

Lesson 3 Rome and Christianity

MAIN IDEAS

Government Rome became hostile to Jews and Christians because both groups challenged Roman authority.

Government The Roman emperor Constantine accepted Christianity and ended persecutions.

Government The church developed into a complex institution with many levels of authority.

Rome's Policy Toward Other Religions

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why was Rome hostile to Christians and Jews?

A Christian Threat

- Romans allowed other religions
- Romans alarmed by Gentiles becoming Christian
 - some Gentiles said they didn't have to worship emperor
 - appeal of Christianity to women, slaves was troubling
- Christians talked of a Lord who would have a kingdom
 - seemed to imply an end to the Roman Empire

The Roman Persecutions

- Nero blamed Christians for huge fire in Rome in A.D. 64
 - many Christians were tortured, killed
- Some Christians hid to escape persecution
 - hid in **catacombs**—underground cemeteries with secret passages

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did the Romans feel threatened by Christianity?

The Conversion of Constantine

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What was Constantine's policy toward Christianity?

The Cross as Sign

- Constantine became Roman emperor in A.D. 306
 - had allowed persecution of Christians
- During battle for leadership in 312, Constantine prayed for help
 - said he saw cross in sky and prediction of victory
- Had troops put crosses on shields, battle flags
- Constantine was victorious

The Legalization of Christianity

- Constantine ended persecution of Christians
- Edit of Milan made Christianity a legal religion in empire
- Constantine built churches, made Sunday a holy day
- Constantine not baptized—formally converted—until end of his life

Christianity Changes Rome

- Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion in 380
 - closed pagan temples eleven years later

REVIEW QUESTION

What did the Edict of Milan decree?

Beginnings of the Roman Catholic Church

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What were some of the beliefs of the early church?

The Structure of the Church

- Priest, deacons obeyed **bishops**—local church leaders
 - Roman Catholics believe the apostle Peter was Rome’s first bishop
- Much later, Rome’s bishop became the **pope**—the most important bishop
 - this began the Roman Catholic church; **catholic** means “universal”

Beliefs and Practices

- Early writers, church fathers, developed **creed**—statement of beliefs
 - **Trinity**—union of Father, Son (Jesus), Holy Spirit in one God
- North African church father, Augustine, felt God was everywhere
- Church created sacraments—religious rites such as baptism, communion
- Christian men formed monasteries; became bishops, priests, deacons
- Christianity became a powerful, wealthy religion

REVIEW QUESTION

What is Rome’s bishop called?

Lesson Summary

- Rome saw the new religion of Christianity as a threat.
- Constantine embraced Christianity in A.D. 312.
- The Roman Catholic Church traces its roots to the apostle Peter.

Why It Matters Now . . .

One-third of the people in the world today are Christian.