

# CHURCH HISTORY

A brief overview of the first 600 years  
and key figures of the Church



"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful  
for teaching, rebuking, correcting and  
training in righteousness" - **2 Timothy 3:16**

# Introduction

## Why Learn Church History?

Church history is full of controversies, heresies, and battles for the truth. We must familiarize ourselves with those events if we are to stand faithfully in the present, are not led astray and do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Solomon stated in **Ecclesiastes 1:9-10**

"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new'? It has been already in the ages before us" **(ESV)**.

Several times in Scripture we are told to learn from the things done in the past, that we may become wiser and this is especially true regarding church history.

"Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

- **1 Corinthians 10:11 (ESV)**

" For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." - **Romans 15:4 (ESV)**

## Christian Orthodoxy

We define Christian Orthodoxy as conforming to the Christian faith as represented in the creeds of the early Church. These creeds were established through several ecumenical councils. They were meant to clarify teaching and customs, denounce false teachings and define terms and concepts.

In the New Testament Church we see clashes between the Apostles. In the **Book of Acts chapter 15**, we see how Paul and Barnabas head to Jerusalem to debate with the apostles and elders of the church over the circumcision of the Gentiles. This was the first Jerusalem Council.

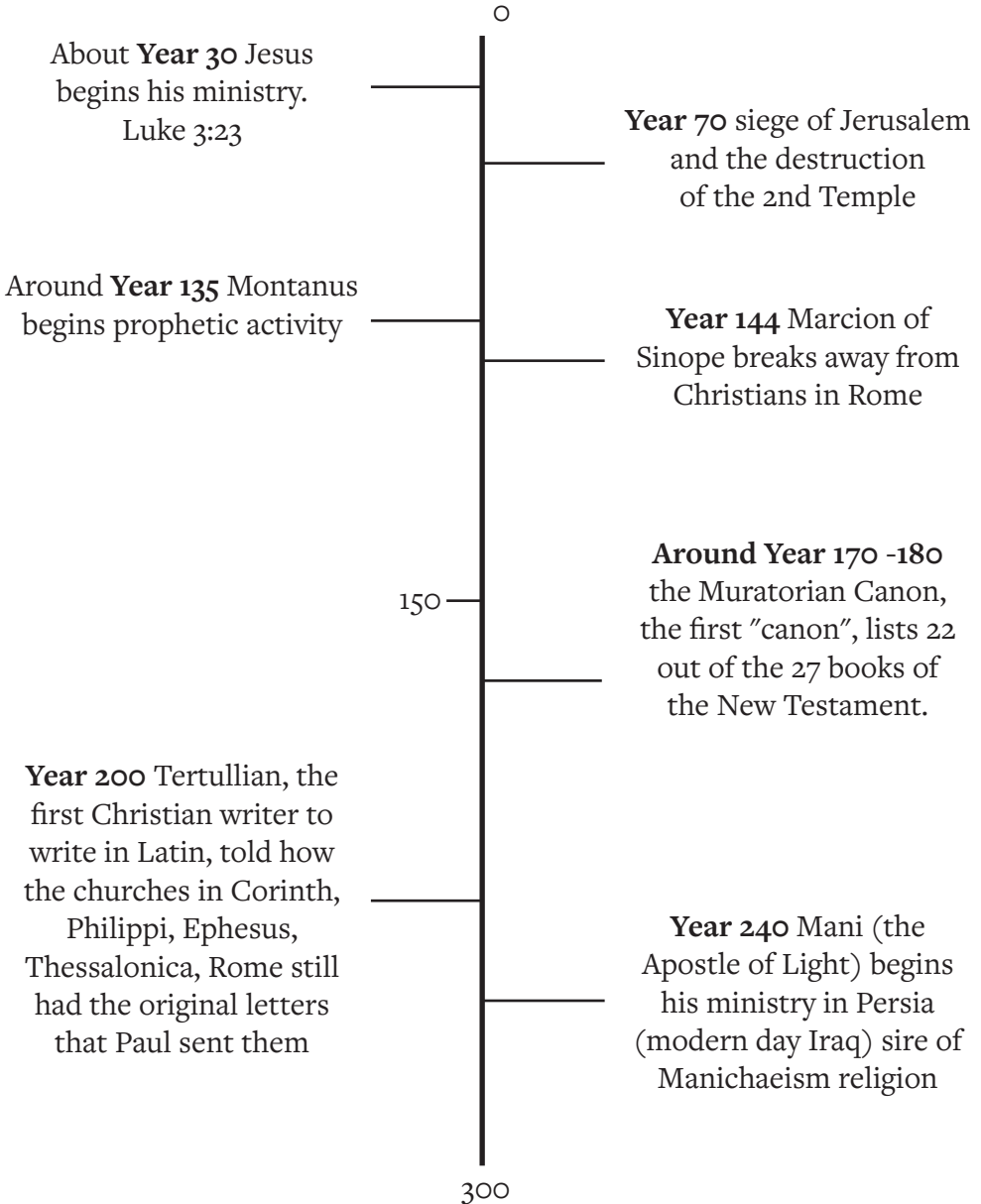
We then see how Paul and Peter clash in the **Book of Galatians 2:11**. We see an early division between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians which is quickly settled by the Apostles in order to maintain a Unified Church.

