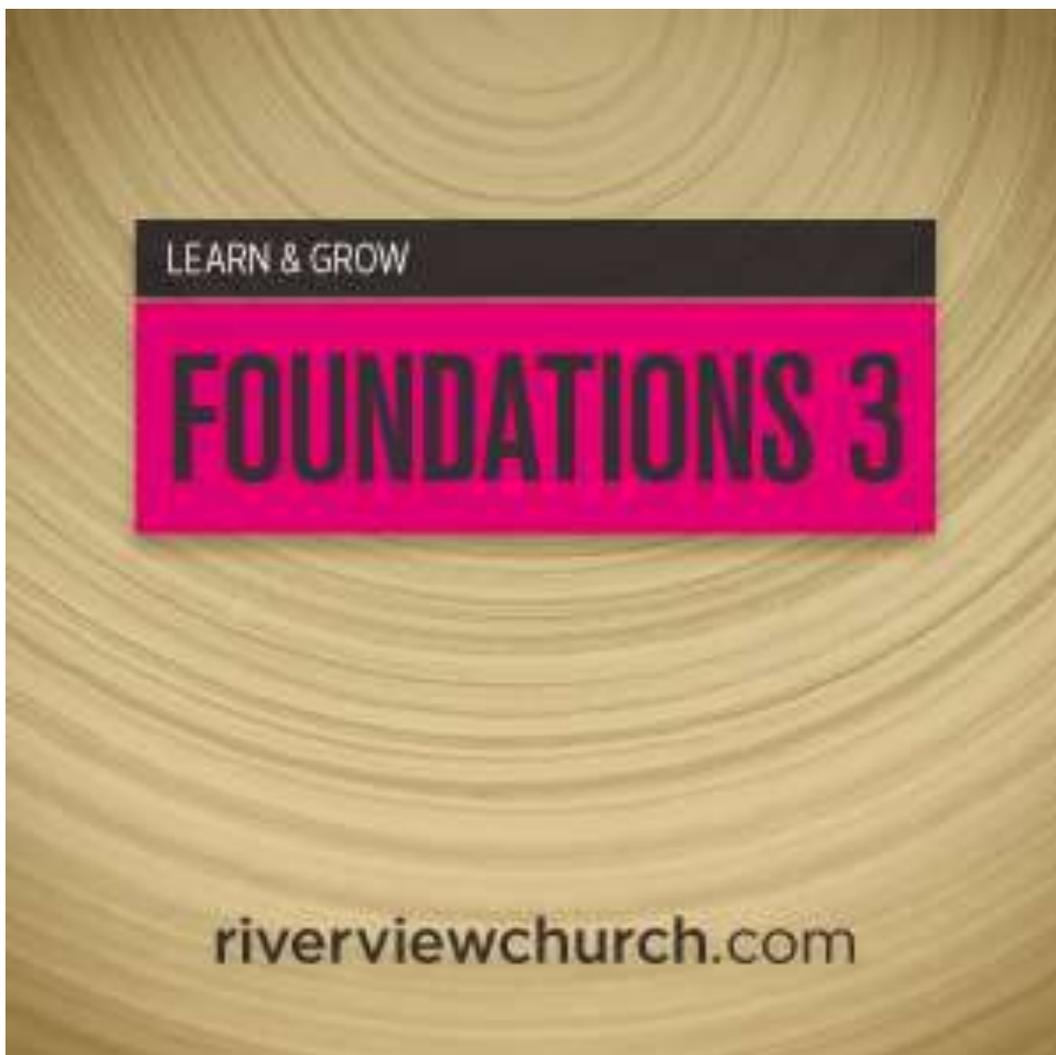


# The Church as Empire

Church History 1 (306) – Week 2



## The Beginnings of the Roman Catholic Church

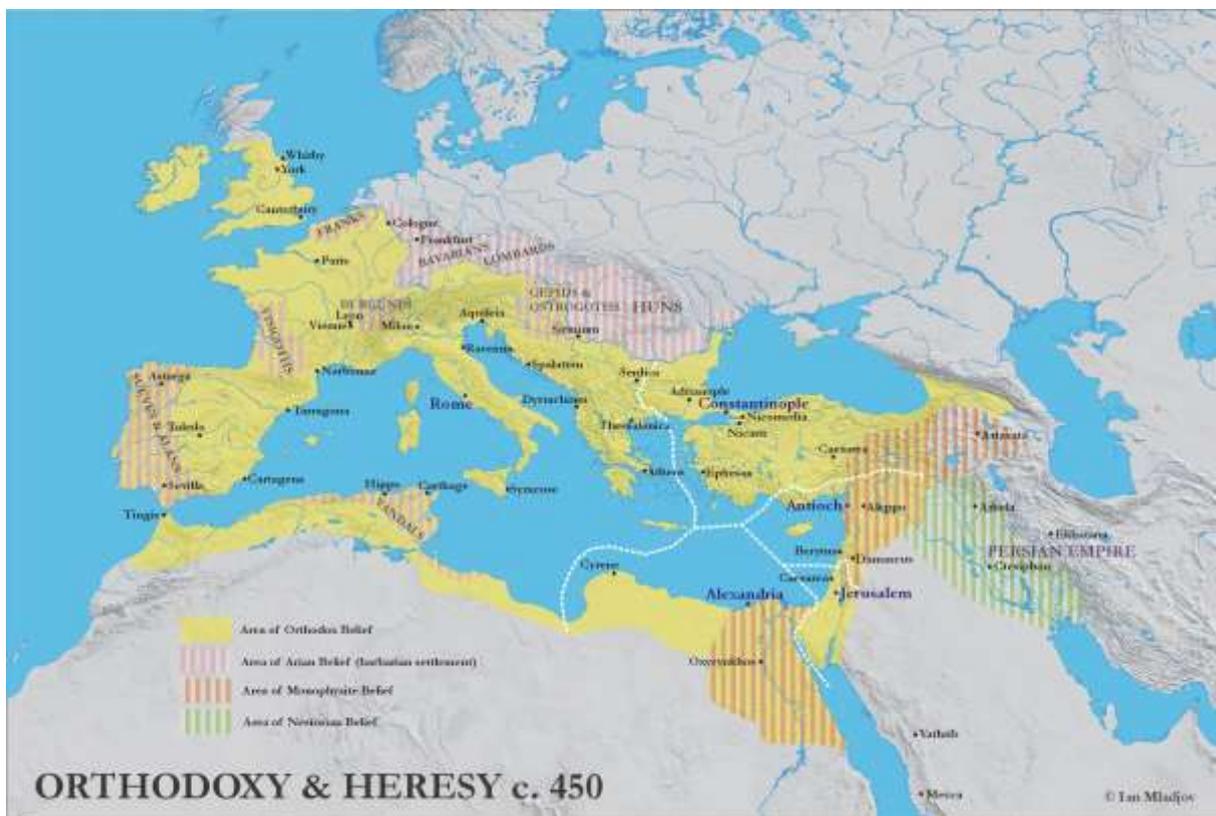
When Ambrose forced Theodosius to repent of his slaughter of the crowd in Thessalonica the Church became the Empire! (380 CE)

“Ambrose had hit upon the weapon – the threat of excommunication – which the Western Church would soon use again and again to humble princes.”

In 451 a General Council at Chalcedon, not far from Constantinople, affirmed that Jesus Christ was “complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man,... in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division or without separation,... coming together to form one person.”<sup>1</sup>

Most Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians, to this day, consider that statement orthodox Christian belief.

Debate also over the way in which Jesus was both fully God and fully Man carried with it a strong political edge.



<sup>1</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX.: Word., 1995), 107.

Arianism - Arius wrote, "The Son has a beginning, but . . . God is without beginning."<sup>2</sup>

Monophysite - that the person of the incarnate Christ was of one nature only (*monos*, 'single', *physis*, 'nature'), are present in Cyril of Alexandria's polemic against Nestorius.<sup>3</sup>

Nestorianism - two persons, a divine and a human, existing in juxtaposition in the incarnate Christ.<sup>4</sup>

## East and West

The Church of Rome and Constantinople began with very different cultures and this led to the development of different emphasis when it came to the things of God. The western church was developed out of the legal culture of the Romans and continued to maintain this emphasis. The West asks the questions, "How is a person changed, what is the church, where does religious authority lie"? For the East there are entirely different set of questions. How do we maintain the image of God in man? There is a greater emphasis on the relationship. This is especially seen in the use of icons.

