

HISTORY'S HEROES

FAITHFUL MEN AND WOMEN OF CHURCH HISTORY

Edited by Kevin Swanson & Joshua Schwisow



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COURSE DETAILS

This one-year course provides students with the opportunity to study Church History through historical summaries and biographical accounts of Christian men and women of the past.

This course includes the following features:

- *Chapter summaries and assignments for Richard M. Hannula's Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History*
- *Historical summaries from each major period of Church History*
- *Quizzes and essay assignments for Trial and Triumph and the historical summaries*

Course Objectives

Students completing this course will:

- *Learn about major events in each period of Church History*
- *Study the lives of influential men and women of faith and how God used them for His kingdom*
- *Learn about major theological issues in Church History*
- *Analyze people and events on the basis of Scripture*

Lesson Schedule

The lesson schedule included in this workbook is a suggested schedule. Teachers and students may adapt the schedule to suit their

needs. The lesson schedule is based on a 36-week school year divided into two semesters.

Grading Assignments

The Teacher/Parent may determine how to grade the assignments. We offer these suggested guidelines to grade assignments. For each assignment, divide total number of questions correct with the total number of questions possible to calculate the percentage.

For example, if 8 out of 11 questions were correct, then the percentage grade for that assignment will be 72%.

$$8 / 11 = 72\%$$

The following may be used for grade values:

90 to 100 percent = A

80-89 percent = B

70 to 79 percent = C

60 to 69 percent = D

0 to 59 percent = F

Credits

Upon successful completion of this course, we recommend assigning 1 credit in history.

COURSE SCHEDULE

	Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade
First Semester–First Quarter						
Early Church	Week 1	1	Read Introduction			
		2				
		3	Read 1. Sufferings of the Early Church and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5	Read 2. Church Life in the Early Centuries and Complete Exercises			
	Week 2	1	Read 3. Development of Church Doctrine and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read 4. Early Church Fathers and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				
Trial and Triumph	Week 3	1	Read Polycarp: Witness in the Arena and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read Blandina: Martyr of Lyons and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				
	Week 4	1	Read Constantine: Defender of the Church and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read Athanasius: Against the World and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				

Trial and Triumph	Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade	
	Week 5	1		Read Ambrose: Bishop of Milan and Complete Exercises			
		2					
		3		Read Monica and Augustine: Christian Mother and Son and Complete Exercises			
		4					
		5		Read Patrick: Missionary to the Irish and Complete Exercises			
	Week 6	1		Complete Early Church Quiz			
		2		Begin Early Church Essay Assignment			
		3					
		4					
		5		Complete Early Church Essay Assignment			
	Week 7	1		Read 1. Missions in the West and Complete Exercises			
		2					
		3		Read 2. Islam and the Crusades and Complete Exercises			
		4					
		5		Read 3. The Church is Divided and Complete Exercises			
	Week 8	1		Read 4. Scholasticism and the Universities and Complete Exercises			
		2					
		3		Read 5. Reformers in the Middle Ages and Complete Exercises			
		4					
5							
Middle Ages							

Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade
Week 9	1	Read Pope Gregory I: Servant of the Servants of God and Complete Exercises			
	2				
	3	Read Boniface: Missionary to the Germans and Complete Exercises			
	4				
	5				
First Semester–Second Quarter					
Week 1	1	Read Charlemagne: Protector of the Church and Complete Exercises			
	2				
	3	Read Alfred the Great: Christian King and Complete Exercises			
	4				
	5				
Week 2	1	Read Anselm: Theologian, Monk, Archbishop and Complete Exercises			
	2				
	3	Read Bernard of Clairvaux: Lover of Christ and Complete Exercises			
	4				
	5				
Week 3	1	Read Peter Waldo and the Waldensians: Faithful to the Word and Complete Exercises			
	2				
	3	Read Francis of Assisi: The Lesser Brother and Complete Exercises			
	4				
	5				

