

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY  
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## ***“THY KINGDOM COME: THE WITNESS OF CHURCH HISTORY”***

### ***“The Catholic Age (2): Persecution, Heresy & Orthodoxy***

#### **II. The Church Comes into Its Own (70-300 AD)**

##### **F. The Question of the Lapsed**

What should the Church do with those who denied their faith and obeyed the state and “worshipped the Emperor” and then returned to the Church? As the Church grew in numbers and influence and as persecutions came and went, the issue of “lapsed” Christians became a real dilemma and potential for division in the Church. This issue came to a head following Decius’ reign (249-51 AD) as emperor. To highlight the difficulties involved, some Christians recanted their faith as soon as an imperial decree was issued, others bought fraudulent certificates to “cover” their true faith, and still others gave in after pressure and the threat of torture, but later asked to rejoin the church when the persecution had subsided. Since most believers who stood firm were tortured or imprisoned during this persecution, they became known as “confessors.” Many “confessors” were looked up to as a result. And some in the church looked to the “confessors” as having more authority than the bishops!

The two bishops that played crucial roles in addressing the issue were Cyprian and Novatian. Cyprian had become bishop of Carthage shortly before the persecution. He fled with fellow clergy to serve as an underground church. Some, especially the church in Rome, who ended up losing their bishop to martyrdom, felt this was an act of cowardice. His authority was called into question especially by confessors, even though he had insisted that it was for the benefit of the flock. Some confessors felt that lapsed believers could be readmitted with simply a statement of repentance.

How did Cyprian respond? He called a synod (meeting) of area bishops to determine the conditions for readmittance to the Church. The bishops agreed that those who had purchased false certificate without actually having sacrificed would be readmitted to the church, those who had sacrificed could be readmitted on their deathbeds, or if a new persecution arose they could prove the sincerity of their repentance. Those who showed no repentance would not be readmitted. Cyprian believed that there was “*no salvation outside of the Church*” and that unity of the Church was essential. By having a meeting of bishops, he reaffirmed their authority over the actions of the confessors who were disgruntled with their bishop, and retained a standard of readmission against the confessor’s easy way of restoration. It also continued the tradition begun in Acts 15 that when there are disputes in the Church, its leaders need to gather to discuss and pray on a way forward that the majority can agree on. Cyprian’s integrity and conviction was vindicated later when he was martyred in next persecution.

Novatian took an opposite approach. He contended with Cornelius, the bishop of Rome, that the lapsed were too easily allowed to return. The question of which should take precedence – purity of character or forgiving love was at the heart of the issue. Novatian’s hard line stance resulted in a split in the Church that lasted several generations and served to highlight the greater issue of what should be done with baptized Christians who have committed the more serious sins of apostasy, adultery, and murder? This issue would divided the Church often throughout the centuries and led to the entire penitential system of what would eventually become the Roman Catholic Church. This penitential system led to the doctrine of purgatory, the sale of indulgences, and the Protestant Reformation in 1517.

### III. The Imperial Church (300-476AD)

**A. The Final Great Persecution** – with the death of the emperor Valerian in the Church entered into a relative period of peace without fear of persecution for almost forty years. This ended in 303 AD during the reign of Diocletian. At first all seemed well. Diocletian's wife, Prisca and their daughter Valeria were Christians. Ornate and massive church buildings filled the cities. Christians could be found in all parts of society. Upon becoming emperor Diocletian's first move was to reorganize the empire with four emperors, he being chief of the four. The top two had the title - *augustus*; the junior two - *caesar*. Diocletian was the primary *augustus* with Galerius under him as a *caesar*. They ruled in the Eastern half of the empire. In the West, Maximian served as *augustus* with Constantius Chlorus under him as the *caesar*. When the *augustus* died or stepped down he would be replaced by his *caesar* and then the remaining three leaders would choose the successor *caesar*. His goal was to avoid the civil wars that would often result during periods of succession. While this seemed like a good plan on paper, as we shall see, it proved to be a failure!

