

A QUICK
LOOK
AT
CHRISTIAN
HISTORY

GEORGE THOMAS KURIAN



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Introduction

History,” the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger said, “is a river in which human beings float, driven by its currents.” *A Quick Look at Christian History* traces the river of Christian history and its tributaries as it meanders over the course of 2000 years.

A Quick Look at Christian History belongs to a genre known as timelines. It is a horizontal linkage of people and events, ideas and institutions. Timelines are different from narrative history, but both are included in a branch of historiography known as chronology. In the early centuries, the church had as many chronologers as historians. One of the earliest was James Usher, who wrote a chronology of the world starting with creation. Then there was the 13-volume *Magdeburg Centuries*, a chronology of the church divided by centuries. Written by seven authors called Centuriators led by M. Flacius Illyricus, it was published in Basel between 1559 and 1674. New divisions of time were sometimes devised, such as age, era, and dispensation, to illustrate patterns of growth and the waxing and waning of civilizations.

But the greatest triumph of Christian chronology came from the work of a little-known monk named Dionysius Exiguus, who, on orders of the pope, devised a dividing line across human history known as *Anno Domini*, or Year of the Lord. This revolution was as influential and consequential as Copernicus’s heliocentric theory. The birth of Christ became the central event in history. Later the term “before Christ” (BC) was devised to cover the centuries that ended with the birth of Christ.

A Quick Look at Christian History may be called (to borrow from John Bunyan) the Pilgrim Church’s Progress. It is a story of growth and expansion and the efforts of the gates of hell to thwart it. The church grew on three fronts. First, it grew territorially from a room in Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. Second, it grew numerically from 12 illiterate men to more than two-thirds of the human race to become the first truly universal faith. But the greatest transformation was institutional and structural. That the church is not of human origin; it is actually an institution alien to the earth system. As a result, it has to adopt the protocols, rubrics, and modalities that undergird it as a universal institution. This process took centuries and is perhaps even now incomplete.

For decades the church and its members did not even have a name. They were called the Way or the Nazarenes or some such words of insult. Finally, the name Christians was used at Antioch, and then only in derision. Similarly, Christ’s divinity did not become dogma until centuries after His resurrection. During the same period, hymns had to be composed, the canon of the Scriptures established, the

Eucharist incorporated into the worship services, dates set for fasts and feasts, liturgies written, churches built, and the sacerdotal hierarchy set up. The church's institutional infrastructure is the most brilliant and well-ordered in the world and has contributed to the church's success.

The great advantage of timelines over narrative history is that while the latter travels along the highways, the former can explore the byways and side roads of history. What may appear as inconsequential to the great historians may be fascinating to the lay student. Timelines are a serendipitist's delight.

The most enjoyable part of completing a manuscript is acknowledging help in its compilation. In this, as in my 65 books that preceded it, I drew from the well-springs of love, encouragement, and support of my wife, Annie. My daughter Sarah was the laboring oar in many of these projects, and her cheerful disposition made her an ideal coworker, troubleshooter, and problem solver. At Harvest House Publishers, Terry Glaspey was in at the creation and worked on it closely every step of the way. Gene Skinner handled the editing with professional skill and brought in imaginative ideas and resources.

George Thomas Kurian
Yorktown Heights, New York
June 10, 2014

The Age of the Apostles

THE STATUS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

On the Day of Pentecost, the church begins with about 4000 members. By the end of the first century, 28 percent of the then-known world has heard the gospel, and 0.6 percent of the population is Christian. The church is 70 percent nonwhite, and Scriptures are available in six languages.

INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIANS

Apostles Paul, John, and Matthew; Gospel writers Mark and Luke; Stephen (the first martyr)

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND INFLUENCES

- The birth of Christ is the great watershed in human history. This cosmic event did not explode on the scene like a supernova, but arrived in secret with the gentle cry of an infant in the Judean night. It would reverberate through the corridors of time and change human lives as no other event before or since.
- When Christ was born, Octavian (later Emperor Caesar Augustus) was at the zenith of his power, and his army enforced peace throughout the largest empire history had known. It extended to Armenia and Arabia in the east, to Nubia and Carthage in the south, to Gaul in the north, and to Spain in the west. The other two great powers, China and India, were outside the pale of known civilization.
- Christianity began not with the birth of Christ, but with His resurrection. The New Testament, like all testaments, became effective only with the death of the testator. It is not so much Christ's message that forms the foundation stone of Christianity as His atoning sacrifice and His resurrection.
- Pentecost transformed the small band of apostles and their immediate followers into the largest missionary enterprise the world had known. On this day the Holy Spirit was poured out on this motley crowd of believers and emboldened them to challenge the established religions of Greece and Rome.
- Christianity spread like a fire from heaven, consuming the pagan cultures of the day. Within two decades of Calvary, Christianity had spread to three continents. Paul, Peter, and possibly James took it to Europe. Mark took it to Africa, Thomas took it to India, and the other apostles took it to some of the smaller countries in the Middle East. By the end of the first century, there were Christians in Egypt, Nubia, Armenia, France, Italy, Spain, Greece,

- Cyprus, Germany, Britain, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, Illyria, Dalmatia, Asia Minor, Albania, Libya, and all of North Africa.
- Seven years after Calvary, Christ’s followers were called Christians for the first time in Antioch. In Roman usage, the suffix “-ian” implied “the property of,” and the term “Christian” originally pointed to one who belonged to Christ rather than someone who simply believed in Him.
 - The three decades after Calvary were dominated by a man who was not even one of the 12 apostles—Paul, formerly Saul, the learned Jew from Cilicia. Paul was a towering figure in all except the physical sense, a brilliant intellect, a gifted writer, and a tireless worker. Half of the New Testament books came from his pen. His elegiac epistles form the foundation of Christian theology. Known as the apostle of the Gentiles, Paul almost single-handedly took the gospel to the non-Jewish world and made it a global rather than an ethnic religion.
 - Within a few years of Calvary, Christianity had its first martyr—Stephen. He set the pattern that would last through the centuries. The blood of the martyrs would become the seeds of the church as millions of Christian martyrs gave their lives that their faith might live.
 - Open persecution of Christians began in Palestine under King Herod Agrippa, who beheaded James, one of the original apostles, in Jerusalem. The spread of Christianity to other provinces of the Roman Empire incurred imperial wrath. In the first century, both Nero and Domitian proscribed the new religion and put tens of thousands to the sword or exposed them to lions.
 - By the end of the first century, Christianity had cut its umbilical cord to Judaism. Christians were ousted from all synagogues. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans as Jesus had predicted, and the Jews were expelled from their native land after the suppression of their final revolt against Rome in AD 70. For the next 19 centuries, Jews and Christians would remain hostile to one another.
 - All the documents eventually included in the New Testament were written by the end of the first century.

CHRONOLOGY

30 Jesus commissions the 12 apostles (and later 70 other disciples) to preach the good news.

Jesus is crucified and resurrected, and He ascends to heaven.

Jesus gives the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

The church in Jerusalem is founded on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem as the disciples are filled with the Spirit in an upper room and 3000 others are converted.

- 31** The apostles begin evangelizing widely. Some remain in Jerusalem, where they evangelize only Jews. The church remains Jewish.
- 34** Stephen, one of the first deacons, becomes the first martyr. Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, is directed by the high priest to suppress Christianity. On the road to Damascus, Saul encounters a blinding light and receives a vision of the risen Christ, who asks him, “Why do you persecute me?” Saul departs to Arabia and later to Jerusalem. He eventually becomes well known by the Greek version of his name, Paul. Philip extends the mission to Samaritans. He baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch, who takes the gospel to Nubia (present-day Sudan).
- 35** According to tradition, Thaddeus and Bartholomew evangelize in Armenia. Christians multiply throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee.
- 36** Peter ministers at Caesarea, and many Italians are converted.
- 37** The wider mission to the Gentiles is launched. Peter preaches in Samaria and the coastal cities of Palestine. Emperor Tiberius dies, and Caligula becomes emperor.
- 40** Believers are first called Christians in Antioch, perhaps derisively. The suffix “-ian” indicates that they belong to Christ. The first Christians are reported in Greece and the city of Rome.
- 42** Claudius becomes emperor. Mark the Evangelist arrives in Alexandria and plants the seeds of the Coptic Church.
- 44** King Agrippa executes James, the brother of John. Peter is imprisoned but miraculously escapes.
- 45** Paul begins his first missionary journey, which lasts three years. He travels with Barnabas to Antioch, Cyprus, Pamphilia, Pisidia, and Lystra. The church in Antioch sends famine relief to Jerusalem.
- 48** The apostles and elders of the church meet in Jerusalem for the first apostolic council. They discuss whether Christians need to follow Jewish rites, such as circumcision.
- 49** Peter and Paul fall out over whether Jewish and Gentile Christians should follow the *kashruth*, or Jewish dietary laws, especially those

