

**Church History and Evidences**  
**Notes: 150-325 AD: The Advent of the Catholic church**

**0-100 AD: The Church, The Apostles, Timothy and Titus**

**100- circa 160AD: The “church fathers” – Clement, Ignatius, etc.**

**150-175 AD: Beginnings of the “Episcopal polity”- the Catholic church**

**Episcopal polity:**

Churches with an episcopal polity are governed by bishops, practicing their authorities in the dioceses and conferences or synods. Their leadership is both sacramental and constitutional; as well as performing ordinations, confirmations, and consecrations, the bishop supervises the clergy within a local jurisdiction and is the representative both to secular structures and within the hierarchy of the church. Bishops are considered to derive their authority from an unbroken, personal apostolic succession from the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. Bishops with such authority are said to represent the historical episcopate or historic episcopate. Churches with this type of government usually believe that the Church requires episcopal government as described in the New Testament. In some systems, bishops may be subject to bishops holding a higher office (variously called archbishops, metropolitans, or patriarchs, depending upon the tradition). They also meet in councils or synods. These gatherings, subject to presidency by higher ranking bishops, usually make important decisions, though the synod or council may also be purely advisory.

For much of the written history of institutional Christianity, episcopal government was the only known form of church organization. This changed at the Reformation. Many Protestant churches are now organized by either congregational or presbyterian church polities, both descended from the writings of John Calvin, a Protestant reformer working and writing independently following the break with the Catholic Church precipitated by The Ninety-Five Theses of Martin Luther.

The definition of the word episcopal has variation among Christian traditions. There are subtle differences in governmental principles among episcopal churches at the present time. To some extent the separation of episcopal churches can be traced to these differences in ecclesiology, that is, their theological understanding of church and church governance. For some, "episcopal churches" are churches that use a hierarchy of bishops that regard themselves as being in an unbroken, personal apostolic succession.

"Episcopal" is also commonly used to distinguish between the various organizational structures of denominations. For instance, "Presbyterian" (Greek: 'πρεσβύτες, presbútēs) is used to describe a church governed by a hierarchy of assemblies of elected elders, referred to as Presbyterian polity. Similarly, "episcopal" is used to

describe a church governed by bishops. Self-governed local congregations, governed neither by elders nor bishops, are usually described as "congregational".

More specifically, the capitalized appellation "Episcopal" is applied to several churches historically based within Anglicanism ("Episcopalianism"), including those still in communion with the Church of England.

All orthodox Christians were in churches with an episcopal government, that is, one Church under local bishops and **regional Patriarchs**. Writing between ca. 85 and 110, St. Ignatius of Antioch, Patriarch of Antioch, was the earliest of the Church fathers to define the importance of episcopal government. **Assuming Ignatius' view was the Apostolic teaching and practice, the line of succession was unbroken and passed through the four ancient Patriarchal sees** (those local churches known to be founded by apostles), Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria. Rome was the leading Patriarchate of the ancient four by virtue of its founding by Saints Peter and Paul and their martyrdom there, not to mention being the political center of the Roman empire at the time. Some organizations (e.g. the Assyrian Church of the East), though aloof from the political wranglings of imperial Christianity, nevertheless also practiced episcopal polity.

#### **The traditional view of the origin of Episcopal polity:**

According to Christian tradition **[in fact, according to the Scriptures]**, the Christian Church **[i.e. Christianity]** was founded by Jesus. In the Gospel according to Matthew, the resurrected Jesus gathered his Twelve Apostles together, issued the Great Commission, and selected Simon Peter as their leader, proclaiming "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" **[This is the basis for ALL apostolic succession within many churches, including Catholicism – this is NOT in harmony with the Scriptures]**. **Many modern scholars, including some Catholic ones, flatly deny that Jesus ever even intended to found a Church, much less that he did so. Even those scholars who agree that Jesus founded some kind of Church are divided on whether he founded it on Simon Peter or gave him any sort of primacy. Even those scholars who accept that Peter held some sort of primacy among the apostles are divided on the issue of whether Jesus intended that primacy to be continued by others after Peter's death (apostolic succession). Even those scholars who accept that Jesus intended a continuing Petrine primacy are divided on whether this primacy was uniquely devolved upon the Church of Rome;** some, for example, following the lead of Cyprian of Carthage, insist that the Petrine primacy is possessed by every bishop throughout the world who stands in legitimate apostolic succession, whether in communion with Rome or not. **Even those scholars who accept that a unique Petrine primacy attached to the See of Rome are divided on exactly how and why that primacy became attached to Rome, by what means or succession it was passed down within the See of Rome, whether Rome itself remained true to that primacy, and exactly what authority the primacy legitimately exercises in the world today.**