Of the four emperors, Galerius had to engage in battles along the Danube with bordering tribes and also with the Persians in Parthia. For whatever reason it was Galerius who had a hatred for Christians. While most church leaders encouraged Christians not to join the Roman legions, there still were many soldiers who were believers. Galerius' animosity may have developed in 295 AD, when a number of Christians were condemned to death for refusing to join the army, and others for trying to leave it. He certainly believed that Christians were unreliable soldiers for shortly afterwards he convinced Diocletian to expel all Christians from the ranks of the legions. But certain officers who did not want to see their ranks depleted, tried to force Christian soldiers to deny their faith. Those that did not were executed, all of them under Galerius' command.

According to the church historian Eusebius, Galerius' animosity toward Christians increased and he convinced Diocletian to issue an edict to remove all Christians from positions of authority in the empire, and that all church buildings and books be destroyed. This was met by full blown resistance from believers who refused to turn over their sacred writings. Many were tortured and condemned to death as a result. Then on two separate occasions a fire broke out in the palace. Galerius accused Christians for starting the fires in revenge for the destruction of their churches and books. Some Christian writers of the period contend that Galerius actually started the fires to further his persecution of the Church. Diocletian responded harshly by ordering all Christians in the imperial court to sacrifice to the gods. His wife and daughter complied but those who did not were killed. The situation intensified as there were a number of disturbances across the empire. He then ordered all Church leaders to be arrested and all Christians were ordered to sacrifice to the gods. In many locales, officials brutally tortured and killed those who did not recant their faith. It seems however, that in the far western region of the empire under Constantius Chlorus, the persecution remained mild with mainly buildings being torn down.

In 304 AD, Diocletian became ill and stepped down at the urging of Galerius, who also convinced Maximian to step down under threat of invasion by his superior army. Galerius and Constantius Chlorus became the new *augustuses*, and Severus and Maximinus Daia became the new *caesars*, both of who were "yes men" to Galerius. This alienated the sons of Maximian and Constantius, Maxentius and Constantine, who were popular with the legions. It seems that Constantine had lived for years in Diocletian's court and then in Galerius' as a hostage to assure his father's loyalty. His father Constantius had claimed illness to pressure for Constantine's release. His son returned and then his father passed. Constantine was proclaimed the new *augustus* by his legions. He bided his time in Gaul and Great Britain strengthening his position as the others fought amongst themselves for control of the empire. Maxentius had marched on Rome as Severus committed suicide. Galerius had tried unsuccessfully to stop him. He even appealed to Diocletian to come out of retirement to help him but the old emperor said he was happy growing cabbages but could help negotiate an

agreement! A new augustus was appointed for the West by the name of Licinius all the while civil war was brewing.

Galerius and Maximinus Daia continued fierce persecutions having Christians maimed and put into stone quarries. But even in these dire conditions, churches sprout up and then these too were either killed or deported again. It seemed in the eastern half of the empire no end was in sight. But then in 311 Galerius fell ill with a painful disease and whether out of fear of divine punishment or sincere regret or to placate his enemies, he issued **the Edict of Serdica** (modern day Sofia, Bulgaria) also known as the Edict of Toleration by Galerius himself. Note how he justifies the persecution even as he now allows freedom for Christians: on April 30, 311.

*Among other arrangements which we are always accustomed to make for the prosperity and welfare of the republic, we had desired formerly to bring all things into harmony with the ancient laws and public order of the Romans, and to provide that even the Christians who had left the religion of their fathers should come back to reason; since, indeed, the Christians themselves, for some reason, had followed such a caprice and had fallen into such a folly that they would not obey the institutes of antiquity, which perchance their own ancestors had first established; but at their own will and pleasure, they would thus make laws unto themselves which they should observe and would collect various peoples in diverse places in congregations. Finally when our law had been promulgated to the effect that they should conform to the institutes of antiquity, many were subdued by the fear of danger, many even suffered death. And yet since most of them persevered in their determination, and we saw that they neither paid the reverence and awe due to the gods nor worshipped the God of the Christians, in view of our most mild clemency and the constant habit by which we are accustomed to grant indulgence to all, we thought that we ought to grant our most prompt indulgence also to these, so that they may again be Christians and may hold their conventicles, provided they do nothing contrary to good order. But we shall tell the magistrates in another letter what they ought to do.*

