

A Brief History of Catholicism

(Excerpts from Catholicism for Dummies)

Ancient Times (A.D. 33-741)

- **Non-Christian Rome (33-312)**

- The early Christians (mostly Jews who maintained their Jewish traditions)
- Jerusalem's religious establishment tolerated the early Christians as a fringe element of Judaism
- Christianity splits into its own religion
 - Growing number of Gentile converts (outnumbered Jewish converts by the end of the first century)
 - Greek and Roman cultural influences were adapted into Christianity
 - Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (resulted in the final and formal expulsion of the Christians from Judaism)
- The Roman persecutions
 - The first period (A.D. 68-117) – Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome
 - The second period (A.D. 117-192) – Emperors were less tyrannical and despotic but the persecutions were still promoted
 - The third period (A.D. 193-313) – Persecutions were the most virulent, violent, and atrocious during this period

- **Christian Rome (313-475)**

- A.D. 286 Roman Empire split between East and West
 - Constantinople – formerly the city of Byzantium and now present-day Istanbul
 - Rome – declined in power and prestige during the barbarian invasions (A.D. 378-570) while the papacy emerged as the stable center of a chaotic world
- Roman Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 which legalized Christianity – it was no longer a capital crime to be Christian
- A.D. 380 Christianity became the official state religion – Paganism was outlawed
- The Christian Patriarchs (Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople)
 - Patriarch of the West (bishop of Rome)
 - Patriarch of the East (bishop of Constantinople)
- Greek influence on the Christian Church

- Greek philosophers Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle had an enormous impact on Catholic Theology
- Greek Church Fathers, such as St. Athanasius, St. Gregory Nanzianzen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil, St. John Crysostom, and St. John Damascene preserved the true faith from heresy and influenced the way the Church does theology
- Western Church Fathers influenced by Greek philosophy:
 - St. Ambrose (A.D. 340-397)– Bishop of Milan, coined the phrase *ubi Petrus ibi Ecclesia* (where there is Peter, there is the Church)
 - St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) – Converted through St. Ambrose after 33 years of prayer by Augustine’s mother, St. Monica. He wrote his spiritual journey and autobiography, *The Confessions*, in A.D. 397.
 - St. Jerome (A.D. 340-420) – Compiled and translated the entire Christian Bible from the various Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts into a one-volume book in one language – Latin (called the Vulgate)
- **The fall of Rome and more barbarian invasions (476-570)**
 - Establishment of religious life, especially monasticism
 - Monasteries isolated in the countryside provided safe haven during the barbarian invasions of the cities of Imperial Rome
 - The monks not only preserved Greco-Roman literature, law, philosophy, and art, but also agriculture
 - The monks taught the barbarians how to grow food; how to build bridges, aqueducts, and sewers; and how to make and interpret laws
- **Pope St. Gregory the Great to Charles Martel (590-741)**
 - Pope St. Gregory the Great (A.D. 540-604) – Provided momentous influence on the doctrine, the organization, and the discipline of the Catholic Church (also influenced by Greek philosophy)
 - St. Benedict of Nursia (A.D. 480-547) – Father of Western monasticism – he established the first monastery in Europe at Subiaco, Italy
 - Charles Martel (A.D. 688-741) – He won a decisive and pivotal victory over Abd-er-Rahman and the Moors (Spanish Muslims of this period) at the Battle of Poitiers in 732. It was a crucial victory for all of Christendom because it determined whether Islam or Christianity would be the predominant religion in Europe for centuries to come.

The Middle Ages (A.D. 800-1500)

- **Christendom: One big, mighty kingdom**
 - Fall of the Roman Empire resulted in disunity and chaos as different groups of barbarians invaded the empire and fought among themselves
 - The Catholic Church was the one single vestige of unity remaining:
 - One head (the pope in Rome)
 - One set of laws (canon law)
 - One set of seven sacraments all over the world
 - Unity between the pope and the bishops, between the priests/deacons and their respective bishop, and between the people of the parish and their pastor
- **The rise of the Holy Roman Empire**
 - Charles (A.D. 742-814) – aka Charles the Great (*Carolus Magnus* in Latin and *Charlemagne* in French)
 - On Christmas Day 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Holy Roman Emperor
 - Under Charlemagne, one standard liturgical language (Latin) united the people of the Holy Roman Empire – both the Catholic Church and the government. Latin was the *lingua franca* (common language).
- **The East/West Schism (1054)**
 - The Eastern Church and the Western Church became more distant and isolated from each other for the following reasons:
 - **Geography:** The West encompassed Western Europe and the northern and western areas of the Mediterranean and the East took up Asia Minor, the Middle East, and Northern Africa.
 - **Ignorance:** The Byzantine Church knew less and less Latin and even less Latin tradition, and the Roman Church knew less and less of Greek. Byzantines in the East used leavened bread in their Divine Liturgy to symbolize the Risen Christ, and Latins in the West used unleavened bread as was used by Jesus at the Last Supper.
 - **Different theologies:** Both were valid, but each had its own perspective. The West (Latin) was more practical and, although fully believing in the divinity of Christ, put emphasis on his humanity when depicting Jesus in art – especially by making realistic crucifixes. The East (Byzantine) was more theoretical and, although fully believing in the humanity of Christ, focused on his divinity, which was much more mysterious.