banning pork. The apostles decide that Gentiles are exempt from these restrictions. Paul is recognized as the apostle to non-Jews.

- 50** Jews and Christians are banished from Rome.
The first Christians are reported in Persia. Assyrian Christians form the Church of the East.
Paul begins his second missionary journey, which lasts two years. He visits Phrygia, Galatia, and Greece. He enlists Timothy and Silas and plants many churches.
- 51** Paul writes 1 Thessalonians from Corinth.
- 52** The apostle Thomas sails to an ancient Jewish colony in India. He evangelizes Hindus and establishes seven churches. He is eventually martyred in Mylapore, and his body is buried in San Thome.
Paul writes 1 Corinthians and 2 Thessalonians.
- 53** Paul writes to the Philippians, the first church he founded, while he is in prison.
Paul embarks on his third missionary journey, which lasts five years. He visits Ephesus, Corinth, Macedonia, Philippi, Phrygia, Galatia, and Caesarea. He is arrested during Pentecost at Jerusalem, taken before Governor Felix at Caesarea, and imprisoned there from 58 to 60. In 60 he appears before Festus, appeals to Caesar, is brought before Agrippa and Berenice, and sails to Rome as a prisoner. He remains in Rome until 63.
- 54** Nero becomes emperor and launches the first imperial persecution of Christians.
- 55** The Roman province of Asia, which includes 500 cities, is evangelized from Ephesus, its capital. Acts reports that all residents of Asia hear the word of God.
- 56** The 12 apostles cover the known world with the good news. Paul and Peter preach in Roman provinces, James in Spain, Bartholomew in Armenia, and Thomas in India.
- 57** Paul's epistle to the Romans is sent out to 3000 Christians in five Roman congregations. Paul reports that the word of God has reached the ends of the earth as far as Illyricum.
- 60** The apostle Andrew, brother of Peter, is crucified in Achaia.
James, a brother of Jesus, writes his epistle.

- The first Christians are reported in Malta following Paul's shipwreck on the island.
- 61** Paul arrives in Rome as a prisoner. He reports that the good news has been preached to "every creature under heaven."
The first Christians are reported in England.
In Jerusalem, James (the brother of Jesus) is stoned to death by order of the high priest, Annas. Simeon, son of Cleophas and Mary, succeeds James.
- 63** Paul is freed in Rome. He later visits Spain.
The apostle Mark is martyred in Alexandria.
- 64** Peter writes his first epistle.
Paul sends his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus.
Fire breaks out in Rome, and Christians are blamed. Peter is crucified upside down.
Paul is executed with thousands of other Christians.
- 66** Luke concludes the book of Acts.
- 69** Ignatius becomes bishop of Antioch.
Polycarp (69–155), bishop of Smyrna and martyr, is born.
- 70** The Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the synoptic Gospels, is completed.
Titus destroys Jerusalem with four Roman legions, killing 10,000 Jews and taking 90,000 more to Rome as prisoners.
Antioch becomes the center of Christianity in the eastern half of the Roman Empire.
- 75** Luke and Matthew complete their Gospels.
Christians are expelled from Jewish synagogues.
- 80** The first Christians are reported in France and in North Africa.
- 81** Christians refuse to offer incense to Emperor Domitian and suffer their second imperial persecution.
- 85** Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Ignatius, Papias, and Polycarp compose the earliest writings of the Apostolic Fathers.
- 90** Gnosticism, a dualistic heresy, arises.
The Gospel of John is completed.