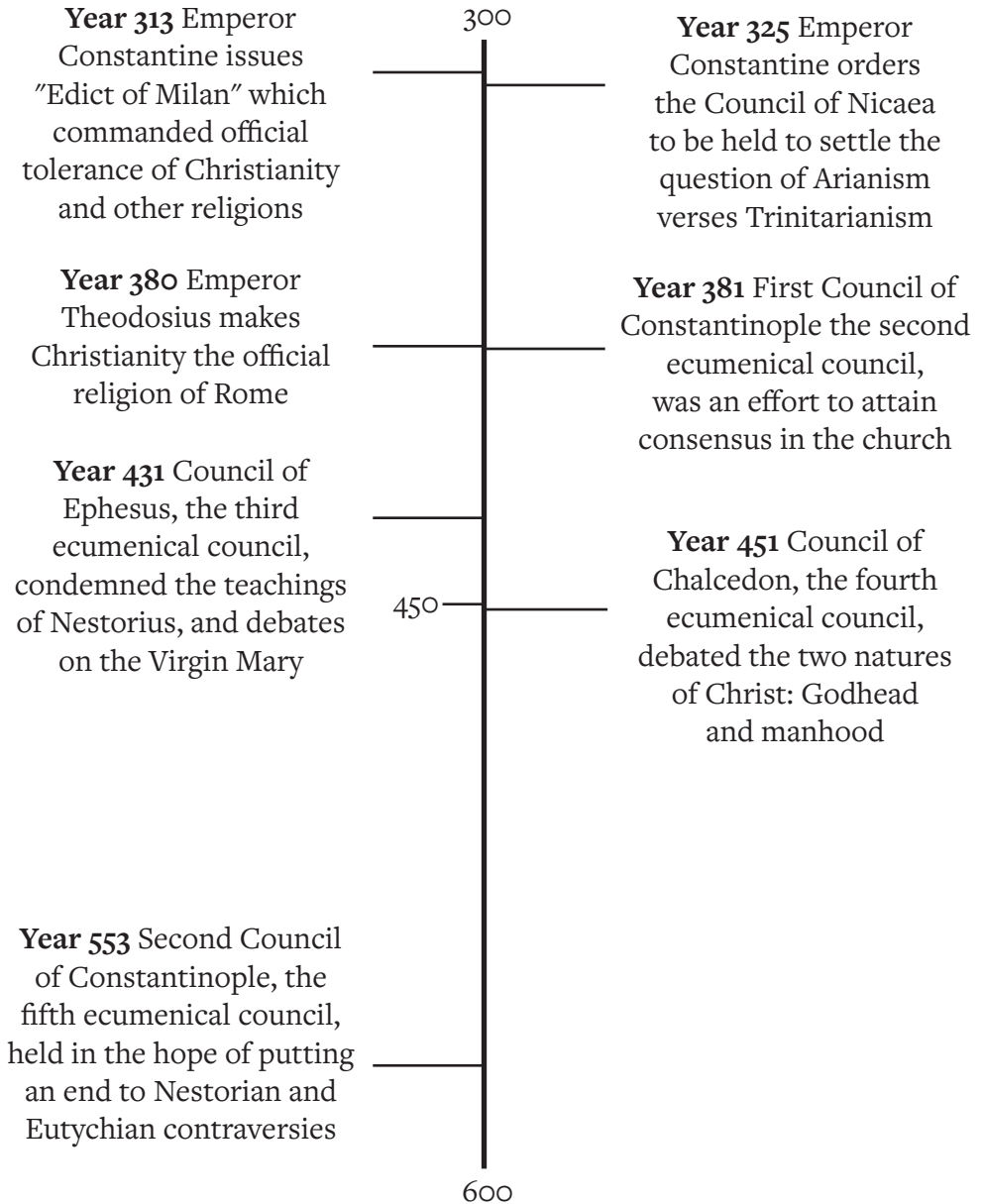
Although there were clashes, we also see the Apostles edifying each other and showing unity within the Church. Peter recognized Paul's writing as Scripture:

