



The Early Church

Overview and Distinctives

Overview – Important Dates

- 70 – Jerusalem is Destroyed
- 96 – Clement of Rome writes a letter to the Corinthians
- 107 – Ignatius writes 7 letters and is martyred
- 150 – Justin Martyr writes *First Apology*
- 155 – Polycarp is martyred

Overview – Important Dates

- 185 – Irenaeus writes *Against Heresies* (refuting Gnosticism)
- 215 – Origen begins writing
- 313 – Edict of Milan
- 318 – Beginning of Arian controversy
- 325 – Council of Nicaea
- 381 – Council of Constantinople

Overview – Important Dates

- 386 – Augustine converts to Christianity
- 398 – Chrysostom consecrated bishop of Constantinople
- 431 – Council of Ephesus
- 432 – Patrick begins mission to Ireland
- 451 – Council of Chalcedon

The Importance of Women in the Early Church

“Women pop up all over the place in our earliest Christian sources. They’re persecuted by the Roman government; they’re hosting churches in their homes; they’re caring for the poor and those in prison; they’re traveling as missionaries; they’re wealthy patrons supporting the church financially; and so much more.” – Michael Kruger

The Importance of Women in the Early Church

- Justin Martyr wrote that Christianity was reaching many women, especially wealthy women.
- One study estimated that two-thirds of the Christian community in the second century was made up of women.

Fabiola (died 399)

- Studied under Jerome in Rome
- Started a hospital in Rome where she cared for those rejected from society
- Also helped begin a place of treatment for pilgrims coming to Rome



Critics of the Early Church

- Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan complaining that Christianity was spreading throughout his region among “both sexes.”
- He tortured two Christian female slaves in order to find out more about what was happening in their secret meetings.

Critics of the Early Church

- Celsus was probably the strongest critic of Christianity in the second century. He criticized the way much Christian teaching was done by women in the home rather than in the public square.
- “[Christians] show they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable, and stupid, only slaves, women, and little children” - Celsus

***Why on Earth Did
Anyone Become a
Christian in the
First Three
Centuries?
by Larry Hurtado***

Destroyer
of the
gods

EARLY CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVENESS
IN THE ROMAN WORLD



Larry W. Hurtado

Distinctives of the Early Church

- 1. Christians were called into a unique “social project” that both offended and attracted people.**
- 2. Christianity offered a direct, personal, love relationship with the Creator God.**
- 3. Christianity offered assurance of eternal life.**

Unique “Social Project” of the Early Church

The foundation of the early church’s unique social project was their unique religious identity.

Unique “Social Project” of the Early Church

1. The early church was multiethnic and experienced a unity across ethnic boundaries that was startling.
2. The early church was a community of forgiveness and reconciliation.
3. The early church was known for its hospitality to the poor and the suffering.
4. It was a community committed to the sanctity of life.
5. It was a sexual counterculture.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the involvement of women in the Church throughout history. How would the Church be lacking if not for the leadership and activity of women?
2. What if the church in America modeled the early church's unique social project? How would we be perceived by our culture?