## The Empire Falls

Rome fell for the first time to the Visigoths in 410. The last of the Roman troops left England in 410 and the country was overrun by the Jutes, Angles and Saxons. There was left a significant Christian church in western England which, being separated from the rest of the empire by the barbarians maintained a strong spiritual fervor and was culturally distinct from the RC church. The fall of the empire greatly increased the power and prestige of the Bishop of Rome.

The Pope became the religious emperor to a gradually increasingly expansive empire. Gregory 1 ascended the throne in 590 and this is seen as the beginning of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX.: Word., 1995), 100.

<sup>3</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 442.

<sup>4</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 457.

## Celtic Christianity – a detour

In 314 three British bishops attended a church council in Arles in France, Eborius bishop of York, Restitutus bishop of London and Adelius bishop of Caerleon (Gwent). So by that time there was a flourishing and organised church in England.

### *Christianity in Anglo Saxon England*

In 407 the last Roman soldiers left Britain. Over the following decades Roman civilization broke down.

However Christianity continued to thrive in Wales and by the early 5th century it spread to Ireland.

### *St Palladius.*

An early Irish missionary, the first bishop of Ireland, and the immediate predecessor to St. Patrick.

### *St Patrick*

With his knowledge of the way in which Irish society was organized Patrick set about organizing the church he founded in Ireland along the same lines.

Surprisingly, Celtic monks from Ireland and Britain also became missionaries to the Continent. Their itching feet carried them farther and farther from home. They established monasteries in Germany and Switzerland and even in northern Italy.

In the 5th and 6th centuries Scotland was converted. Cut off from the Church in Rome, Celtic Christians formed a distinctive Celtic Church.