## **Congregational Polity:**

Ecclesiastical government is congregational rather than denominational. Churches of Christ purposefully have no central headquarters, councils, or other organizational structure above the local church level. Rather, the independent congregations are a network with each congregation participating at its own discretion in various means of service and fellowship with other congregations. Churches of Christ are linked by their shared commitment to restoration principles.

Congregations are generally overseen by a plurality of elders (also known in some congregations as shepherds, bishops, or pastors) who are sometimes assisted in the administration of various works by deacons. Elders are generally seen as responsible for the spiritual welfare of the congregation, while deacons are seen as responsible for the non-spiritual needs of the church. Deacons serve under the supervision of the elders and are often assigned to direct specific ministries. Successful service as a deacon is often seen as preparation for the eldership. Elders and deacons are chosen by the congregation based on the qualifications found in Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Congregations look for elders who have a mature enough understanding of scripture to enable them to supervise the minister and to teach, as well as to perform governance functions. In lieu of willing men who meet these qualifications, congregations are sometimes overseen by an unelected committee of the congregation's men.

While the early Restoration Movement had a tradition of itinerant preachers rather than "located Preachers", during the 20th century a long-term, formally trained congregational minister became the norm among Churches of Christ. Ministers are understood to serve under the oversight of the elders. While the presence of a long-term professional minister has sometimes created "significant de facto ministerial authority" and led to conflict between the minister and the elders, the eldership has remained the "ultimate locus of authority in the congregation".

Churches of Christ hold to the priesthood of all believers. No special titles are used for preachers or ministers that would identify them as clergy. Churches of Christ emphasize that there is no distinction between "clergy" and "laity" and that every member has a gift and a role to play in accomplishing the work of the church.

## **~ 200 AD: The Catholic church –**

The Catholic Church has an episcopate, with the Pope, who is the Bishop of Rome, at the top. The Catholic Church considers that juridical oversight over the Church is not a power that derives from human beings, but strictly from the authority of Christ, which was given to his twelve apostles. The See of Rome, as the unbroken line of apostolic authority descending from St. Peter (the "prince and head of the apostles"), is a visible sign and instrument of communion among the college of bishops and therefore also of the local churches around the world. In communion with the worldwide college of bishops, the Pope has all legitimate juridical and teaching authority over the whole

Church. This authority given by Christ to St. Peter and the apostles is transmitted from one generation to the next by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the laying on of hands from the Apostles to the bishops, in unbroken succession.

According to Catholic tradition, the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ. The New Testament records Jesus' activities and teaching, his appointment of the twelve Apostles, and his instructions to them to continue his work. The Catholic Church teaches that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, in an event known as Pentecost, signaled the beginning of the public ministry of the Church. Catholics hold that Saint Peter was Rome's first bishop and the consecrator of Linus as its next bishop, thus starting the unbroken line which includes the current pontiff, Pope Francis. That is, the Catholic Church maintains the apostolic succession of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope – the successor to Saint Peter.

In the account of the Confession of Peter found in the Gospel of Matthew, Christ designates Peter as the "rock" upon which Christ's church will be built. While some scholars do state that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome, others say that the institution of the papacy is not dependent on the idea that Peter was Bishop of Rome or even on his ever having been in Rome. **Many scholars hold that a church structure of plural presbyters/bishops persisted in Rome until the mid-2nd century, when the structure of a single bishop and plural presbyters was adopted**, and that later writers retrospectively applied the term "bishop of Rome" to the most prominent members of the clergy in the earlier period and also to Peter himself. On this basis, Oscar Cullmann and Henry Chadwick question whether there was a formal link between Peter and the modern papacy, and Raymond E. Brown says that, while it is anachronistic to speak of Peter in terms of local bishop of Rome, Christians of that period would have looked on Peter as having "roles that would contribute in an essential way to the development of the role of the papacy in the subsequent church". **These roles, Brown says, "contributed enormously to seeing the bishop of Rome, the bishop of the city where Peter died, and where Paul witnessed to the truth of Christ, as the successor of Peter in care for the church universal"**.

