

The History of the Catholic Church

The Beginning
(B.C-100 A.D.)

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WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

■ God's Chosen People

– The Old Testament is the story of God calling and teaching His chosen people, the Israelites. These people were to bring the news of God's love to the whole human race so that the wound and division that was caused by the sin of Adam and Eve would be healed.

▪ Jeremiah 31:31-33.

▪ The Old Covenant was not God's final plan for His people, but the beginning of a relationship that would culminate in the New Covenant, instituted in, with, and through Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 31:31-33

“The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

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WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

■ God's Chosen People

- The New Testament tells the story of the institution of the New Covenant through Jesus.
 - Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, testified to God's New Covenant when he said, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).
 - Through the Holy Spirit, released through Christ, the People of God no longer need laws written on stone, but they have the Word of God written on their hearts (John 16:12-13).

John 16:12-13

"I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming."

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- Jesus founded the Church and He loves it.
 - Matthew 16:18-19
 - While the Church is imperfect, Jesus states that the powers of hell will not prevail against it and that He loves it as a groom loves his bride.
 - Through Jesus Christ, God's New Covenant has been revealed and through His Chosen People He desires to bring all people back into the relationship He had with them before the first sin.

Matthew 16:18-19

“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

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- The Church is “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic”
 - The Church is ONE. The authors of the New Testament understood that there was only *one* church, *one* people of God of the New Covenant.
 - While St. Paul addressed different “churches” in his letters, he was referring simply to different locations, not to different teachings and authorities.
 - In fact, he corrected the church at Corinth for dividing into different groups and following different leaders (1 Cor. 1:10-13).
 - He wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, urging them to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” insisting that “there is one body and one Spirit... one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Eph. 4:3-6).
 - There are two instances in the Acts of the Apostles where the unity of the Church was threatened (Acts 6 and 15).
 - In both instances, the church resolved the disputes peacefully, by meeting together (councils) to discuss and pray about the issues.
 - They relied upon the Holy Spirit to continue to teach and instruct them (John 16:12-13), knowing that it was the will of God that they remain one (John 17:21).

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

“I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, ‘I belong to 5 Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Kephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

John 16:12-13

“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.”

John 17:21

“...so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”

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- It was necessary for authority and leadership to develop in the early Church in order to maintain the unity Christ desired. This structure of authority is already clearly seen in the New Testament.
- **Bishops** (επισκοπος: a directing hand, an overseer, or guardian)
As in **Acts 20:28**.
 - The Apostles were given a unique teaching role (**John 16:12-13**).
 - They were also given power and authority (**Matthew 18:18-20**).
 - Apostleship eventually went beyond the Twelve, but it always maintained solidarity with the Twelve.
 - There were apostles of the local communities, who were not member of the original Twelve, but were representatives of the Twelve to local areas.
 - They had to be commissioned by the Twelve to have a legitimate ministry. This was done through commissioning and laying on of hands.
 - Examples would be Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy, who were contemporaries of the Twelve.

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- **Priest** (πρεσβυτερος: presbyter, elder, presider, or priest)

As in Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-4; James 5:14; and Rev. 4:4

- The word presbyter suggests one sharing in a council.
- In some cases, the functions of the elder and bishop were the same.
- Presbyters were subject to the authority of the visiting apostles.
- James is an example of a πρεσβυτερος.

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory.” -1 Peter 5:1-4

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- **Deacon** (διακονος- meaning "servant" or "minister")
 - The ministry of "deacon" was established to assist the apostles (bishops) in serving by taking over the administrative, organizational, and outreach ministries.

"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. - **Acts 1:1-6**

- The New Testament shows that there was already a ministerial structure developing in the Church. While these ministries were not clearly defined then, they are today.

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Church Structure Today:

- The Pope is the bishop of Rome, a "first among equals" with the other bishops, a successor of Saint Peter, and the visible head of the Church.
- A Cardinal is usually a bishop with an additional job, such as serving as an advisor to the Pope.
- A Bishop is the church leader of a diocese.
- An Archbishop is the title given to a bishop of an Archdiocese.