"And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, **16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures." – **2 Peter 3:15-16 (ESV)**

Further examples of unity can be found in **Colossians 4:16** and **1 Thessalonians 5:27**

# Church Timeline





# Definitions of Belief Systems

**Ancient Greek religion** – encompasses the collection of beliefs, rituals and mythology originating in ancient Greece in the form of both popular public religion and cult practices.

**Arian Christianity** – a non-Trinitarian belief that asserts that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, created by God the Father, distinct from the Father and therefore subordinate to the Father.

**Gnostic Christianity** – beliefs that stray from orthodox Christianity, believing in salvation through secret knowledge and wisdom.

**Manichaeism Christianity** – a type of Gnosticism, a dualistic religion that offered salvation through special knowledge of spiritual truth.

**Marcionism Christianity** – was an Early Christian dualist belief system that originated in the teachings of Marcion of Sinope at Rome around the year 144. Marcion believed Jesus was the savior sent by God, and Paul the Apostle was his chief apostle, but he rejected the Hebrew Bible and the God of Israel.

**Montanism Christianity** – also known as the Cataphygian Heresy and the New Prophecy, was a heretical movement founded by the prophet Montanus that arose in the Christian Church in Phrygia, Asia Minor in the 2nd century. Believed in new revelations and ecstasies unapproved by the wider Church.

**Neoplatonism (philosophy)** – is a modern term used to designate a tradition of philosophy that arose in the 3rd century AD and persisted until shortly after the closing of the Platonic Academy in Athens in AD 529 by Justinian I. Their philosophy involved describing the derivation of the whole of reality from a single principle, “the One”.

**Pauline Christianity** – is the Christianity associated with the beliefs and doctrines espoused by Paul the Apostle through his writings. Most of Christianity relies heavily on these teachings and considers them to be amplifications and explanations of the teachings of Jesus.

# 7 Ecumenical Councils

Below is a short summary of each of the 7 ecumenical councils, why they were called and what they accomplished.

1. **First Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.)**
  - a. condemned and repudiated the false doctrine of the Alexandrian priest Arius, who rejected the Divine nature and pre-eternal birth of the second person of the Holy Trinity, namely the Divine Son of God the Father, and taught that the Son of God is only the highest creation.
  - b. affirmed the immutable truth, the dogma that the Son of God is true God, born of God the Father before all ages, and is eternal, as is God the Father; He was begotten, and not made, and is of one essence with God the Father
2. **First Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.)**
  - a. condemned and repudiated the false teaching of the Arian bishop of Constantinople, Macedonius, who rejected the deity of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. He taught that the Holy Spirit is not God, and called Him a creature, or a created power, and therefore subservient to God the Father and God the Son, like an angel.
  - b. the council supplemented the Nicene Creed, or "Symbol of Faith," with five Articles in which is set forth its teaching about the Holy Spirit, about the Church, about the Mysteries, about the resurrection of the dead, and the life in the world to come. Thus they composed the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which serves as a guide to the Church for all time.
3. **Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.)**
  - a. condemned and repudiated the false doctrine of Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, who profanely taught that the Most-holy Virgin Mary simply gave birth to the man Christ, with whom then God united morally and dwelled in Him, as in a temple, as previously He had dwelled in Moses and other prophets.

Therefore, Nestorius called the Lord Jesus Christ, God-bearing, and not God incarnate; and the Holy Virgin was called the Christ-bearer (Christotokos) and not the God-bearer (Theotokos).