The Catholic Church believes itself to be the continuation of the Christian community founded by Jesus in his consecration of Simon Peter. In the Catholic view, modern bishops are the successors to the apostles.

The See of Rome is traditionally said to be founded by Peter and Paul. While the New Testament says nothing directly about Peter's connection with Rome, indirectly Romans 15:20–22 may indicate that when Paul wrote it, another Apostle was already in Rome, and it is highly probable that the "Babylon" mentioned in 1 Peter 5:13, a letter attributed to Peter, is Rome **[Editor's Note: It shows the Gospel had been taught there already, but not necessarily by an apostle, and there's certainly no indication it was Peter. "Babylon" has many different possibilities, of which Rome is only one.]**. The tradition that links Peter with Rome is "early and unrivalled"

**[according to a Catholic source].** In the first years of the 2nd century, Ignatius of Antioch implies that Peter and Paul had special authority over the Roman church **[this implication has been assumed by biased historians]**. Irenaeus of Lyons, also of the 2nd century, believed that Peter and Paul had been the founders of the Church in Rome and had appointed Linus as bishop **[as we've already seen, Irenaeus' testimony is itself questionable at best, and much of what he supposedly wrote or said no longer exists separately from the recordings of Eusebius (325 AD, whose bias for the Catholic papacy is clear)]**. Dionysius of Corinth also serves as a witness to the tradition. **[Interestingly, Dionysius is ONLY known to us through Eusebius. There is no other source for his existence or what he taught.]**

The traditional narrative starts with Peter being consecrated by Jesus, followed by Peter traveling to Rome sometime after Pentecost, founding a church there, serving as its first bishop and consecrating Linus as bishop, thus starting the line of Popes of whom Francis I is the current successor. This narrative is often related in histories of the Catholic Church.

Elements of this traditional narrative agree with the surviving historical evidence, which includes the writings of several early church Fathers (among them Pope Clement I) and some archaeological evidence. While some historians of Christianity assert that the Catholic Church can be traced to Jesus's consecration of Peter, others argue that Jesus did not found a church in his lifetime but provided a framework of beliefs. **Other historians disagree with the traditional view that the papacy originated with Peter, instead asserting that the papal office developed at an unspecified date before the mid-150s and could possibly have been superimposed by the traditional narrative upon the primitive church.**

The only part of this narrative that is supported directly by the Scriptures is the **[supposed, being improperly interpreted]** consecration of Peter; however, elements of the rest of the narrative are attested to in the writings of Church Fathers such as Ignatius **[The seven epistles preserved under the name of Ignatius are generally considered authentic, since they were mentioned by the historian Eusebius in the first half of the fourth century. Ever since the Protestant Reformation, the authenticity of all the Ignatian epistles has come under intense scrutiny. John Calvin called the epistles "rubbish published under Ignatius' name." Protestants have tended to want to deny the authenticity of the epistles because they seem to attest to the existence of a monarchical episcopate in the second century. In 1886, Presbyterian minister and church historian William Dool Killen published an essay extensively arguing that none of the epistles attributed to Ignatius is authentic. Instead, he argued that Callixtus, bishop of Rome, forged the letters around AD 220 to garner support for a monarchical episcopate, modeling the renowned Saint Ignatius after his own life to give precedent for his own authority.]** Irenaeus **[almost everything we know about Irenaeus come from Eusebius, including even some of his supposed writings]** and Dionysius of

Corinth [**again...Eusebius...**]. Largely as a result of a challenge to this narrative initiated by Alfred Loisy, some theologians have challenged the historicity of the traditional narrative, resulting in a less literal interpretation of the Church's "founding" by Jesus and less specific claims about the historical foundations and transmission of the Petrine primacy in the Church's early years. Some historians have also challenged the traditional narrative of Peter's role in the early Roman Church.