- **Personalities and politics:** Michael Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Pope St. Leo IX weren't friends, and each one mistrusted the other. Cerularius crossed the line when he wrote in a letter that the Latin use of unleavened bread was Jewish but not Christian. He was denying the validity of the Holy Eucharist in the Western Church. Leo countered by saying that the patriarchs had always been puppets of the Byzantine emperors.
- Pope Leo and Patriarch Michael excommunicated each other and their respective churches in 1054
- Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople removed the mutual excommunications in 1965
- **The Crusades**
 - Response from the Holy Roman Empire to a plea from the Byzantine Empire for help to defend Christianity from an imminent attack
 - The Saracens (Arab Muslims during the time of the Crusades) had overrun the Holy Land, and Christians were no longer free to move about and visit their holy pilgrimage sites
 - Pope Urban II saw the Crusades as a way to unite the embattled European Christian monarchs under one banner, Christianity, for one purpose, to free the Holy Land for pilgrims, against one common enemy, Islamic extremism and expansionism
 - There were a total of eight Crusades (A.D. 1095-1270) – it ended in total disaster
 - Although the goal of defending and freeing the oppressed was good and noble, the Crusades should have stopped when many of the Europeans started making a profit on it and when Christians and Muslims alike resorted to barbaric tactics
- **The Golden Age**
 - Two new orders developed – the Dominicans and Franciscans – aka *mendicant* orders because they didn't own any property and relied on alms as itinerant preachers
 - Gothic architecture, grand art, and great literature occurred during this period
 - Universities developed – originally attached to the cathedrals and staffed for the education of clergy
 - St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) – Wrote *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologica*, where he explained the doctrines of the Catholic faith using the newly discovered works of Aristotle

- St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) – Wrote a commentary on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*, which basically explained the principal doctrines of the Catholic faith using St. Augustine and Plato
- **The downward spiral**
 - The rise of the middle class
 - The Black Death killed 25 million people (two-thirds of Europe)
 - The Babylonian Captivity (aka Avignon papacy where 7 French popes resided for 70 years)
 - The Great Schism
 - St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) – Pleaded with Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome where the pope as bishop of Rome belongs
 - Italian cardinal, Urban VI, elected to succeed Pope Gregory XI, who remained in Rome (succeeded by Boniface XI)
 - French cardinals elected the *antipope*, Clement VII, who went back to Avignon (succeeded by Benedict XIII)
 - Scholars and secular rulers deposed both popes and elected another *antipope* in 1409, Alexander V in Pisa (succeeded by John XXIII)
 - The Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund demanded a General Council at Constance (1414-1418) to resolve the “Great Schism” by choosing Martin V to be the one and only pope – the others were asked to resign

The Reformation to the Modern Era (A.D. 1517-Today)

- **The growing need for reform**
 - Corruption in the Church
 - The rise of the middle class resulted in:
 - The Church and the nobility owned the land
 - The poor had nothing but worked the land for hire
 - The middle class had money but no land
- **The Reformers**
 - Martin Luther (1483-1546)
 - October 31st, 1517 – Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of a Wittenberg church
 - Pelagianism (works alone, without faith)
 - Romans 3:28, Luther added the word “alone” (see James 2:24)
 - Henry VIII
 - Pope refused to grant an annulment to marriage to Catherine of Aragon
 - 1533 – Henry declared himself Supreme Head of the Church in England and dissolved the allegiance that the clergy in England had to Rome
 - John Calvin
 - TULIP (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints)
- **The Catholic Church’s response: The Counter Reformation**
 - The Council of Trent (1545-1563)
 - Holy People:
 - St. Charles Borromeo (reformed the clergy with the institution of seminaries and rectories)
 - St. Ignatius of Loyola (founded the Society of Jesus – Jesuits - to create a spiritual army to win back souls to Christ and to the Catholic faith)
 - St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross (reformed religious life, going back to the original spirit of their founders)
 - St. Philip Neri (gave the diocesan clergy a new sense of personal piety and priestly spirituality)

- Pope St. Pius V (reformed the clergy by stopping abuses; unified the Sacred Liturgy for the entire Western Church and the reformed *liturgical calendar* – the Church year)
- Used the printing press to mass-produce catechisms, canon law, the Catholic Bible, and the lives of the saints
- Ferdinand and Isabella, Catholic monarchs of Spain, helped colonize the New World
- Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits went to the New World, evangelizing native peoples and establishing churches, missions, and schools
- Baroque art and architecture appealed to the symbolism used by the sacraments (sacraments are tangible signs to the physical body – via the human senses – of the invisible work and presence of divine grace)
- **The Age of Reason**
 - Science and religion
 - Faith and reason
- **The Age of Revolution**
 - The Industrial Revolution in England
 - The American Revolution
 - The French Revolution
- **The Modern Era**
 - Two World Wars and the Church's stand against communism and fascism
 - The Church in Eastern Europe
 - Pope John Paul II
 - Fall of the Berlin Wall
 - Soviet Union collapsed
 - Persian Gulf wars
 - "Be not afraid"