Trial and Triumph	Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade	
	Week 4	1		Read Elizabeth of Hungary: Servant of the Poor and Complete Exercises			
		2					
		3		Read John Wyclif: Morning Star of the Reformation and Complete Exercises			
		4					
		5					
	Week 5	1		Read John Huss: Forerunner of the Reformation			
		2		Complete Middle Ages Quiz			
		3		Begin Middle Ages Essay Assignment			
		4					
5			Complete Middle Ages Essay Assignment				
Week 6	1		Read 1. Historical Background and Complete Exercises				
	2						
	3		Read 2. The Reformation in Germany and Complete Exercises				
	4						
	5						
Week 7	1		Read 3. The Swiss Reformation and Complete Exercises				
	2						
	3		Read 4. The Radical Reformers and Complete Exercises				
	4						
	5		Read 5. The Reformation in Geneva and Complete Exercises				
Reformation							

	Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade
Reformation	Week 8	1	Read 6. The English Reformation and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read 7. The Scottish Reformation and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				
Reformation	Week 9	1	Read Martin Luther: Father of the Reformation and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read William Tyndale: Translator of the English Bible and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				
Mid-Term Grade						
Second Semester-Third Quarter						
Trial and Triumph	Week 1	1	Read John Calvin: Theologian of the Reformation and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read Anne Askew: The Lord's Bold Witness and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				
Trial and Triumph	Week 2	1	Read Latimer, Ridley, and Cranmer: The Bishop Martyrs and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read John Knox: Scottish Reformer and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				

	Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade
Trial and Triumph	Week 3	1	Read Jeanne d'Albret: Reformation Queen and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read Renee: Duchess of Ferrara and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				
	Week 4	1	Complete Reformation Quiz			
		2	Begin Reformation Essay Assignment			
		3				
		4				
		5	Complete Reformation Essay Assignment			
Post-Reformation	Week 5	1	Read 1. The Puritans & Their Legacy and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read 2. The Scottish Covenanters and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5				
Week 6	1	Read 3. Pietism and Evangelicalism and Complete Exercises				
	2					
	3	Read 4. Christianity in Early America and Complete Exercises				
	4					
	5	Read 5. Revivals and Reformation and Complete Exercises				

		Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade
Trial and Triumph	Week 7		1	Read 6. Apostasy in the Western Church and Complete Exercises			
			2				
			3	Read Gustavus Adolphus: Warrior King and Complete Exercises			
			4				
			5	Read Richard Cameron: Lion of the Covenant and Complete Exercises			
Trial and Triumph	Week 8		1	Read The Two Margarets: The Solway Martyrs and Complete Exercises			
			2				
			3	Read John Bunyan: Happy Pilgrim and Complete Exercises			
			4				
			5	Read Jonathan Edwards: Great Awakening Theologian and Complete Exercises			
Trial and Triumph	Week 9		1	Read George Whitefield: Great Awakening Preacher and Complete Exercises			
			2				
			3	Read John Wesley: The World His Parish and Complete Exercises			
			4				
			5	Read John Newton: Slave Trader Saved by Grace and Complete Exercises			
Second Semester-Fourth Quarter							
Modern Missions	Week 1		1	Read 1. David Brainerd - America and Complete Exercises			
			2	Read 2. William Carey - India and Complete Exercises			
			3	Read 3. Henry Martyn - India and Persia and Complete Exercises			
			4	Read 4. Adoniram and Ann Judson - Burma and Complete Exercises			
			5	Read 5. Hudson Taylor - China and Complete Exercises			

	Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade
Modern Missions	Week 2	1	Read 6. John Paton - South Pacific and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read 7. Bonar and M'Cheyne - Israel and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5	Read David Brainerd: Preacher to the North American Indians and Complete Exercises			
Trial and Triumph	Week 3	1	Read William Carey: Father of Modern Missions and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read David Livingstone: Missionary Explorer and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5	Read John Paton: Witness to the Cannibals and Complete Exercises			
Trial and Triumph	Week 4	1	Read Hudson Taylor: The China Inland Mission and Complete Exercises			
		2	Read Amy Carmichael: Mother to Outcast Children and Complete Exercises			
		3	Complete Modern Missions Quiz			
		4	Begin Modern Missions Essay Assignment			
		5				
Recent Times	Week 5	1	Complete Modern Missions Essay Assignment			
		2				
		3	Read 1. Christians in Hitler's Germany and Complete Exercises			
		4	Read 2. The Explosion of Christianity in China and Complete Exercises			
		5	Read 3. The Korean Pentecost and Complete Exercises			