*Wherefore, for this our indulgence, they ought to pray to their God for our safety, for that of the republic, and for their own, that the republic may continue uninjured on every side, and that they may be able to live securely in their homes.*

After this edict Galerius died five days later. This ended the most severe persecution of believers. Prisons opened and although many had been traumatized and bore the scares of brutal torture, there was a sense of thankfulness to God for the new development. Maximinus Daia continued a policy of persecution in his region but eventually this ended upon his defeat.

With the death of Galerius, the empire was now divided and led by Licinius, Maximinus Daia, Constantine and Maxentius (who was considered a usurper by the other three). It would be Constantine who would emerge as the sole emperor after a bold military move and a divine revelation. The result would be one of the greatest seismic shifts in human history. How did it happen?

Without any warning Constantine gathered his armies in Gaul, crossed the Alps and marched on Rome, Maxentius' capital. Maxentius was taken by surprised and found himself having to make a decision to defend the city from within or to go out and meet Constantine outside the city. Hindsight would tell him to have remained in the city but he consulted his seers and the "gods" and they said to go out and meet for battle.

According to Eusebius who personally knew the emperor, Constantine was marching with his army somewhere on his approach to Rome (Eusebius does not specify the actual location) when he looked up to the sun and saw a cross of light above it, and with it the Greek words Ἐν Τούτῳ Νικά – "in this sign, you will conquer," or "by this, conquer!" At first, he was unsure of the meaning of the apparition, but the following

night he had a dream in which Christ told him that he should use the sign against his enemies. Eusebius then continues to describe the labarum, the military standard used by Constantine in his later wars against Licinius, showing the Chi Rho sign which is an X (Ch) superimposed with a vertical line and a curl to the right (Greek “ι”) These are the first two Greek letters of *Xristos* (Christ). Thus, he added the symbol to his standard and had his soldiers paint the symbol on their shields before the battle of Milvian Bridge.

While Constantine’s father was a pagan and had raised his son to be the same, Constantine’s mother was a Christian. She undoubtedly made sure that her son grew up with an awareness of the faith, even though he did not claim it himself. So, while it must have been startling when God spoke to the would-be-emperor, Constantine was not wholly unfamiliar with the Lord.

On **October 27, 312**, Constantine moved his army toward the capital city of Rome and approached the North side of the city. Having defeated Maxentius’ forces through Italy on his way to Rome, he still was outnumbered almost by two to one. Still, Constantine’s forces won the day. At place of the Milvian Bridge, Maxentius attempted to retreat into the safety of Rome’s walls. The makeshift bridge of boats gave way sending many soldiers into the Tiber River, including Maxentius, where he drowned. Constantine then entered the city as the victor and new emperor. Many viewed him as a liberator. Eusebius writes that in the most public spot of the city, that when a statue of Constantine was erected in his honor, he had a cross placed in his right hand with the following Latin inscription: *“By this saving sign, the true proof of valor, I saved your city from the yoke of the tyrant and liberated her. I also freed the senate and people of Rome and restored their ancient fame and splendor.”*

The following year, he would partner with the Eastern Emperor, Licinius, and proclaim what has been called **the Edict of Milan**, which officially recognized Christianity as a legal religion and put a stop to most of the persecution faced by Christians. Their buildings, cemeteries, and other properties would be returned to them. It also allowed for freedom of worship for all religions.

