC); Amos (800 BC); Isaiah (700 BC); Jeremiah (600 BC); the Babylonian (Iraq) conquest and exile of the Israelites and their enforced move to Babylon (587 – 537 BC); prophet Ezekiel and 2nd Isaiah (500 BC); restoration of Israelites to Israel and the 3rd prophet Isaiah, circa 350 BC;
- H. Jewish (Maccabean revolt against the Hellenistic Greeks); the Jewish Temple is purified and animal sacrifice resumes (circa 167 BC).

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II. Chronology: BC Time

- I. Roman civilization occupies Palestine and most of the Mediterranean Sea basin area (63 BC).
- J. Anne, Joachim, and their daughter Mary (the Blessed Mother) Elizabeth, Zechariah, and their son John (“the Baptist”); Mary’s betrothal to the carpenter Joseph, subsequent marriage; Jesus born approximately 3 BC.

III. Rome and Early Catholic Church history – “up” the ladder in AD!

- A. Rome formally established itself as a culture in 509 BC. It became an imperial power and successfully gained control of the entire Mediterranean basin and most of Western Europe by 50 BC. On August 19th of the year AD 14, Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor dies and is succeeded by Tiberius. Tiberius reigns as Roman emperor from AD 14 – 37. Jesus is born during his reign.
- B. AD 30, The Roman historian **Tacitus** writes in his *Annals* “**the Christ is condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, under the emperor Tiberius.**” Jesus rises from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost to “**confirm**” (*to establish the truth and state with assurance*) the **Apostolic community**, it develops in Jerusalem and begins to spread.
- C. AD 30 – 31, the selection and election of the **7 Hellenistic Jewish deacons** (*Acts of the Apostles* chapter 6, ff.) **to assist the 12 Apostles in their ministry of evangelization.** Hellenistic Jews were Jews that lived outside of Palestine. In their synagogues, they read the Bible in Greek. Stephen, the first of 7 deacons, is listed among the Hellenistic Jews. AD 36 – 37, the martyrdom of Stephen occurs and the conversion of Saul (*Acts 7-9*). **Saul’s name changes to Paul.** Paul embarks on an extraordinary missionary effort, writing many *Epistles*, and bringing the faith to many different areas of Syria, Turkey, Greece, Malta, and Italy.
- D. Caligula, emperor of Rome, AD 37 – 41; Claudius, emperor of Rome, from the period AD 41 to 54. Paul and Barnabas are on a missionary journey to Antioch in Syria.

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E. AD 48-49 **Council of Jerusalem:** 1st Christian Council, doctrine regarding circumcision and dietary law is agreed to by apostles and elders, written in a letter addressed to "the brothers of Gentile origin in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia" (*Acts 15*)

F. **Antioch was the third most important city in the Roman Empire after Rome itself and Alexandria in Egypt.** I mention this because Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and all the other Apostles are working in Antioch. It ultimately becomes the center for the Hellenistic Christians. The Apostle James, brother of John, becomes the first Apostle to be the leader of the Church in Jerusalem.

- 48-57? Paul writes *Galatians*
- 49-50 Paul in the Greek city of Corinth (*Acts 18*)
- 51-52 Paul writes *2 Thessalonians*
- 53-62 Paul writes *Philippians*
- 54-68 Nero becomes emperor of Rome
- 56 Paul writes *1 Corinthians*
- 57 Paul writes *Romans* and *2nd Corinthians*
- 57 Paul's last visit to Jerusalem [*Acts 21*]
- 58, James, a *cousin* of Jesus, leads the Judeo-Christians in Jerusalem.
- 58 Paul arrested, imprisoned in Caesarea (northern Israel) [*Acts 25:4*]
- 59 Nero kills his mother, Agrippina
- 60 Paul imprisoned in Rome (*Acts 28,16*)
- 61-63? Paul? writes *Ephesians*
- 61-63 Paul writes *Philemon*
- 61-63 Paul writes *Colossians*
- 61-63? Paul? writes *1,2 Timothy*, and *Titus*, known as "pastoral epistles"

54 – 68, Nero, Emperor of Rome; Great fire of Rome in AD 64; scapegoats the Christians; during his reign Peter and Paul are martyred in Rome (AD 66/7). Persecutions of Christians begin and are to last **until AD 380**. "The blood of the martyrs watered the seeds of the Church;" extraordinary growth of the Christian faith under tremendous persecution by the Emperors and government system of Rome.