- b. decreed that one should recognize that united in Jesus Christ at the time of the incarnation were two natures, divine and human, and that one should confess Jesus Christ as true God and true Man, and the Holy Virgin Mary as the God-bearer (Theotokos).

**4. Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.)**

- a. condemned and repudiated the false doctrine of an archimandrite of a Constantinople monastery, Eu-tychius, who rejected the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Refuting one heresy and defending the divinity of Jesus Christ, he himself fell into an extreme, and taught that in the Lord Jesus Christ human nature was completely absorbed in the Divine, and therefore it followed that one need only recognize the Divine nature. This false doctrine is called Monophysitism, and followers of it are called Monophysites.
- b. defined the true teaching of the Church, namely that our Lord Jesus Christ is perfect God, and as God He is eternally born from God. As man, He was born of the Holy Virgin and in every way is like us, except in sin. Through the incarnation, birth from the Holy Virgin, divinity and humanity are united in Him as a single Person, infused and immutable, thus reputing Eutyechius; indivisible and inseparable, reputing Nestorius.

**5. Second Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.)**

- a. It was called to quell a controversy between Nestorians and Eutyechians. The major points of contention were the well-known works of the Antiochian school of the Syrian church, entitled "The Three Chapters." Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa, clearly expressed the Nestorian error, although at the Fourth Ecumenical



Council, nothing had been mentioned of their works.

- b. Nestorians, in argument with Eutychians (Monophysites), referred to these works, and Eutychians found in them an excuse to reject the Fourth Ecumenical Council and to slander the universal Orthodox Church, charging that it was deviating toward Nestorianism.
- c. The council condemned all three works and Theodore of Mopsuestia himself, as not having repented. Concerning the other two, censure was limited only to their Nestorian works. They themselves were pardoned. They renounced their false opinions and died in peace with the Church. The Council reiterated its censure of the heresies of Nestorius and Eutychius.

#### 6. **Third Council of Constantinople (680 A.D.)**

- a. condemned and repudiated the false doctrine of heretics, Monothelites, who, although they recognized in Jesus Christ two natures, God and man, ascribed to Him only a Divine will.
- b. formulated the recognition that in Jesus Christ are two natures, Divine and human, and in these two natures there are two wills, but that the human will in Christ is not against, but rather is submissive to His Divine will.

#### 7. **Second Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.)**

- a. condemned and repudiated the iconoclastic heresy and determined to provide and to put in the holy churches, together with the likeness of the honored and Life-giving Cross of the Lord, holy icons, to honor and render homage to them, elevating the soul and heart to the Lord God, the Mother of God and the Saints, who are represented in these icons. After the Seventh Ecumenical Council, persecution of the holy icons arose anew under the Emperors Leo V, of Armenian origin, Michael II, and Theophilus, and for twenty-five years disturbed the Church.

# Glossary

**Amillennialism** - The view that the "thousand years" mentioned in Revelation 20 is a symbolic number, not as a literal description.

**Apologetics** - the branch of theology concerned with the defense or proof of Christianity.

**Apostasy** - means to fall away from the truth. Therefore, an apostate is someone who has once believed and then rejected the truth of God.

**Catechism** - an elementary book containing a summary of the principles of the Christian religion, especially as maintained by a particular church, in the form of questions and answers.

**Creed** - an authoritative, formulated statement of the chief articles of Christian belief, as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the Athanasian Creed.

**Docetism** - an early Christian doctrine that the sufferings of Christ were apparent and not real and that after the crucifixion he appeared in a spiritual body.

**Doctrine** - a particular principle, position, or policy taught or advocated, as of a religion or government

**Ecumenical** - promoting or fostering Christian unity throughout the world.

**Eschatology** - in Christianity, the study of the end times.

**Exegesis** - critical explanation or interpretation of a text or portion of a text, especially of the Bible.

**Gnostic** - a member of any of certain sects among the early

Christians who claimed to have superior knowledge of spiritual matters, and explained the world as created by powers or agencies arising as emanations from the Godhead.

**Godhead** - the essential being of God; the Supreme Being. the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

**Hedonist** – a person whose life is devoted to the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification.

**Hellenism** - the characteristics of Greek culture, especially after the time of Alexander the Great; civilization of the Hellenistic period.