While we don’t have any transcripts of the original edict and many believe it was not a formal edict but a general declaration directed to all governors, we have quotes from the ancient Christian writer Lactitinus who was an advisor to Constantine of the joint letter issued to those in authority throughout the empire: *“When we, Constantine Augustus and Licinius Augustus, met so happily at Milan, and considered together all that concerned the interest and security of the State, we decided ... to grant to Christians and to everybody the free power to follow the religion of their choice, in order that all that is divine in the heavens may be favorable and propitious towards all who are placed under our authority.”*

## **B. The Rise and Influence of Constantine (312-337 AD)**

**1. A Christian Emperor?** – while some scholars question the sincerity of Constantine’s conversion and contend it was for purely political reasons, most believe he did have a conversion experience and that his faith developed over time. Recall that he was steeped in Roman tradition and religion. He still allowed pagan practices and even kept the title of Pontifex Maximus (High Priest) of the state cult as the emperor. As such he also participated in pagan ceremonies during his reign. Before professing Christ as his god, he had worshipped, like his father before him, the *“Sol Invictus”* or *“Unconquered Sun”* which was the belief that the sun represented the supreme god of all the gods of the universe. Some believe that he identified Christ as this god before coming into a fuller realization of what the Word of God actually taught concerning Christ. But one could see a change in the man during his reign and before he died he finally chose to be baptized.

The typical process *before baptism* for a new convert in the Church included a long period (up to three years) of teaching and discipline so that believers would clearly understand and know how to live out the Christian faith. They would be under the authority and guidance of a local priest and regional bishop. But Constantine never put himself under a bishop for he believed himself to be the “bishop of bishops.” He usually, however took a hands-off approach to church doctrinal matters and would only interject himself when unity was threatened. Again, the goal of Constantine was the political stability of the empire. A unified Church along with a tolerance of traditional Roman religious practices were essential to this end. But Constantine took his religious beliefs seriously knowing that the Christian God had given him the victory at Milvian bridge and many others afterward. He believed that as long as he supported the cause of Christ, he would have the blessing of the Christian God. Likewise, if he suppressed pagan worship, he would have a rebellion on his hands. He sought to maintain religious harmony.

During Constantine’s reign he appointed many Christians to high office, allowed bishops who gathered for special councils to use imperial traveling privileges, made the Church tax-exempt, abolished execution by crucifixion, put an end to gladiator games, and in 321 made Sunday a public holiday. Since Sunday was also the day of the Unconquered Sun it pleased pagans as well! His generosity led to the building of extravagant church buildings including the type known as basilicas.

Thus, the Church had gone from being persecuted, looked down upon as superstitious and disloyal, to now having the blessing and support of the state. This sudden change gave the Church the opportunity to officially agree on key elements of the faith such as the nature of God and the nature of Christ (see below).

While Constantine did not declare Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire (that would come from one of his later successors Theodosius nearly seventy years later) he still allowed for pagan worship as he promoted the Christian Church. He raised his sons and daughters as Christians and led a Christian family life. As a result, the Christian faith continued to grow in numbers, power, and influence across much of the Roman world. At the same time, the new influence and power afforded the Church also led to complacency and corruption. Moreover, since martyrdom no longer was possible, the monastic movement developed. It led to a mass exodus of devout believers to the deserts of Egypt and Syria for life of self-denial and communal living. Finally, the new relationship between church and state/emperor would cause many challenges and issues among both great and small in the centuries to come.

Another event of great significance for Church history that came in 330, when Constantine moved his imperial throne from Rome to the old city of Byzantium in Asia Minor. Since most of Rome’s enemies were in the East, Constantine wanted to move the government and build his own city in the process. He named the new city after himself - Constantinople (Istanbul today). As time went on Rome’s political significance lessened and thereby eventually made it more vulnerable to attacks and conquest by barbaric tribes. The Church leadership filled the void during these attacks which, in turn, led to more influence by the Church in Rome. As a side note, Constantine’s mother Helena, a devout Christian, at the age of eighty, traveled to the Holy Land to research the significant places of Christ’s ministry. She had churches built on those sites the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the supposed sight of the crucifixion, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and a church on the Mount of Olives. All three are still in use today.