	Date	Day	Assignment	Due Date	X	Grade
Recent Times	Week 6	1	Read 4. Christianity in North Korea and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read 5. Soviet Persecution and Downfall and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5	Read Charles Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers and Complete Exercises			
Trial and Triumph	Week 7	1	Read Chinese Christians: In the Boxer Rebellion and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read Abraham Kuyper: Theologian and Statesman and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5	Read J. Gresham Machen: Valiant for Truth and Complete Exercises			
Trial and Triumph	Week 8	1	Read C.S. Lewis: Chronicler of Narnia and Complete Exercises			
		2				
		3	Read Richard Wurmbrand: Tortured for Christ and Complete Exercises			
		4				
		5	Complete Recent Times Quiz			
Trial and Triumph	Week 9	1	Begin Recent Times Essay			
		2				
		3				
		4				
		5	Complete Recent Times Essay Assignment			
	Final Grade					

INTRODUCTION

Church History recounts the story of the greatest project the world has ever seen: Jesus Christ building His kingdom.

Pick up a textbook on World History and you will find one major recurring theme. Such and such a nation rose to power. And the same nation eventually declined into obscurity. And then another nation or kingdom rose to power. And it too declined and became another footnote in the pages of history.

The story of Church History is very different. The kingdom of Jesus lasts forever. During Jesus' earthly ministry, He gave His disciples a promise: a promise of the church's victory over the forces of evil. In Matthew 16:18, we read:

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
(Matthew 16:18)

Many read this verse of Matthew and think that the church is being assaulted by the forces of hell, and the church will not fall. The church is pictured as the old Alamo, assaulted by forces on every side, and barely holding on. In the case of the Alamo, the Mexicans eventually prevailed even though the Republic of Texas fought valiantly against all odds.

But to picture the church like a victorious Alamo is to misread the verse. What the verse actually says is that the gates of hell are being

assaulted by the church of Christ. The forces of Christ's kingdom are doing spiritual battle with the forces of hell, and the gates of hell will eventually fall. Satan's kingdom will come to complete ruin.

To read Church History is to be a front row spectator in this grand battle of Christ's kingdom against Satan's kingdom. And even though the church faces persecution, suffering, and sometimes even a decline in numbers, the kingdom of Christ marches on. The gates of hell will not be able to prevail against the onslaught of Christ and His disciples against the forces of spiritual darkness.

Important Themes in Church History

When approaching any subject, it can sometimes be difficult to keep in focus the most important things when there are so many details, so many stories, so many people, and so many dates. Any time we study history, the big question you should ask is this: "What is God doing in history?"

This assumes, of course, that God is sovereign over the entire universe, from the empires that rise to the sparrows that fall from the sky (Matthew 10:29).

There is one interpretive rule that every Christian must bring to history. Jesus Christ is the ruler of all things (Ephesians 1:22). Everything that happens in history has purpose (Ephesians 1:23).

Here are some of the most important

themes to keep in mind as you embark on this study of Church History.

1. The kingdom of God grows throughout history

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened. (Matthew 13:31-33)

You will see the kingdom of God grow as the church of Jesus Christ expands around the globe. The church of Jesus Christ must include every tribe and nation by the end. Jesus' kingdom works like leaven, quietly and steadily growing over time.

Most of the work done by the followers of the Carpenter from Galilee does not make it to the front page of the newspapers. But, when the dust settles and the history books are written, we will always find that Christ has conquered. We find Christian hospitals and orphanages everywhere. We find Christian culture impacting every aspect of human life on planet earth! That is the way the mus-

tard seed and the leaven works.

The kingdoms of men will come and go. Empires rise and fall. Rome is gone. The Holy Roman Empire is gone. The Spanish Empire, the French Empire, the British Empire, and the American Empire have all more or less disappeared. But Jesus' kingdom marches on.

2. Jesus Christ builds His church through using the influence of evangelists, pastors, and teachers

Every pastor and leader in the church has been influenced by somebody, and these connections are very important. The kingdom of Christ grows through discipleship. The Lord has ordained that other human beings will teach us the Word of God.