67-78 Pope Linus, 2nd Pope, succeeds Peter (Linus mentioned in *2 Timothy 4,21*)

By AD 100, the Gospels are put into written form in the four *Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*. *St. Irenaeus of Lyon speaks of these four Gospels as being the Four Pillars of the Church. Note: Irenaeus was in a position to know since he was a friend of St. Polycarp who was a close friend of St. John the Apostle. St. Irenaeus dies in AD 202.*

AD 100, the Apostolic Age ends with the death of the last Apostle, St. John, on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea.

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IV. The Time of the Early Church Fathers

The term “early Church Father” does not apply to a definitive list of people. Unlike the term “Doctor of the Church” which is a very specific list of famous men and women who have contributed to the growth and understanding of the Catholic faith, the term Father of the Church can apply to many different people who remained true to the Apostolic Tradition.

These people are called “fathers” because they helped bring the early Church out of “diapers” into “adulthood.” They left many documents and these writings helped define what the Church believes. Some of the Early Fathers are also martyrs for the faith.

The first group of early Church Fathers is called the *Apostolic Fathers*. They lived from approximately AD 65 to AD 150. Their first writings come to us around AD 95. These men either knew the 12 Apostles or they knew people (individuals and worshipping communities) that had direct contact with the 12 Apostles. Men in this category are Clement of Rome (promoted authority of the Bishop of Rome, died in the year 99), St. Ignatius of Antioch (promoted structure of bishop, priest, deacon and following Apostolic Tradition, promotes belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, is the first writer to use the word “catholic” to describe the Christian communities, martyred about 112), St. Polycarp of Smyrna (fought Marcionite heresy - that heresy threw out the Old Testament, and promoted idea that there were two Gods – one “good” and one “bad.”), martyred 155.

After the Apostolic Fathers are a group of early Church Fathers called *Apologists*. They are also called the **Ante (pre) Nicene** Fathers. They defended the beliefs of the Church during the years AD 150 to 325. Some of the famous scholars during this period were St. Irenaeus (fights Gnostic heresy), St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and Hippolytus.

The third era is called the “**Golden Era**” (AD 325 to 430), represented by men such as St. Athanasius (dies 373), St. Ambrose (dies 397), St. John Chrysostom (dies 407), St. Jerome (dies 420), St. Augustine (dies 430), etc. The “Canon” of Scripture, liturgies, and traditions were codified and copied during this period of time; they were also actively combating heresy.

The fourth era is called the “**Post Golden Era**” (from 400 to 800) during which further clarification and scholarship occurred in order to specifically define what the Catholic Church believed. Together, all four groups contributed to the belief system of the Catholic Church.

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IV. The Time of the Early Church Fathers

During the first 800 years of the our Church, leaders are from all walks of life

Popes: St. Clement of Rome, St. Leo the Great, St. Gregory the Great

Bishops: St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Athanasius

Priests: Tertullian, St. Hippolytus

Deacons: St. Lawrence (martyred 258), St. Ephrem the Syrian (dies 373)

Abbots: St. Anthony of Egypt, St. Benedict; and the Abbess, St. Scholastica

Lay people: Justin Martyr - a defender of the faith (apologist), promoted Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, martyred in 165. Clement of Alexandria (Egypt) teacher, dies around 212, Origen (of Alexandria, succeeds Clement as head of the catechetical college there, dies 254.

