

THE EARLY CHURCH FROM CHRIST TO CONSTANTINE II

4. **HERETICS.** In addition to NT, early epistles from **Clement**, 3d Bishop of Rome (96) and Ignatius (110) show clear understanding of divinity/humanity of Christ, Crucifixion and Resurrection, salvation by grace, and Christ's fulfillment of OT prophecy, but this does not stop growth of heresies. Most either denied the deity of Christ (the early **Ebionites** and later **Arians**) or his full humanity: the **Docetists** said that Christ only appeared (seemed) to inhabit a human body, that he did not physically die on the Cross or experience a bodily resurrection; the **Gnostics** (and **Neo-Platonists**) saw matter as inherently evil (the aborted creation of a lesser God) and the flesh as a prison of the soul. Gnostics said salvation came from secret wisdom (gnosis); Gnostics like **Valentinus** (140) invented elaborate mythologies of divine emanations. The Gnostic Gospels from **Nag Hammadi** are associated with this wide ranging heresy that has resurfaced today; none of these "gospels" was ever seriously considered by Church. There were also more minor heresies that debated relationship between Christ's two natures and the persons of the Trinity. **Marcion** (144), influenced by Gnostics, rejects God of OT (and thus OT itself) as a lesser deity and sees Christ as the true God of love. **Montanus** (157) leads an extreme version of Pentecostalism that relies on ecstatic prophesies for further revelation. There were also early disputes over dating of Easter and grace vs. works (**Pelagius**).
 5. **THEOLOGIANS.** Clement/Ignatius call for unity and submission to Bishops. Justin founds a school of Christian philosophy in Rome (140). **Irenaeus**, Bishop of Lyon (France) is first systematic theologian who refutes Gnostics by charting salvation history from Adam to Christ (180-200). (Heretics do not create orthodoxy, but they spur Church to systematize faith handed down by apostolic succession; Marcion demonstrated the need to come up with a clear biblical canon.) **Tertullian** a more hard-nosed theologian (the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church; what has Athens to do with Jerusalem) defends faith, but embraces Montanism. **Clement of Alexandria** (180) begins to read OT in an allegorical manner, but is superseded by his pupil, **Origen**, the greatest early theologian (and the most controversial: he castrated himself and he seemed at times to be too Platonic in his thinking and his allegorical readings). Origen's famous school drew Christians and pagans alike and took its pupils from philosophy/literature to scriptures.
 6. **CONSTANTINE.** During calm after Decius, church grows rapidly and builds churches; by 300, they make up 10% of Empire. **Diocletian** (284-305) comes to power, splits Empire, and sets up **Tetrarchy** with an Augustus & Caesar in East (**Diocletian/Galerius**) and West (**Maximian/Constantius**). Galerius incites Diocletian to unleash the 10th (and worst) of the Persecutions (303-12): Churches are destroyed, scriptures burned, leaders martyred. Diocletian/Maximian retire in 305; Constantius treats Christians well (as does his son, **Constantine**) but Galerius keeps persecution going until just before his death (311); he is followed by **Maximinus** who continues persecution in East. Troops name Constantine Emperor of West in 306; he defeats rival Emperor Maxentius at Battle of the **Milvian Bridge** (312; Cross in sky; In This Sign Conquer). He & **Licinius** (Augustus of East), sign **Edict of Milan** (313) that gives freedom of religion, returns stolen church property. Constantine defeats Licinius (324), calls **Council of Nicea** (325) to solve Arian heresy, bring Church unity. Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria main defeater of Arianism.
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