This is what Ephesians 4:11-12 says:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12)

3. The faith and courage of Christians through many trials is a testimony of God's Spirit working through the centuries

These men and women of faith are examples for us. They faced tremendous spiritual opposition in their many struggles against powerful kings, popes, armies, worldly philosophers, and others. We continue to battle,

not against flesh and blood, but “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). There is much we can learn from these brave saints who went before us, many of them to their martyrdoms, “of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38).

4. The importance of preaching and teaching the Word of God

The dying words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy provide for us the mandate for the Christian Church for the succeeding two thousand years:

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

Preach the Word! That is the mandate! Wherever the Word of God is preached, clearly, truthfully, and sincerely, the work of the kingdom progresses. Where the church becomes slothful, where music and entertainment displace the people’s interest in the Word, where the sacraments play a stronger role than the Word, where the Word is read and preached in a language unfamiliar to the people listening, the church wilts and dies.

Jesus told us to disciple the nations, and to teach them all the things that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God is vital for the growth of the church.

Applying What You Learn

Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). And learning about Church History should change the way you live. How can you apply what you learn in this course?

First, the goal of studying Church History should be to give praise to God for what He has done. As Psalm 78 says, “We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:4). As you read of God’s wonderful works through the lives of men and women, give praise to God!

Second, you can apply what you learn by learning from those who came before you. How did these men and women stand fast for Christ in adversity? How did these men and women teach the faith to others? How did these men and women influence future generations? Paul once said, “follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

It is our prayer that this course will be used by our Lord to instruct, edify, and equip you to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

*The Church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish,
Is with her to the end:
Though there be those who hate her,
And false sons in her pale,
Against both foe or traitor
She ever shall prevail.¹*

1. from “The Church’s One Foundation” by Samuel J. Stone, 1866



EARLY CHURCH

1. SUFFERINGS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Imagine you are on the streets of Rome. The year is AD 150. There is a group of people that you've heard about called "Christians." Your friends have told you some very strange things about this group. You've heard of strange beliefs before, but nothing like this.

Apparently, this group of people don't believe in any of the Roman gods. That's why your friend calls them "atheists." Your friend also tells you that these people are rumored to be doing illegal activities, maybe even sacrificing human children and then eating them

because they have a ritual called the "Eucharist" (Lord's Supper) where they partake of a human body and blood.

And you also hear that these "Christians" call one another "brother" and "sister" even when they are married. Perhaps actual brothers and sisters are getting married to each other. You don't know what to make of these claims.

It sounds strange to us to think of Christians as "atheists" and "cannibals" who committed sexual immorality. But this was actually what many people in the Roman Empire



THE ANCIENT ROMAN FORUM

believed about the early Christians. While all of these claims were false and based on misunderstanding, they became excuses for much persecution of the early Christians.

There was another reason why Christians were persecuted by Rome: they refused to worship Caesar as Lord. The early Christians were not persecuted for worshipping Jesus. The Romans allowed the worship of many gods. All they had to do was offer a pinch of incense to Caesar, acknowledging him to be Lord. But the early Christians refused to do this because Jesus Christ alone is Lord (1 Cor. 8:6, Eph. 4:5).

The early centuries of the church are filled with many stories of terrible suffering and persecution. But the story of the early church is also one of great success in the expansion of the church throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

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Persecution in the Early Church

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18-19)

Jesus had told his disciples that they also would suffer persecution. In the first three centuries of the Christian church, the church was purified through the fire of trials and persecution. It also grew. The Christian apologist Tertullian wrote that “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”¹

Many of the apostles, who were commissioned by Jesus Christ to spread the gospel to other lands also suffered persecution. The Bible records that Peter and John were imprisoned for their preaching of the gospel

1. Tertullian, *Apology*, 50.

(Acts 5:21). Stephen suffered a martyr's death (Acts 7:54-60). James also died at the hands of Herod (Acts 12:1-4).

Many of the initial sufferings of the apostles and other disciples were suffered at the hands of the Jews. But eventually the Roman government also got involved in this persecution. The first major persecution of Christians by the Roman authorities took place during the reign of the Emperor Nero (AD 54-68). Many consider Nero to be one of the most wicked men who ever lived. He was a murderer and tyrant who lived according to his own pleasures.