**The New Testament offers no proof that Jesus established the Papacy nor that he established Peter as the first Bishop of Rome. The official documents of the Catholic Church do not apply to Peter the title "Bishop of Rome", applying it instead to the "successor of Peter", and presenting the Pope as Peter's successor in his relationship with the whole of the Catholic Church.** However, some present the Church as linking Peter's primacy with his being bishop of Rome: Eamon Duffy says the official Catholic Church position is that Jesus had essentially appointed Peter as the first pope, with universal primacy as bishop of Rome. **Some historians have challenged the view that Peter was bishop (as the term is now understood) of Rome.**

While most scholars agree that Peter died in Rome, it is generally accepted that there was a Christian community in Rome before either Peter or Paul arrived there. The Catholic Church draws an analogy between Peter's seeming primacy among the Twelve in New Testament texts such as Matthew 16:17–19, Luke 22:32, and John 21:15–17 and the position of the Pope among the Church's bishops.

Two apostolic and patriarchal sees are claimed to have been founded by Peter: those of Antioch and Rome. With the see of Alexandria, viewed as founded by a disciple of Peter, these formed what became known as the three Petrine Sees, endowed with special authority as recognized by the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

### **100 – 325 AD: Ante-Nicene Period (literally meaning "before Nicaea") (First Council of Nicaea-325 AD)**

Christianity throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries have generally been less studied than the periods that came before and after it. This is reflected in that it is usually referred to in terms of the adjacent periods with names as such "post-apostolic" (after the period of 1st century formative Christianity) and "ante-Nicene" (before the First Council of Nicaea). However, the 2nd and 3rd centuries are quite important in the development of Christianity.

There is a relative lack of material for this period, compared with the later Church Father period. For example, a widely used collection (Ante-Nicene Fathers) includes most 2nd- and 3rd-century writings in nine volumes. This includes the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Apologists, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyons, Origen of Alexandria and the New Testament Apocrypha, among others. In contrast, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (consisting mainly of Augustine, Jerome and Chrysostom) fills twenty-eight volumes.

According to Siker the developments of this time are "multidirectional and not easily mapped". While the preceding and following periods were diverse, they possessed unifying characteristics lacking in this period. 1st-century Christianity possessed a basic cohesion based on the Pauline church movement, Jewish character, and self-identification as a messianic movement. The 2nd and 3rd centuries saw a sharp divorce from its early roots. There was an explicit rejection of then-modern Judaism and Jewish culture by the end of the 2nd century, with a growing body of *adversus Judaeos* literature. Christianity in the 4th and 5th centuries experienced imperial pressure and developed strong episcopal and unifying structure. The ante-Nicene period was without such authority and immensely diverse. Many variations in this time defy neat categorizations, with as various forms of Christianity interacted in a complex fashion to form the dynamic character of Christianity in this era.

By the early 2nd century, Christians had agreed on a basic list of writings that would serve as their canon, see *Development of the New Testament canon*, but interpretations of these works differed, often wildly. In part to ensure a greater consistency in their teachings, by the end of the 1st century many Christian communities evolved a more structured hierarchy, with a central bishop, whose opinion held more weight in that city. By 160, most communities had a bishop, who based his authority on the chain of succession from the apostles to himself.

Bishops still had a freedom of interpretation. The competing versions of Christianity led many bishops who subscribed to what is now the mainstream version of Christianity to rally more closely together. Bishops would call synods to discuss problems or doctrinal differences in certain regions; the first of these to be documented occurred in Roman Asia in about 160. Some bishops began to take on a more authoritative role for a region; in many cases, the bishop of the church located in the capital city of a province became the central authority for all churches in that province. These more centralized authorities were known as metropolitan churches headed by a Metropolitan bishop. The churches in Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome exerted authority over groups of these metropolitan churches.