- 93** Jewish historian Flavius Josephus mentions Jesus in *Antiquities of the Jews*.
- 95** Ignatius of Antioch writes *Letters*, seven letters written to his friends before his martyrdom.
The Eucharist is widely celebrated on Sunday, which becomes the Christian Sabbath.
John, the aged and sole surviving apostle, is exiled to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea.
- 96** Clement writes his first epistle to the Corinthians, the oldest of the extracanonical epistles.
“*Sanctus*,” an early hymn of praise, is first used. Clement mentions singing of psalms during service.
Timothy is killed by a mob while opposing a pagan festival.
- 98** Christians suffer their third imperial persecution under Trajan.

The Age of the Church Fathers

THE STATUS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

At the end of the second century, 32 percent of the known world has heard the gospel, and 3.4 percent of the population is Christian. The church is 68 percent nonwhite, and Scriptures are available in seven languages.

INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIANS

Ignatius, Polycarp, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Hermas, Tatian

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND INFLUENCES

- At the turn of the first century, the last of the surviving apostles, John, is an exile on the island of Patmos, where the angel of the Lord parted the veil of the future and revealed to him the mysteries of things to be. His Apocalypse is couched in enigmatic language that speaks of cosmic cataclysms that defy human understanding. The Apocalypse was to become the last chapter of the New Testament, and he ended the great drama of which he had been such a faithful witness with the words, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”
- A new generation of saints and martyrs took up the torch of faith even as the last of the apostles passed from the scene. The greatest among these were Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who was burned at the stake. Other church fathers were defining the faith that had been handed down from the apostles, creating a *consensus patrum* that was to develop later. Irenaeus of Lyons, a student of Polycarp, emerged as one of the earliest Christian theologians. His *Against Heresies* was the first attempt to defend orthodoxy.
- The fledgling church was already being beset by heretics by the beginning of the second century. The most formidable of these heretics was Marcion of Sinope, who was a brilliant theologian. He was the first to realize the radical nature of the Christian revelation and to break away completely from Judaism. He considered the Jehovah of the Old Testament as a Demiurge who was not only inferior to the Father of Jesus Christ, but in fact, evil. Marcion rejected most of the Old Testament and accepted only the Pauline epistles in the New Testament. By doing so, he prompted the church to determine the authenticity of each of the books of the Bible.
- The Gnostics also emerged as a serious threat to orthodoxy. They followed a form of Manichaeism that posited a struggle between a god of light and a god of darkness and offered knowledge (*gnosis*) as the path of salvation.

- By the end of the second century, the church recognized 23 of the 27 books of the New Testament as canonical. At this time, these books came to be called Scripture. Other New Testament writings were received more slowly. Doubts persisted about Hebrews, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. Certain books, not included in the modern New Testament, were considered canonical by some churches but rejected by others. These included the Epistle of Barnabas and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.
- By the second century, two of the seven major sacraments of the church—baptism and the Eucharist—had been accepted as the defining marks of a Christian life. The other five sacraments—extreme unction, confirmation, ordination, marriage, and monastic consecration—were being incorporated as divine services. Baptism was originally only for adults, but the baptism of infants was becoming increasingly the norm. The Eucharist was being celebrated on Sundays, as prescribed by Paul, rather than on the Sabbath, as the earliest Christians did.
- By the end of the second century, Christianity was sweeping the empire, posing a threat to the imperial religion. Tertullian wrote, “There is no nation indeed which is not Christian.” Hermas wrote, “The Son of God has been preached to the ends of the earth.” And Justin Martyr wrote that “Christ has been proclaimed to every race of men.” Christianity spread to present-day Morocco, Bulgaria, Portugal, Romania, Arabia, and Austria.
- The second century witnessed the birth of Christian literature. Among the notable works was the *Didache*, an important document describing Christian beliefs, practices, and church government. Justin Martyr wrote his *Apology*, introducing the branch of theology known as apologetics. Another classic is the *Shepherd of Hermas* by the subapostolic writer Hermas.
- In 132 the Jews revolted again under Bar Kokhba, leading to the second destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 134. Almost all the Jews in Palestine were either killed or exiled, and the nation was not to return to its native land until modern times.
- The second century witnessed even more brutal persecutions of Christians under Septimus Severus and Marcus Aurelius. The number of martyrs throughout the Roman Empire was in the tens of thousands. The church was planted in blood, and it was being watered with blood.