**Heresy** - the willful and persistent rejection of any article of faith by a baptized member of the church.

**Lapsed or Lapsi** - Christians who fell away from the faith and were thereafter referred to as "lapsi". They committed apostasy during persecution. The majority had signed statements (libelli) certifying that they had sacrificed to the Roman gods in order to avoid persecution or confiscation of property.

**Manichean** - an adherent of the dualistic religious system of Manes, a combination of Gnostic Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and various other elements, with a basic doctrine of a conflict between light and dark, matter being regarded as dark and evil.

**Monotheism** - the doctrine or belief that there is only one God.

**Original sin** - a depravity, or tendency to evil, held to be innate in humankind and transmitted from Adam to all humans in consequence of his sin.

**Orthodox** - conforming to the Christian faith as represented in the creeds of the early church.

**Pantheon** - the gods of a particular mythology considered collectively.

**Polytheism** - the doctrine of or belief in more than one god or in many gods.

**Predestination** – theology:

- the action of God in foreordaining from eternity whatever comes to pass.
- the decree of God by which certain souls are foreordained to salvation.

**Premillennialism** - the doctrine or belief that the Second Coming of Christ will precede the millennium.

**Postmillennialism** - the doctrine or belief that the second coming of Christ will follow the millennium.

**Repentance** - deep sorrow, compunction, or contrition for a past sin, wrongdoing, or the like.

**Second repentance** - the church believed that after your initial repentance, baptism, and entrance into the family of faith you could not be formally allowed readmittance to the church if you commit a "sin unto death." Typically three sins were considered mortal sins: adultery, fornication, and apostasy (denouncing Christ during persecution).

**Septuagint** - the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament, traditionally said to have been translated by 70 or 72 Jewish scholars at the request of Ptolemy II; most scholars believe that only the Pentateuch was completed in the early part of the 3rd century B.C. and that the remaining books were translated in the next two centuries.

**Sin** - transgression of divine law. any reprehensible or regrettable action, behavior, lapse, etc.; great fault or offense.

**Theology** - the field of study and analysis that treats of God and of God's attributes and relations to the universe; study of divine things or religious truth; divinity.

**Zoroastrianism** - an Iranian religion, founded c600 b.c. by Zoroaster, the principal beliefs of which are in the existence of a supreme deity, Ahura Mazda, and in a cosmic struggle between a spirit of good, Spenta Mainyu, and a spirit of evil, Angra Mainyu.

# Early Apologists of the Church



## Justin Martyr - The First Apologist

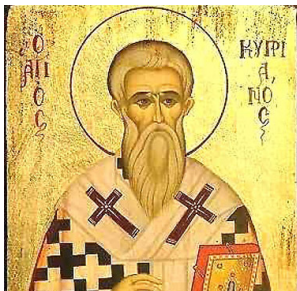
Born: 100 A.D.

Died: 165 A.D.

He was an early Christian apologist, and is regarded as the foremost interpreter of the theory of the Logos in the 2nd century.

### In about the year 150

Justin Martyr writes his First Apology, advancing Christian efforts to address competing philosophies. He passionately defends the morality of the Christian life, and provides various ethical and philosophical arguments. Urging Roman emperor, Antoninus, to abandon the persecution of Christians. He also quotes from the 4 Gospels and Paul.



## Cyprian Bishop of Carthage

Born: 210 A.D.

Died: 258 A.D.

He was an an important Early Christian writer, many of whose Latin works are extant.

### In the year 251

He publishes his influential work "Unity of the Church". During his time he struggled with the Lapsed and their re-admittance to the Church. He believed in re-admittance of the Lapsed after some penance. However, he combated other groups who chose not to re-admit them or groups who admitted them without penance.



## Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons

Born: 130 A.D.

Died: 202 A.D.

His writings were credited with the early development of Christian theology.

### In the year 177

Irenaeus combats developing heresies within the Church, especially Gnosticism, which was then a serious threat to the Church. His polemical work is credited for laying out the orthodoxies of the Christian church, its faith, its preaching and the books that it held as sacred authority.



## Tertullian the Father of Latin Theology

Born: 155 A.D.

Died: 240 A.D.

He was an early Christian apologist and a polemicist against heresy, including contemporary Christian Gnosticism.

### During his time

He is also known as the founder of Western theology. He originated and advance new theology to the early Church. He was one of the oldest extant Latin writers to use the term Trinity and he was a Premillennialist. He also struggled with the Lapsed and Second Repentance.