The Persecution under Nero

When a fire broke out in Rome in AD 64, Nero blamed the Christians for the catastrophe. Many suspected that the Emperor himself had ordered the fire, but the Christians proved an easy target. The area of Rome that most Christians resided in was largely untouched by the fire. To the superstitious Roman, this suggested that the Christians were to blame for the fire.

The Roman historian Tacitus, in his *Annals*, records how this occurred:

In spite of every human effort, of the emperor's largesse, and of the sacrifices made to the gods, nothing sufficed to allay suspicion nor to destroy the opinion that the fire had been ordered. Therefore, in order to destroy this rumor, Nero blamed the Christians, who are hated for their abominations, and punished them with refined cruelty. Christ, from whom they take their name, was executed by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. Stopped for a moment, this evil supersti-

tion reappeared, not only in Judea, where was the root of the evil, but also in Rome, where all things sordid and abominable from every corner of the world come together. Thus, first those who confessed (that they were Christians) were arrested, and on the basis of their testimony a great number were condemned, although not so much for the fire itself as for their hatred of humankind.²



NERO'S GREAT FIRE, AD 64

It is clear from this quotation that Tacitus was no friend to Christianity. But Tacitus also recognized that it was not actually the Christians who had caused this disaster, but probably Nero himself. Tacitus goes on to record how the Christians were persecuted:

Before killing the Christians, Nero used them to amuse the people. Some were dressed in furs, to be killed by dogs. Others were crucified. Still others were set on fire early in the night, so that they might illumine it. Nero opened his own gardens for these shows, and in the circus he himself became

2. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

a spectacle, for he mingled with the people dressed as a charioteer, or he rode around in his chariot. All of this aroused the mercy of the people, even against these culprits who deserved an exemplary punishment, for it was clear that they were not being destroyed for the common good, but rather to satisfy the cruelty of one person.³

This terrible cruelty was common during the “Neronian Persecution” which lasted until the emperor’s death in AD 68. According to the church historian Eusebius, Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome during this persecution.

The Persecution under Domitian

After the death of Nero, widespread persecution ceased until the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96). Historians are not agreed as to why Domitian persecuted the Christians. However, it was Domitian’s goal to restore the glory of the Roman Empire. This included the restoration of the worship of the Roman gods. Christians obviously stood in the way of this goal and this may be one of the reasons that he persecuted them.

After the reign of Domitian, persecution was often sporadic and localized. An important correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan from AD 111 is important for understanding the later persecutions. Pliny, governor of Bithynia, wrote to the Emperor Trajan for assistance in determining what to do with Christians who refused to worship the Roman gods.

Trajan’s advice to Pliny made perfect political sense. He told Pliny not to seek out

3. Ibid.

Christians for arrest. Instead, if a Christian was exposed and would not submit to the worship of the Roman gods, then they were to be arrested, tried, and executed. This preserved the resources of the Roman Empire since Christians did not have to be systematically hunted. But when a Christian defied the political and legal system of the Empire, they were to be punished. It was this policy outlined by Trajan that was common during the 2nd century and for part of the 3rd centu-



A DENARIUS WITH AN INSCRIPTION OF THE EMPEROR DOMITIAN

ry as well. Because of this policy, persecution was somewhat sporadic and localized.

The Persecution under Decius

However, in the 3rd century, persecution once again increased during the reigns of Septimius Severus (193-211) and Decius (249-251). But the worst and most widespread persecution of the early church took place under the Emperor Diocletian. The sufferings of the Diocletian Persecution (303-313) are recorded by the eyewitness historians Eusebius and

Lactantius. Their narratives and eyewitness accounts are heartbreaking in their gruesome detail. Yet, they are also encouraging and edifying because they are examples of faith and courage in the face of evil.

Some of the most well-known martyrs of the early church are Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch and Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna.

The Martyrdom of Ignatius

Ignatius (c. 67-110) of Antioch wrote many letters to various churches, which we still have today. These letters are some of the most important writings of the early church because they give us a glimpse into the life of the early Christians.