CHRONOLOGY

100 Justin Martyr (100–165), an early Christian apologist, is born.

The age of the apostles comes to a close when apostle John dies at Ephesus.

Christianity is predominantly urban, spreading from city to city along Roman trade routes.

Saudi Arabians become Christians. (Christianity will be eradicated in the seventh century by Islam.)

Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) receives the gospel from Christians who had been evangelized by Thomas in India.

- 105** Ignatius of Antioch applies the term “catholic” to the church for the first time in his letter to the Smyrnaeans.
- 110** This is the earliest plausible date for the Old Roman Creed, a precursor to the Apostles’ Creed.
Ignatius writes his seven *Letters* during his journey to Rome.
- 112** Ignatius is martyred at Rome.
- 120** Tatian (120–180), author of *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four Gospels, is born.
The *Didache*, an early manual of church life, is written as early as 65 or as late as 150. It includes teaching that baptism is administered both by triple immersion and by pouring, and it mentions regular fasting on Wednesday and Friday.
Shepherd of Hermas, a series of eschatological and prophetic tracts, is written sometime between 120 and 155.
- 128** The Latin hymn “*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*” (“Glory to God on High”) is written. The authorship is probably Greek.
- 130** Irenaeus (130–202), an early Church Father and apologist, is born.
- 135** Polycarp writes his Epistle to the Philippians.
- 144** Marcion of Pontus is excommunicated and forms a separate Christian community. He rejects the Old Testament, whose God he contrasts with the God of Jesus. His radical selection of New Testament books prompts the church to be more specific about what books it believes to be part of the Bible.
Aristides of Athens writes the earliest surviving *apologia* for (defence of) Christianity, much influenced by Judaism.
- 150** *Marcion’s Canon*, a collection of New Testament books, is compiled according to Gnostic criteria. It is the first known New Testament canon. Though the text is not extant, it has been reconstructed from the writings of Marcion’s critics.
The Roman provinces of Moesia and Thracia (modern Bulgaria) are evangelized. The first churches are formed at Anchialos (modern Pomorie) and Debeltum (modern Burgas) along the Black Sea.

The Roman province of Lusitania (modern Portugal) is evangelized. Justin Martyr founds a catechetical school in Rome and documents signs and wonders among the faithful. A shrine is constructed over the tomb of the apostle Peter on Vatican Hill in Rome. Clement of Alexandria (150–215), a Church Father, is born.

- 155** Justin Martyr describes worship in Rome. It includes Old and New Testament readings, a sermon, an offering of bread and wine, a prayer of the faithful, the kiss of peace, a eucharistic prayer, and communion. He writes his *First Apology*, reconciling faith and reason, outlining doctrine, and responding to charges of immorality.
- 156** Montanism begins. Tertullian will be its most famous member. Persecuted by the established church, it goes underground.
- 160** Tertullian of Carthage (160–220), a brilliant Christian apologist, expositor, and Church Father, is born. Clement of Alexandria (150–215), a Greek theologian and philosopher, is born.
- 161** Christians suffer the fourth imperial Roman persecution under Marcus Aurelius.
- 170** Hippolytus (170–235), an important theologian, is born. Tatian, a Gnostic apologist, writes his *Address to the Greeks* and also the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four Gospels in Old Syriac.
- 175** The earliest references to incense being used in Christian worship date from this time. Hegesippus writes his list of apostolic succession. It is the oldest record of the names of the early bishops of Rome. Athenagoras writes his *Apology* and *On the Resurrection*.
- 177** Christianity is introduced to Britain.
- 180** Christians are now found in all provinces of the Roman Empire and in Mesopotamia. The first Christian commentary on the beginning of Genesis is written. The existence of the invisible God is argued from His visible works in creation. It includes the first usage of the word “Trinity.” The churches of Rome and Alexandria celebrate Easter on the Sunday after the first full moon of spring, but the churches of Asia Minor observe it on the fourteenth of the month Nisan. Celsus writes his *True Speech* against the Christians.