# Early Church Leaders



## Emperor Constantine

Born: 27 February circa 272 A.D.

Died: 22 May 337 A.D. (shortly after baptism)

He was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity and bring an end of Christian persecution in the empire.

### Short Biography

Constantine was born in Naissus, Moesia Superior (present-day Serbia). He was the son of Flavius Valerius Constantius, a Roman army officer, and his consort Helena.

He was sent east, where he rose through the ranks to become a military tribune under the emperors Diocletian and Galerius. In 305, Constantius was raised to the rank of Augustus, senior western emperor. Constantine emerged victorious in a series of civil wars against the emperors Maxentius and Licinius to become sole ruler of both west and east by 324 A.D.

### Why he is important

- He was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity
- He issued the Edict of Milan, assuring religious liberty to Christians
- His conversion ended years of persecution
- He orders the Council of Nicaea to be held to settle the question of Arianism versus Trinitarianism
- By some estimates only 10% of the Roman Empire was Christian in the early 4th century before his conversion.





## Athanasius of Alexandria

Born: circa 296–298 A.D.

Died: 2 May 373 A.D.

He was known during his lifetime as the “Father of Orthodoxy” and the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism.

### Short Biography

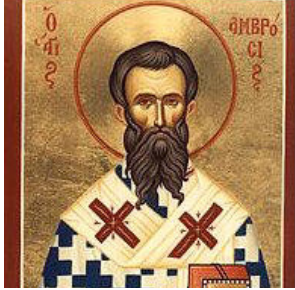
Athanasius was born to a Christian family in the city of Alexandria. His parents were wealthy enough to afford giving him a fine secular education.

He was well educated and started a clerical career eventually ascending to Bishop of Alexandria.

He was exiled five times by four Roman emperors, spending 17 of the 45 years he served as bishop of Alexandria in exile. Yet in the end, his theological enemies were “exiled” from the church’s teaching, and it is Athanasius’s writings that shaped the future of the church.

### Why he is important

- Chief defender of Trinitarianism
- First to list all the books of the New Testament as we know them today
- Successfully fought against Arianism
- Was the Champion at the Council of Nicaea, successfully argued that the Godhead is made up of three equal parts of the same substance



## Ambrose Bishop of Milan

Born: circa 340 A.D.

Died: 4 April 397 A.D.

One of the most influential ecclesiastical figures of the 4th century.

### Short Biography

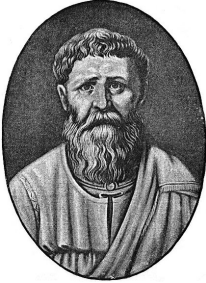
Ambrose was born into a Roman Christian family and was raised in Trier. His father was Aurelius Ambrosius, the praetorian prefect of Gaul; his mother was a woman of intellect and piety.

Ambrose followed his father's career. He was educated in Rome, studying literature, law, and rhetoric.

Ambrose was the Governor of Aemilia-Liguria in northern Italy until 374 when he became the Bishop of Milan.

### Why he is important

- He fought against Arianism which was strong at the time with bishops in high positions
- His most lasting contribution, though, was in the area of church-state relations.
- He defied the Empress (Arian faith), helping establish the precedent of Church confrontation of the state when necessary to protect Christian teaching and oppose the state.
- He heavily influenced Augustin of Hippo.



## Augustin of Hippo

Born: 13 November 354 A.D.

Died: 28 August 430 A.D.

His written works shaped the practice of biblical exegesis and help lay the foundation of modern Christian thought.

### Short Biography

Augustine's mother was Monica, a devout Christian and his father was Patricius, a Pagan who converted to Christianity on his death bed.

Early in life he learned pagan beliefs, Neoplatonism and became a follower of the Manichaean religion. He lived a hedonistic life before converting to Christianity in his 30's.

Soon after he became a priest, a famous preacher and eventually the Bishop of Hippo.

### Why he is important

- He wrote hundreds of works including City of God and On the Trinity
- First to address the doctrine of man and salvation
- Taught that all people are born with original sin and that God predestines who will be saved
- Argued in favor of the Lapsed to be allowed back into the Church
- Was the father of amillennialism (promoted the idea that Satan is currently bound and that the millennium is being fulfilled in the present age)

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Edited by Jose Guerra