Ignatius was arrested by the Emperor Trajan and was sentenced to be thrown to the wild beasts in Rome. He longed to give honor to Jesus his Savior, saying:

May the wild beasts be eager to rush upon me. If they be unwilling, I will compel them. Come, crowds of wild beasts; come, tearings and manglings, wracking of bones and hacking of limbs; come, cruel tortures of the devil; only let me attain unto Christ.⁴

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

Polycarp also suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Romans. Polycarp had the unique privilege of being taught the faith by the Apostle John. The story of Polycarp's martyrdom is recorded in the early church document, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

Polycarp was arrested and brought into the amphitheater in Smyrna. Since there were no images of gods in the churches of the Christians, the pagan Romans concluded that the Christians did not believe in the existence of

4. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans*, 5.



THE ANCIENT AGORA AT SMYRNA

gods, and (as mentioned above) they accused the Christians of being “atheists” (people who believe there is no God).

The proconsul commanded Polycarp to join with the cries of the multitude gathered and say, “Away with the atheists!” Polycarp joined the cry and said, “Away with the atheists!” But he pointed at the crowds instead, proclaiming that they were the real atheists, since they did not believe in the one true God.

The proconsul asked Polycarp to “revile Christ” and he promised to release Polycarp if he would reject Jesus. Polycarp replied, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme Him, my King, who has saved me?... I am a Christian.”⁵ The crowds then cried, “Let him be burned!”

Wood was then collected and made into a pile. The woodpile was lighted, and Polycarp prayed to God one last time as the flames surrounded him, with these words:

*“Lord God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I praise Thee that Thou hast judged me worthy of this day and of this hour, to participate in the number of Thy witnesses, and in the cup of Thy Christ.”*⁶

The flames then consumed him, and Polycarp went to be with His Lord forever in glory.

The Beginning of a New Era

Emperor Galerius succeeded Diocletian and continued the persecution of the Christians for a time. But in 311, he called a halt to



THE BATTLE OF MILVIAN BRIDGE

the persecutions while on his deathbed. He granted an edict allowing Christians to assemble for worship. He even asked for prayers to be made on his behalf by the Christians. Widespread persecution under the Roman Empire came to an end under the reign of Constantine, to whose story we now turn.

Constantine defeated the Emperor Maxentius at the Battle of Milvian Bridge outside Rome in AD 312. Before this battle, Constantine claimed to see a vision where he was told to use the sign of the cross as he went into battle. Various accounts describe the vision in different ways. Nevertheless, this event marked the conversion of Constantine to the Christian faith.

After Maxentius' defeat, Constantine took control of the Western portion of the Empire. Constantine and Licinius (who had control of the East) issued the Edict of Milan in 313.

5. *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 9-10.

6. *Ibid.*, 14.

This edict brought an end to the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. It also ordered that the churches and property of Christians that had been seized during the persecution be restored. This, along with Galerius' earlier edict of 311 ended major persecution of Christians throughout the Empire.

For a time, the Empire was divided between Constantine and Licinius. But when Licinius began persecuting Christians, Constantine attacked his territory and eventually defeated him in 324. This made Constantine the sole emperor of the entire Roman Empire.

Constantine then set out to restore the glory of the Roman Empire, this time on the foundations of the Christian Faith. Constantine also built a "new Rome" in the East. This city became known as Constantinople (named after its namesake). Constantinople would become the pride and glory of the Byzantine Empire for the next thousand years.

The nature of Constantine's conversion to Christianity is widely debated. Many point to the fact that Constantine continued to worship the "Unconquered Sun" after his conversion. Some argue that this shows that Constantine's conversion was not real. Nevertheless, his personal belief in Jesus Christ is evident from a variety of quotations as well as his actions towards the church during his reign.

In general, Constantine followed a policy of religious toleration for both Christianity and some elements of paganism. But his legislation showed that he was influenced by the Christian faith. He issued decrees against sacrifice and the gladiatorial games and for-

bade the use of crucifixion as a punishment.

Constantine also made Sunday a day of rest and exempted churches from taxation. Prior to this, Sunday had been a working day in the Roman Empire and Christians had to meet early in the morning before work began and in the evening after it ended.