- The Scillitan Martyrs are executed at Carthage. The *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* is considered the earliest document of the church of Africa.
- 182** Origen (182–254), an influential Christian thinker and writer, is born.
- 185** Irenaeus writes *Against Heresies*. It is a detailed attack on Gnosticism, especially that of Valentinus, and is eventually regarded as a classic formulation of orthodoxy.
- 188** Church Fathers allow chant in the liturgy but warn against polyphony, chromatic music, dance, and the use of some instruments.
Clement of Alexandria writes *Miscellaneous Studies, An Exhortation to the Greeks (Protrepticus)*, and *On Christian Life and Manners*. These three works contain the most thorough synthesis of Christian doctrine and Greek philosophy at the time.
- 190** Parts of the Bible are translated into Latin for the first time, perhaps by a Christian community in Africa.
- 193** Christians suffer the fifth imperial Roman persecution under Septimius Severus.
- 194** The *Muratorian Canon* of Scripture is compiled. It is the oldest extant list of New Testament writings and is somewhat different from the modern one.
- 195** The threefold hierarchy of bishop, presbyter, and deacon is widespread by this time.
- 197** Tertullian writes his *Apology*, appealing for state toleration of Christianity. He also writes *On the Lord's Prayer* and *On Baptism*. He writes, "The blood of the martyrs is seed," and "There is no nation indeed which is not Christian."
- 199** Christian catacombs are constructed in the suburban area of Rome. They consist of several underground chambers, usually laid out in a grid. Recesses in the walls, one above another, contain the bodies, grouped by family.
The Montanist movement is officially condemned.
- 200** Tertullian is among the first to mention various Daily Office hours. He notes that Vigils, Lauds, and Vespers are said in Carthage and that Terce, Sext, and None are recognized as private prayer hours.

The Great Persecutions

THE STATUS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

At the end of the third century, 36 percent of the world is evangelized, and 10.4 percent of the population is Christian. The church is 65.7 percent nonwhite, and Scriptures are available in ten languages.

INFUENTIAL CHRISTIANS

Anthony the Great, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory the Illuminator, Cyprian of Carthage, Gregory Thaumaturgus

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND INFLUENCES

- By 200 the Scriptures were translated into seven languages, including Syriac and Coptic. The edition of the four Gospels in a continuous narrative, compiled by Tatian in about 170, began to circulate widely in Syriac-speaking churches. It became the standard text until the fifth century, when it was replaced by the four separate Gospels we have today.
- The third century saw the birth of Christian monasticism in Egypt. Anthony the Great (251–356) was the first Desert Father to go into the Wadi El Natrun as a hermit to launch the great wave of asceticism that would blossom in the fourth century.
- Christian theology was taken to new heights in the early third century by two theologians based in Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria was the head of a school of catechumens there. He was an authority on Greek philosophy and was able to fashion a theology rooted in the best Hellenic traditions. After Clement came Origen, the greatest of the Alexandrian theologians. He taught in Alexandria for 28 years. He wrote some 2000 works, about which Jerome wrote, “Who could ever read all that Origen wrote?” Origen’s writings included commentaries on most books of the New Testament. Origen was killed in the Decian persecution.
- The Decian persecution began in the middle of the century. Emperor Decius decreed that all citizens were required to sacrifice to an image of the emperor and obtain a certificate called a *libellus* attesting to their obedience. Those who failed to obtain a *libellus* were tortured and beheaded, a fate that befell most of the bishops and church leaders. Valerian succeeded Decius as emperor and issued another decree in 257: “The most sacred emperors Valerian and his son Gallienus command that there shall be no meetings of Christians in any place, and that they shall not frequent the cemeteries. If

anyone fails to observe this beneficial precept, he shall be beheaded.” Those who were killed included Cyprian of Carthage, one of the greatest Christian theologians. The persecution ended in 261 when Emperor Gallienus issued his edict of toleration.