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The development of doctrine, the position of orthodoxy, and the relationship between the various opinions is a matter of continuing academic debate. Since the Nicene Creed came to define the Church, the early debates have long been regarded as a unified orthodox position against a minority of heretics. Walter Bauer, drawing upon

distinctions between Jewish Christians, Pauline Christians, and other groups such as Gnostics and Marcionites, argued that early Christianity was fragmented, with various competing interpretations. According to Bauer, orthodoxy and heresy do not stand in relation to one another as primary to secondary, but, in many regions, heresy was the original manifestation of Christianity.

The Ante-Nicene period saw the rise of a great number of Christian sects, cults and movements with different interpretations of Scripture, particularly the divinity of Jesus and the nature of the Trinity. These were called heresies by the leaders of the Proto-orthodox church, but many were very popular and had large followings. Some of the major movements were:

**Gnosticism** – 2nd to 4th centuries – reliance on revealed knowledge from an unknowable God, a distinct divinity from the Demiurge who created and oversees the material world.

**Marcionism** – 2nd century – the God of Jesus was a different God from the God of the Old Testament.

**Montanism** – 2nd century – relied on continual prophetic revelations from the Holy Spirit.

**Adoptionism** – 2nd century – Jesus was not born the Son of God, but was adopted at his baptism, resurrection or ascension.

**Docetism** – 2nd to 3rd century – Jesus was pure spirit and his physical form an illusion.

**Sabellianism** – 3rd century – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three modes of the one God and not the three separate persons of the Trinity. (aka Modalism)

**Arianism** – 3rd to 4th century – The Arian concept of Christ is based on the belief that the Son of God did not always exist but was begotten within time by God the Father. Jesus, as the Son, was therefore subordinate (lesser) to God the Father. During the Council of Antioch, which was convened in 325, Eusebius was excommunicated for subscribing to the heresy of Arius.

### **Some of the teachings that arose during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries include:**

**Infant baptism** - Infant baptism was widely practiced at least by the 3rd century, but it is disputed whether it was in the first centuries of Christianity. Some believe that the Church in the apostolic period practiced infant baptism, arguing that the mention of the baptism of households in the Acts of the Apostles would have included children within the household. Others believe that infants were excluded from the baptism of households, citing verses of the Bible that describe the baptized households as believing, which infants are incapable of doing. In the 2nd century, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, may have referred to it. Additionally, Justin Martyr wrote about baptism in First Apology (written in the mid-2nd century), describing it as a choice and contrasting it



with the lack of choice one has in one's physical birth. However, Justin Martyr also seems to imply elsewhere that believers were "disciples from childhood", indicating, perhaps, their baptism.

The so-called Apostolic Tradition says to "Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them." If it was written by Hippolytus of Rome, Apostolic Tradition could be dated about 215, but recent scholars believe it to be material from separate sources ranging from the middle second to the fourth century, being gathered and compiled on about 375–400. The 3rd century evidence is clearer, with both Origen (calling infant baptism "according to the usage of the Church") and Cyprian advocating the practice. Tertullian acknowledges the practice (and that sponsors would speak on behalf of the children), but, holding an unusual view of marriage, argues against it, on the grounds that baptism should be postponed until after marriage.

Interpretation of the baptismal practices of the early church is important to groups such as Baptists, Anabaptists, and the Churches of Christ who believe that infant baptism was a development that occurred during the late 2nd to early 3rd centuries. The early Christian writings mentioned above, which date from the 2nd and 3rd century indicate that Christians as early as the 2nd century did maintain such a practice, as inferred from the Didache.

**Monasticism** - Institutional Christian monasticism seems to have begun in the deserts in 3rd century Egypt as a kind of living martyrdom. Anthony of Egypt (251-356) is the best known of these early hermit-monks. Anthony the Great (251-356) and Pachomius (c. 292–348) were early monastic innovators in Egypt, although Paul the Hermit (c.226/7-c.341) is the first Christian historically known to have been living as a monk. There is historical evidence that individuals were living the life later known as monasticism before the legalization of Christianity.

Anthony the Great was the first to specifically leave the world and live in the desert as a monk. Anthony lived as a hermit in the desert and gradually gained followers who lived as hermits nearby but not in actual community with him. One such, Paul the Hermit, lived in absolute solitude not very far from Anthony and was looked upon even by Anthony as a perfect monk. This type of monasticism is called eremitical or "hermit-like."