After Constantine's death, both Christian-



CONSTANTINE AND THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

ity and paganism continued their existence side-by-side in the Roman Empire for a time. Nevertheless, Constantine's influence upon the church was significant. The church moved from a position of persecution to a position of dominance in society. The church grew in size during this "Constantinian" and "post-Constantinian" era.

Exercises

1. SUFFERINGS OF THE EARLY CHURCH**Study Questions**

1. What were the early Christians blamed for in AD 64?
2. What was the most severe persecution of the early church?
3. Who did Constantine defeat at the Battle of Milvian Bridge?
4. Who was the first martyr of the early church?
5. What were some of the false rumors the Romans circulated about the early Christians?

Meditation & Application: Walking in the Truth

1. What do the following passages teach us about the early Christians when they bore witness to those who opposed the gospel (Acts 4:13, 23-31)? How did the early Christians receive this power?

2. CHURCH LIFE IN THE EARLY CENTURIES

There are numerous documents from the early church that give us a glimpse into the worship and fellowship of the early church.

The Acts of the Apostles gives us an inspired account of the early church. But we also have the testimony of other early church fathers who have left us accounts of early church life.

Most of the Christians in the early church were not wealthy, nor were they members of high society. They were generally common people. The New Testament itself bears witness to this fact.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’ (1 Corinthians 1:26–31)

Celsus, a pagan apologist, said that the Christian message was:

Let no one educated, no one wise, and no one sensible come near... By the fact that Christians admit that these people are worthy of their God they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, the dishonorable, and the stupid, only slaves, women, little children.¹

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He did not choose the best or the brightest. He did not choose the high and mighty to be His followers. He chooses the low things of the world to shame the proud things of the world. Therefore, we should not be ashamed of being humble. God dwells with the humble and contrite (Isaiah 57:15).

Yet, by AD 200, there were Christian converts from all ranks of society. Tertullian writes:

We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum,—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods.²

We learn about the worship of the early church first from the Acts of the Apostles. We know that they gathered on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and they did so because

1. Origen, *Against Celsus*, 3.44.

2. Tertullian, *Apology*, 37.

it was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. They called this the Lord's Day. We know that they regularly broke bread in mealtimes. And they also broke bread by taking communion, also called the Eucharist (this word simply means "thanksgiving"). Their worship services were centered around the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

We also know that early Christian worship included preaching and teaching from the Bible. Psalms and hymns were also sung as a regular part of that worship. Christians would sometimes meet in homes if there was no better place to meet. We also have records of Christians meeting in catacombs and worshipping in secret to protect themselves from hostile government authorities.

Baptism was also administered as one of the sacraments of the early church. Before someone was baptized, the person would be thoroughly instructed in the faith. This is what is called "catechesis" or instruction. Those preparing for baptism were called "catechumens."

The government of the early church was organized around two main church offices. First, there was the office of pastor/elder. These men were responsible for directing the worship services of the church, for preaching and teaching, and for shepherding the flock. Secondly, the office of deacon existed to care for those in need, particularly widows and orphans (see Acts 6).



JUSTIN MARTYR

After the last of the apostles died, the question arose, who should succeed them? That question provoked different answers in the early church. Some believed that the proper organization of the church consisted of only elders and deacons. Others argued that bishops should be appointed to succeed the apostles. This position became very common. By the 3rd and 4th centuries, the office of bishop in addition to elder and deacon was firmly established in most of the church. However, this structure of church government is not taught in the New Testament. "Bishop" or "Overseer" is another name for the office of elder (Acts 20:17, 28-29, Philippians 1:1,

Titus 1:5-7).

We have an important firsthand account of the worship of the early church from Justin Martyr. Justin was an important church father who lived in the 2nd century. He records this testimony in his First Apology:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on

*the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.*³

Justin tells us that the church would gather on the first day of the week. They would read the “memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets” and then the “president” or pastor/elder would instruct the congregation on the text of Scripture. Then, they would take communion. The church would give thanks to God as they partook of the communion meal. Then, an offering would be taken for the needy.

In the early centuries of the church, we also have examples of ancient Christian art. This early art shows us what was important to the early Christians. Communion was very important in early church worship. Much early Christian art depicts the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Fish and bread are also commonly depicted.