- The end of the third century marked the bloodiest persecutions against Christians. In 298 pagan priests accused Christians of disrupting sacrifices at a pagan temple in Antioch. Roman troops were called in, and they unleashed a persecution that lasted more than seven years and left hundreds of thousands dead. Diocletian, the senior emperor, had been tolerant of Christians during the first 20 years of his reign, as his wife and daughter were probably Christians. But Galerius, the junior emperor, was opposed to the new religion. In 300, as some Christians refused to serve in the imperial army, Galerius ordered all Roman soldiers to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods. Three years later, further edicts ordered the destruction of churches, the confiscation of Scriptures, and the arrest of bishops and theologians. In 304 the edict was extended to all Christians in the empire. As Galerius redoubled his efforts to stamp out Christianity, Lactantius wrote, “There is another cause why God permits persecutions to be carried out against us, that the people of God may be increased.”
- In the third century, North Africa in general and Carthage in particular were among the most heavily Christianized areas of the Roman Empire. The first Latin-speaking church was there, and it produced some of the greatest of the Church Fathers, including Tertullian and Augustine.
- In the third century, the first church buildings began to take shape as rectangular basilicas. Previously Christians met in homes or in underground hiding places. Archeological excavations in the city of Dura-Europos, on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire, discovered the remains of the earliest surviving Christian church. It had an altar, a chair, a baptistery, and room for some 60 people.
- The third century saw the establishment of the first Christian kingdom and the first national church. Gregory the Illuminator (257–332) went to Armenia and persuaded King Tiridates, who was then persecuting the church, to embrace Christianity. The king then encouraged all his people to follow him—the first time such a national conversion had taken place. Armenia is the oldest Christian nation in the world.

CHRONOLOGY

- 200** Clement of Alexandria writes *Stromata*. Minucius Felix writes *Octavius*.
Irenaeus writes *Demonstration of Apostolic Teaching*.
Most of the New Testament is available in Coptic.
Thousands of Christians are martyred in vicious persecutions in Egypt.

Switzerland and Belgium are evangelized.
The New Testament in Latin is completed.
The first permanent church buildings are constructed.

- 202** Septimius Severus issues an edict against Jews and Christians, forbidding any form of proselytism.
Clement flees Alexandria.
Tertullian refers to making the sign of the cross at various times during the day. The sign is made with the finger or thumb on the forehead.
- 203** Perpetua, a 22-year-old noblewoman and nursing mother, and Felicity, an expectant mother, are martyred at Carthage. The account of their deaths, *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, becomes the prototype of acts of Christian martyrs.
- 205** Cyprian of Carthage (205–258), an African bishop, theologian, and martyr, is born.
- 206** Tertullian includes the first explicit mention of infant baptism in *On Baptism*. He also distinguishes baptism, unction, and the laying on of hands in the initiation rite—the first time all three are mentioned together. Baptism involves elaborate preparation, including confession of sin, renunciation of the devil, fasting, vigil, and anointing.
Tertullian writes *On the Soul*.
- 215** The custom of saying grace before meals is common by this time.
Clement of Alexandria is the first to refer to the fish as a Christian symbol.
- 220** Origen writes *On First Principles*, his most systematic and speculative work.
- 225** *Didascalia Apostolorum*, an early treatise on church life and order, is written, probably in Syriac.
- 230** Sextus Julius Africanus writes his *History of the World*. His estimate that the creation took place 5499 years before the birth of Christ is later adopted by many Eastern churches.
- 235** Christians suffer the sixth imperial Roman persecution under Maximinus.
Hippolytus writes *Refutation of All the Heresies*.