They are from a great diversity of places, too, from Spain to the Middle East, from Turkey, France, and Italy to North Africa. Some of these men wrote in Aramaic, or Greek, or Latin. What we see is a tremendous diversity in nationality, style, etc. but what's remarkable is that *they speak in unity – with one voice – within the second and third centuries (AD 100 through AD 299) about the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Jesus, the real presence of the Eucharist, the virginity of Mary and her motherhood of God, papal authority etc.* This consensus is called “Tradition” with a capital “T.” Tradition with a small “t” can be considered Church customs – these things are culturally based and can change with time (such as Church music, vestments, *but never dogma*).

Today, all Christians should look to the Fathers because this is the age **before division** – there is no Protestant, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, etc. The Church is united in the major points of the faith. There **are differences** in cultural traditions (an example being Syrian liturgy versus Roman liturgy) and expressions **BUT NOT IN THE ELEMENTS OF WHAT THE FAITH MEANS, IN ITS BASIC AND SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES.**

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V. Roman Catholic Church History - A Quick Chronology of Events

- A. Born in AD 251 and dying in 356, St. Anthony of Egypt, helps develop the early monastic tradition; continued by St. Benedict and his sister St. Scholastica in Italy; they both die in 547.
- B. AD 311, on his deathbed the Roman emperor Galerius ends the persecution of the Christians. Roman Emperor Constantine supports that edict and in the Edict of Milan (313) allows the property that was confiscated from the Christians during the persecutions to be returned to them. Churches and other Christian institutions developing without serious interference from this point on, persecution begins again under emperors that supported Arius.
- C. AD 325, 200 bishops come to the **Council of Nicea** (in present day Turkey) and compose the basic structure of the *Nicene Creed*. Stated that the Son is of the SAME substance as the Father. The Arian heresy denied the divinity of Christ. Numerous heresies continue to “pop-up.”
- D. In AD 380, the Roman emperor, Theodosius, changes the name of Christianity in Europe to the Roman Catholic Church (*catholica* = universal). The Western Church (Latin Rite) has its center in the city of Rome. It builds churches, schools, etc. The Eastern Rite Churches have their centers in Antioch, Syria, Alexandria, Egypt, and Constantinople (Istanbul, in present day Turkey).
AD 381, the **Council of Constantinople** (in Turkey) affirms and **expands** the Nicene Creed to put it in its **final form**. This Council also defines the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. AD 395 – 430, St. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo in North Africa, links Catholic theology with Greek thought and writes many theological books.

AD 431, the **Council of Ephesus** states: Mary is the Mother of God (*Theotokos* = God Bearer)

AD 451, the **Council of Chalcedon** defends divine nature of Jesus

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- E. AD 529, St. Benedict founds an order of monks called the Benedictines, at Monte Cassino, in Italy. **This order helps preserve the western cultural tradition during the invasions by different European groups after the fall of the Roman Empire in AD 476.** They do this by copying secular and religious manuscripts and keeping parchment libraries in their monasteries.
- F. AD 590, St. Gregory I (the Great) is elected Pope, begins improvements in the formation of clergy, schools, liturgical worship, etc.
- G. AD 800, Charlemagne, the leader of the Franks becomes the first Holy Roman Emperor. This Holy Roman Emperor title shows the link between his European Empire (based in France and Germany) and the Catholic Church because the Pope crowned him in Rome on Christmas Day in the year 800. He allows the Church to be creative in the way it expresses sacred art traditions, versus the Eastern Rite churches, which stated that sacred icons had to be painted (“written”) in a specific way.
- H. **The GREAT SCHISM (break) OF AD 1054** occurs between the Eastern (Greek speaking) Catholic Church based in Constantinople, and Western (Latin speaking) Catholic Church based in Rome. A schism is a break in the Church's authority structure and communion and is different from a heresy, which means false teaching. Mistrust and bad feelings have lasted to this very day.
- I. AD 1095 –1291 – Popes call for **Crusades** to reclaim the Holy Land against the Muslims who are using military conquest to spread their faith and demanding that the Jews and Christians live under their religious law. Catholics sack Constantinople in 1204.
- J. **Time of Great Saints:** AD 1209, St. Francis of Assisi, begins the Franciscan Order in Italy and it soon spreads throughout western Europe. AD 1215, St. Dominic of Calaruega, Spain begins the Dominican Order and is sent by the Pope to France to preach against the heresies developing there.