The fish was also a major symbol used by the early church. The Greek word for fish is *ichthys* and this was used as an acrostic in the early church. An acrostic is a word or poem, where each letter forms a series of words. Each letter of the Greek word for fish referred to part of Jesus’ title.

English: “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”

Greek: “Iesous Christos, Theou Huios, Soter”

3. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67.

There were also examples in early Christian art of various biblical events such as Noah's Ark, Daniel in the Lion's Den, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and other events.

We see the simplicity and beauty of early church worship and fellowship through these written testimonies and the art of the early church. Clement of Rome, writing shortly after the time of the Apostles, said this in his epistle to the Corinthians:



THE THREE YOUTHS IN THE FIERY FURNACE

This is the way, dear friends, in which we found our salvation, namely Jesus Christ, the high priest of our offerings, the benefactor and helper of our weakness. Through him we look steadily into the heights of heaven; through him we see as in a mirror, his faultless and transcendent face; through him the eyes of our hearts have been opened; through him our foolish and darkened mind springs up into the light; through him the Master has willed that we should taste immortal knowledge.⁴

The early Christians worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected again

to new life. We worship Jesus Christ with that same hope, even though we are separated by many centuries.

Christians in Pagan Greco-Roman Society

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1 Peter 4:1-5)

Christians faced many challenges living in pagan Greco-Roman society. Sexual immorality, including homosexuality, was rampant. Abortion was widespread. Clement of Alexandria rebuked the Romans for spending so much time and money on their pets, while exposing their own children to die, and not caring for the elderly.⁵

Abortion methods were more primitive back then. So instead of killing their children in the womb, many people abandoned them to die right after they were born. Christians rescued and adopted many of these abandoned infants. Abortion was universally condemned as murder by the early church. *The*

4. Clement of Rome, *First Clement*, 36.

5. Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor*, 3.4.

Didache, an early Christian document, says: “Do not murder a child by abortion or kill a new-born infant.”⁶

All across the Roman Empire, gladiatorial games took place in amphitheaters. Gladiators were usually slaves, criminals, or captives taken in war. They would be forced to fight with each other and with wild beasts for the entertainment of the spectators. These contests were violent. If a gladiator lost a contest, whether with another gladiator or with a wild beast, the crowd would decide his fate. If they gave a thumbs up, he would be allowed to live. If they gave a thumbs down, he would be killed. Many Christians were killed by wild beasts and gladiators in the arena. The church fathers condemned these violent games and discouraged Christians from watching them.

Private charity was not widely practiced by the Greco-Romans. Rome was a welfare state. People in the city of Rome were given bread and circuses. The Christians had a very different view of charity. They took care of their own. They cared for widows and orphans, adopted abandoned children, helped the poor, and took care of the elderly. They also took care of the sick and founded hospitals.

Like most non-Christian societies, the Greco-Romans had a low view of women. But Christians valued and honored women, treating them with dignity and respect. Many of the abandoned babies adopted by Christians were girls. Many godly women (some married to pagan husbands) like Nonna, Anthusa, and Monica faithfully reared their children in the faith. The pagan orator Libanius confessed: “What women these Chris-

tians have!”

Slaves were also despised in Greco-Roman society. But Christians treated them with dignity as spiritual equals. They recognized that all believers are members of the household of God and spiritual brothers and sisters (1 Timothy 3:15). Callistus, a former slave, even became bishop of Rome (c. 220). The early Christians honored those whom the Roman upper classes despised.

The challenge we face as Christians in the West today is to be faithful to the Lord in an apostate society that is becoming increasingly pagan. May we follow His Word in all areas of life and shine as bright lights in the world like our spiritual ancestors did.

6. *Didache*, 2.

Exercises

2. CHURCH LIFE IN THE EARLY CENTURIES**Study Questions**

1. What were the elements of worship in the early church according to the testimony of Justin Martyr?
2. Besides the office of apostle, what were the other two offices in the early church?
3. Were most early Christians members of the Roman upper class?
4. Why do Christians meet for worship on the first day of the week?
5. What did the fish represent in early Christian art?

Meditation & Application: Walking in the Truth

1. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Name some of the sins mentioned in this passage that early Christians were delivered from. How were they delivered from them?