- 240** Lucian of Antioch (240–312), teacher of Arius and of Eusebius of Nicomedia, is born.
 Origen writes his commentary on the Song of Songs.
 Gregory Thaumaturgus becomes bishop in Pontus, a mostly pagan diocese. Ninety-five percent of the population is converted before his death in 270.
 The earliest known baptism is found in a house-church at Dura-Europos. Prior to this time, baptism was probably carried out in natural water sources.
- 245** Origen compiles *Hexapla*, a parallel edition of six Old Testament Greek translations.
- 248** Origen writes his eight-volume *Against Celsus*, an apologetic work against the pagan philosopher who objected to Christianity's supernatural and exclusivist claims.
- 249** Christians suffer the seventh imperial Roman persecution under Decius. The Roman state systematically attempts to destroy Christianity.
- 250** Gregory Thaumaturgus writes his *Statement of Faith*, which includes the earliest known record of an appearance of Mary.
 Novatian writes *On the Trinity*, a completely orthodox doctrine of the Trinity by a man later condemned as a rigorist.
 The Caesarean Creed is developed. It is a catechetical and baptismal creed of the Caesarean episcopate and later becomes the basis for the Nicene Creed at the Council of Nicaea.
 The first known hermit, Paul of Thebes, goes into seclusion. According to legend, he lives as a hermit for more than a hundred years. He is known through Jerome's biography of him.
 Pope Fabian sends Dionysius of Paris (Saint Denys) to be a missionary in Paris and the first bishop there.
 Emperor Decius orders the arrest of the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The bishops of Carthage and Alexandria go into hiding. Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, dies in prison. Fabian, bishop of Rome, is also martyred.
 The Roman provinces of Pannonia and Valeria (modern Hungary) are evangelized.
- 251** The city of Rome includes 30,000 Christians (5 percent of the population), 46 presbyters, 7 deacons, 42 acolytes, 52 exorcists, and 1500 widows and persons in distress.
 Anthony of Egypt, a desert hermit, is born.

Cyprian writes *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*.

- 252** A catastrophic plague epidemic strikes the Mediterranean world, killing 25 percent of the entire population of the Roman Empire over 20 years. Fifty percent of the population dies in Alexandria. In Carthage, bishop Cyprian organizes medical aid.
- 253** Christians suffer the eighth imperial Roman persecution under Valerian. Christians are no longer allowed to assemble for worship, and their property is confiscated.
- 255** The Council of Carthage addresses the rebaptism of heretics.
- 256** Arius (256–336), an Egyptian heretic, is born.
- 257** Gregory the Illuminator (257–331), the apostle to Armenia, is born.
- 260** Some Christians of Pentapolis denounce Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, for Christological errors. The Synod of Rome upholds the doctrine of the Trinity and condemns both Sabellianism (modalism) and tritheism.
Emperor Gallienus issues an edict of religious tolerance and restores confiscated goods.
According to some calculations, there are about six million Christians in the Roman Empire.
- 261** The first basilicas (rectangular churches) are built.
- 263** Eusebius (263–339), bishop of Caesarea, scholar, and father of church history, is born.
- 268** Rome is regarded as the senior bishopric at the Council of Antioch. About 40 percent of the Roman Empire is Christian, and the number is increasing rapidly.
- 270** Antony of Egypt establishes himself in the desert.
Christians suffer the ninth imperial Roman persecution under Aurelian. Manicheism arises. It is a dualistic hierarchical rival religion to Christianity.
Monasticism begins in Egypt.
Nicholas (270–343), bishop of Myra, is born. Many people today associate him with Santa Claus.
- 272** Dionysius, bishop of Paris, and two of his companions are beheaded on a hill called *Montreartre* (Martyrs' Mound).

- Constantine the Great (272–337) is born. He became a Byzantine emperor and ended the persecution of Christianity.
- 290** The Roman Empire is reorganized by Emperor Diocletian into 4 prefectures, 15 (secular) dioceses, and 120 provinces.
Pachomius (290–346), a hermit and monastic founder in Egypt, is born.
- 291** Hilarion (291–371), the founder of Anchoritic monasticism in Palestine, is born.
- 296** Athanasius the Great of Alexandria (296–373), a Church Father, chief defender of Tinitarianism, and father of Orthodoxy, is born.
- 298–302** Christians in the Roman army are forced to resign.