Interesting Pope facts:

- The tradition of popes changing their names upon election traditionally dates from Sergius IV (1009-1012 A.D.). Apparently, since his real name was Peter di Porca and he did not want to be called Peter II, he humbly changed his name so that people would not think that he considered himself an equal to Saint Peter.
- In 1294, Pope Saint Celestine V (Peter di Morone), without precedent, voluntarily resigned after only five months as pope. He was an 84-year-old hermit when he was elected pope. Feeling incompetent to lead the Church amidst the pressures of secular politics, he declared it possible for a pope to resign and did just that. He died two years later and was canonized a saint in 1313.
- One of the titles of the pope is "Servant of the Servants of God," which was the preferred title of Saint Gregory.

Cardinals:

- Some cardinals work full time in the Vatican while others serve as bishops of dioceses.
- When the Holy See becomes vacant (at the death or resignation of the pope) those cardinals who are under the age of 80 gather together in Rome for a "conclave" to elect the new pope.

Bishops:

- Have received the fullness of priestly ordination and are chief pastors of a geographical area. The local bishop is fully responsible for the flock entrusted to his care.
- Bishops have, for the most part, very limited authority beyond their own diocese. The one obvious exception is the Pope, who has ordinary authority in every diocese.

Archbishops:

- An Archbishop is the head of a particular province or region that includes several other dioceses; however, the archbishop does not have jurisdiction over these dioceses, other than his own. An archbishop, along with the bishops of a province, meet regularly to discuss issues and concerns regarding policies and practices of handing on the faith.

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Church Structure Today:

- Priests are ordained to help the bishop in his ministry.
 - They promise obedience to, and minister in unity and solidarity with, their bishops.
 - In the Roman Catholic Church, all priests (except those who have converted from other faiths) are celibate.

- A Deacon is a man ordained to a ministry of service.
 - He is an ordained person living in the lifestyle of the laity—over 90% are married.
 - The deacon's service is threefold: service of the Word (proclaiming the Gospel message, teaching, conducting retreats, counseling), service of the altar (witnessing marriages, baptizing, presiding at wakes and funerals, conducting prayer services), and service of charity (serving the poor, giving voice to those who are silenced, being involved in social justice).

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- The Church is “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic”
 - The Church is HOLY.
 - The word, “holy” literally means “set apart.”
 - To call the Church holy does not mean that it is without sin, but rather that it is “set apart” by God as His Chosen People to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. Just as a Bride is “set apart” for her groom, the Church is set apart in love by God.
 - The Church is holy, then, because of God, not because of us (1 Peter 2:9-10).

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- The Church is “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic”

- The Church is CATHOLIC.

- The word, “catholic” was first used to describe the Church by an early Christian and martyr, Ignatius of Antioch. He wrote on his way to martyrdom in Rome in the year 110 A.D.— “Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.”
 - The word “catholic,” therefore, was originally used to describe the Church as being universal—the Church of Jesus Christ spread throughout the whole world.
 - Today, the catholicity of the Church is manifested in the fact that it embraces people of every “nation, language, and way of life.”

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- The Church is "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic"
 - The Church is APOSTOLIC.
 - The Apostolic nature of the Church simply means that it continues in the mission of the Apostles, namely to go and "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that [Jesus] commanded [the Apostles]" (Matthew 28:19-20)
 - Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, wrote that the Church was "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).
 - Bishops today continue an unbroken tradition of passing on to the faithful the Word of God in Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments as the Apostles had done centuries ago.

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- The First Century – Laying the Foundation
 - Much of what happened in the Church in the 1st Century can be seen through the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Letters, and Book of Revelation.
 - We read about how Christianity, at the time just a seemingly insignificant offshoot of Judaism, spread from Jerusalem throughout the Gentile world, eventually reaching even Rome itself.
 - While the Roman system of roads and a common language made it much easier for Christianity to spread, it was the Holy Spirit Who was the real force behind the Church.
 - God raised up great men, like St. Paul and St. Stephen (the first martyr) to witness to the faith.
 - Eventually, Christians began being persecuted, as we read about in the Book of Revelation. In this book, John uses symbolic language to explain how Rome ("Babylon") was trying to suppress Christianity.

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This persecution occurred for several reasons:

1. The Christians would not worship the Roman pagan gods and the Emperor.
2. The Jews were making it clear to the Romans that the Christians were not an "offshoot" of their religion.
3. In 64 A.D., the Emperor Nero blamed the Christians for starting a fire in Rome; a fire that he himself more than likely started.

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■ The First Century – Laying the Foundation

- The successors of the Apostles, the bishops, continued to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ despite facing persecution and execution. By the end of the 1st Century, there were an estimated half million Christians in the Roman Empire.

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Vatican Council II

“Constitution on the Church”