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Time of Great Saints: AD 1266, St. Thomas of Aquino, Italy becomes *the* major theologian of the Roman Catholic Church with his major work: *The Summa Theologica* (combines Greek logical forms [Aristotle] with Catholic theology).

- K. AD 1378 – 1415, The Great Western Schism: Three men claim to be pope at the same time, it was driven by politics (the Avignon French versus the supporters of Rome) **not** theology. It was finally ended with the Council of Constance in 1414-18, Martin V pope.
- L. AD 1517, A German Catholic monk, Martin Luther, broke with the Catholic Church over the issue of Church authority, the power of the Pope, and the selling of indulgences. His action begins **the Protestant (Protesters) Reformation**. Numerous Protestant churches are created (there are over 6,000 major Protestant churches today). In 1533, King Henry 8th of England breaks with Rome over the issue of divorce. He establishes himself as the head of his church – the Anglican Church of England (Episcopal in America).
- M. In 1540, St. Ignatius of Loyola, Spain establishes the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). They become a very energetic group of intellectual missionaries fighting heresy and establishing schools and universities. The Popes (Paul III, Julius III, Pius IV), between 1546 – 1563, convened the **Council of Trent**. This Council promoted the **Catholic Counter-Reformation**, which attempted to reform and removes all excesses and corrupt elements from the Church. Anti Catholic discrimination occurs in some parts of Europe.
- N. AD 1500 – 1800, Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries evangelize the American continents. The Jesuits establish Georgetown University 1789, in Maryland, and Saint Louis University, 1818, in Missouri.
- O. 1820 – 1890, nine million Catholic immigrants come to the U.S.A. Millions more arrive in the early 1900's; face discrimination.

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- P. 1891, the first major social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, is written by Pope Leo 13th promoting fairness for the working classes.
- Q. 1939 – 1945 Pope Pius 12th, works diligently behind the scenes to save hundreds of thousands of Jews from falling into the hands of the Fascists and Nazis. His reputation is besmirched by historians that refuse to accept evidence in Pius' support that explains how he **did not collaborate** with Nazis and what he did to help the Jews of Rome. The testimony of the chief rabbi of Rome is very important in this debate. That rabbi specifically said that Pope Pius 12th did help hundreds of thousands of Jews to escape the hands of the Fascists and Nazis.
- R. 1962 Pope John 23rd convenes the **Second Vatican Council** (1962 – 1965) to renew, improve, and “let a breath of fresh air” into the Church. Out of this Council come many theological documents, liturgical reforms, and ecumenical efforts. No dogma was changed.
- S. 1979, Pope John Paul 2nd is elected Pope, begins major efforts to evangelize and clarify Catholic truths for a 20th century faith community, and promote social justice in all areas of the world. John Paul 2nd was blessed with a great charism of bonding with people and explaining Church truths. On May 13, 1981, there was an attempted assassination of John Paul 2nd promoted by Bulgaria with possible Soviet backing. During the 1970 -1980's, major dissent by Catholics, against the institutional Church, occurs in Europe and the Americas; collapse of Eastern bloc and Soviet Communism. John Paul 2 calls for a return to holiness and justice. In 1983, revised law code of the Church, *The Code of Canon Law* was published and in 1992, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published. It is a major work explaining the truths of the Catholic Church in an understandable and clear format so that people of all ages (high school to senior citizen) can be informed on the truths and traditions of the Roman Catholic faith.
- T. April 2, 2005, death of Pope John Paul 2nd.
- U. April 19, 2005 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger elected the 265th pope of the Roman Catholic Church. He took the name Pope Benedict 16th.