**Early iconography** - Christian art emerged only relatively late. According to art historian André Grabar, the first known Christian images emerge from about AD 200, though there is some literary evidence that small domestic images were used earlier. Although many Hellenized Jews seem, as at the Dura-Europos synagogue, to have had images of religious figures, the traditional Mosaic prohibition of "graven images" no doubt retained some effect. This early rejection of images, although never proclaimed by theologians, and the necessity to hide Christian practice from persecution, leaves few archaeological records regarding Early Christianity and its

evolution. The oldest Christian paintings are from the Roman Catacombs, dated to about 200, and the oldest Christian sculptures are from sarcophagi, dating to the beginning of the 3rd century.

**Sabbath** - According to Bauckham, the post-apostolic church contained diverse practices regarding the Sabbath. It seems clear that most of the Early Church did not consider observation of the Sabbath to be required or of eminent importance to Christians and in fact worshiped on Sunday.

**Premillennialism** - the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus were the most outspoken proponents of premillennialism. Justin Martyr saw himself as continuing in the "Jewish" belief of a temporary messianic kingdom prior to the eternal state. Irenaeus devoted Book V of his *Against Heresies* to a defense of the physical resurrection and eternal judgement.

Other early premillennialists included Pseudo-Barnabas, Papias, Methodius, Lactantius, Commodianus, Theophilus, Tertullian, Melito, Hippolytus of Rome and Victorinus of Pettau. By the 3rd century there was growing opposition to premillennialism. Origen was the first to challenge the doctrine openly. Eusebius said of the Premillennialian, Papias, that he was "a man of small mental capacity" because he had taken the Apocalypse literally.

### **312 AD: Constantine makes Christianity legal –**

The first "Christian" Emperor, Constantine the Great, had converted to Christianity directly after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D, after reputedly seeing a flaming cross in the sky which was emblazoned with the words "In Hoc Signo Vincens"; which translates to "In this Sign Conquer." According to Eusebius, in the evening before the battle Constantine went to sleep unsure what this sign could mean, but then had a dream in which Christ appeared to him, and commanded him to make a likeness of the sign which he had seen in the heavens, as it would protect him in all future engagements with his enemies. The next day, Constantine promised the Christian God that if his army were to win the battle, he would adopt the Christian religion - which is precisely what happened.

### **260-340 AD: Eusebius –**

Eusebius of Caesarea, also known as Eusebius Pamphili, was a historian of Christianity, exegete, and Christian polemicist. [A polemic is contentious rhetoric that is intended to support a specific position by aggressive claims and undermining of the opposing position. Polemics are mostly seen in arguments about controversial topics. The word is derived from Ancient Greek (polemikos), meaning 'warlike, hostile', (polemos), meaning 'war'.] He became the bishop of Caesarea Maritima about 314 AD. Together with Pamphilus, he was a scholar of the Biblical canon and is regarded as an extremely learned Christian of his time. He wrote *Demonstrations of the Gospel*,

Preparations for the Gospel, and On Discrepancies between the Gospels, studies of the Biblical text. As "Father of Church History" (not to be confused with the title of Church Father), he produced the Ecclesiastical History, On the Life of Pamphilus, the Chronicle and On the Martyrs. He also produced a biographical work on the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great, who ruled between 306 and 337 AD.

Little is known about the life of Eusebius. Beyond notices in his extant writings, the major sources are the 5th-century ecclesiastical historians Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, and the 4th-century Christian author Jerome. There are assorted notices of his activities in the writings of his contemporaries Athanasius, Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and Alexander of Alexandria. Eusebius' pupil, Eusebius of Emesa, provides some incidental information.

During the Council of Antioch, which was convened in 325 and held shortly before the First Ecumenical Council in the Bythnian city of Nicaea, he was excommunicated for subscribing to the heresy of Arius.

His works cannot be trusted to be from subjectivism, for some scholars believe that "Eusebius is a notoriously unreliable historian, and so anything he reports should be critically scrutinized." This is especially true of his 'Life of Constantine', which he wrote as an eulogy shortly after the emperor's death in 337 A.D, and which is "Often maligned for perceived factual errors, deemed by some so hopelessly flawed that it cannot be the work of Eusebius at all." Yet others see him as a "Constantinian flunky," for as a trusted adviser to Constantine, it was politically expedient for him to present Constantine in the best light as possible. Never recognized as a saint, the likely reason for this is that traditional sources view Arius finding support " ... from Eusebius of Nicomedia, and our Eusebius, who by that time was bishop of Caesarea.

Regarding Church History or Ecclesiastical History, the accuracy of Eusebius' account has often been called into question. In the 5th century, the Christian historian Socrates Scholasticus described Eusebius as writing for "rhetorical finish" in his Vita of Constantine and for the "praises of the Emperor" rather than the "accurate statement of facts." The methods of Eusebius were criticized by Edward Gibbon in the 18th century. In the 19th century Jacob Burckhardt viewed Eusebius as 'a liar', the "first thoroughly dishonest historian of antiquity." Ramsay MacMullen in the 20th century regarded Eusebius' work as representative of early Christian historical accounts in which "Hostile writings and discarded views were not recopied or passed on, or they were actively suppressed... matters discreditable to the faith were to be consigned to silence." Consequently, this kind of methodology in MacMullen's view has distorted modern attempts, (e.g. Harnack, Nock, and Brady), to describe how the Church grew in the early centuries. Arnaldo Momigliano wrote that in Eusebius' mind "chronology was something between an exact science and an instrument of propaganda " Drake in the 21st century treats Eusebius as working within the framework of a "totalizing discourse" that viewed the world from a single point of view that excluded anything he thought inappropriate. Eusebius has been often accused of intentional falsification of

the truth; in judging persons or facts he is not entirely unbiased. In Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica* (Book XII, Chapter 31) Eusebius discussed "That it will be necessary sometimes to use falsehood as a remedy for the benefit of those who require such a mode of treatment." Joseph Lightfoot also notes that Eusebius cannot always be relied on: "A far more serious drawback to his value as a historian is the loose and uncritical spirit in which he sometimes deals with his materials. This shows itself in diverse ways. He is not always to be trusted in his discrimination of genuine and spurious documents."

### **325 AD: The First Council of Nicaea –**

The First Council of Nicaea was the first ecumenical council of the church. Most significantly, it resulted in the first uniform Christian doctrine, called the Nicene Creed. With the creation of the creed, a precedent was established for subsequent local and regional councils of bishops (synods) to create statements of belief and canons of doctrinal orthodoxy—the intent being to define unity of beliefs for the whole of Christendom.

Derived from Greek (Ancient Greek: lit. 'the inhabited one'), "ecumenical" means "worldwide" but generally is assumed to be limited to the known inhabited Earth, (Danker 2000, pp. 699–670) and at this time in history is synonymous with the Roman Empire; the earliest extant uses of the term for a council are Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* 3.6 around 338, which states "he convoked an ecumenical council" and the Letter in 382 to Pope Damasus I and the Latin bishops from the First Council of Constantinople.

One purpose of the council was to resolve disagreements arising from within the Church of Alexandria over the nature of the Son in his relationship to the Father: in particular, whether the Son had been 'begotten' by the Father from his own being, and therefore having no beginning, or else created out of nothing, and therefore having a beginning. St. Alexander of Alexandria and Athanasius took the first position; the popular presbyter Arius, from whom the term Arianism comes, took the second. The council decided against the Arians overwhelmingly (of the estimated 250–318 attendees, all but two agreed to sign the creed and these two, along with Arius, were banished to Illyria).

Another result of the council was an agreement on when to celebrate Easter, the most important feast of the ecclesiastical calendar, decreed in an epistle to the Church of Alexandria in which is simply stated:

“We also send you the good news of the settlement concerning the holy pasch, namely that in answer to your prayers this question also has been resolved. All the brethren in the East who have hitherto followed the Jewish practice will henceforth observe the custom of the Romans and of yourselves and of all of us who from ancient times have kept Easter together with you.”

Historically significant as the first effort to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom, the Council was the first occasion where the technical aspects of Christology were discussed. Through it a precedent was set for subsequent general councils to adopt creeds and canons. This council is generally considered the beginning of the period of the First seven Ecumenical Councils in the History of Christianity.