### **C. The Battle for the Trinity and the Nature of Christ (325-395)**

**1. Arius and Athanasius in Alexandria and beyond**— the belief that Jesus was fully God and fully man is evident by studying of many of the passages in the New Testament. However, from very early on, there were many who insisted otherwise. Gnostics believed Jesus was never human. Jews who didn’t

accept Jesus as the Christ believed he was just a human being. Still others believed that Jesus was semi-divine, below in status and power to the God of the universe.

**Why would such a notion of semi-divinity take root?** Recall that early Christians were considered atheists by the Roman world for not believing in “visible gods.” However, even the great Greek philosophers taught that there was a supreme being above all who does not change, is perfect and all powerful, but is also impersonal (cannot be known). Some philosophers even believed that the gods of the ancient world were human creations. The great Church leaders/theologians of the previous century (Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and others) took this understanding in Greek philosophy to show that the Christian God was this supreme being. They also showed how Christ as the Word (*Logos* – John 1:1) of God is the embodiment of truth and God’s full revelation of Himself. However, the danger of appealing to Greek philosophy was also to reinforce the erroneous idea that Christ was merely a secondary “god” and created being. So, although Origen and the others showed how Jesus as the *Logos* is the personal revelation of this Supreme Being (God the Father), in the Greek mindset it was easy to fall into the understanding that Jesus is the main divine intermediary between the immutable (unchangeable) God and the mutable (changeable) world but who could never himself be immutable. This is what led to what happened next – the spread of the heresy known as Arianism.

In the early years of Constantine’s reign, Arius, a popular and influential presbyter from Alexandria created a stir and a following by arguing that God the Father created the Son. This meant Christ the Son, though still seen as divine, was not equal to the Father, because he had a beginning, and was not eternal. The phrase that became the Arian motto, “*there was when He was not*” highlights this belief. Father and Son were, therefore, similar but not of the same essence or power.

Arius’ bishop, Alexander, who held to the traditional understanding, sought to refute this heresy. Both used the Bible to argue their points. Arius contended that if Jesus was equal with God the Father, it was a denial of monotheism, the worship of only One God. Alexander responded that Christians from the very beginning had worshipped Jesus as God, so to deny His divinity would mean that this worship would have to cease. Moreover, if Jesus was not fully God, how could He be a perfect sacrifice for mankind, and thereby accomplish the redemption of mankind.

In 320 after calling a synod of local clergy together to affirm the traditional position, Alexander removed Arius from his position as priest. Arius then appealed to the people and to other bishops. Public demonstrations followed in his support and many bishops called for him to be reinstated declaring that Arius was correct. The rift widened and quickly spread through Egypt and Libya and even to other Roman provinces. This in turn threatened the unity of the empire.

**2. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** – Since the Arian heresy threatened the unity of the Church, Constantine called on the bishops of the Church to convene a Council at Nicaea (near Constantine’s military headquarters) in 325 AD. The vast majority of the bishops affirmed that Jesus as God the Son was of the same essence/substance (*homoousios*) as God the Father and that He was not created by the Father. They agreed to the following Creed still known today as the Nicene Creed:

*We believe in one God, the father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of light, Very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven, from there He shall come to judge both the quick and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit.*

Creeds are belief statements and are important for articulation and unity of basic beliefs. One such example from the Scriptures is from Paul's letter to the **Colossians (1:15-20)**. Notice how it explains the divinity of Christ:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

However, in the decades that followed there still were a good number of bishops and churches who held the Arian position. When Alexander died in 328, his successor, Athanasius took up the lead role in support of the full deity of Christ. Following Constantine's death in 337, his three sons succeeded their father. The conflicts between the sons led to a resurgence of the Arian position.

During this time, Bishop Athanasius remained at the center of the controversy and despite even being exiled and even imprisoned (depending on which emperor was in power), worked hard to defend the understanding that Jesus is fully God and fully man. To Athanasius, Arius' interpretation of Jesus' nature, that the Father and Son are similar but not identical in substance, could not explain how Jesus could accomplish the redemption of mankind. According to Athanasius, God had to become human so that humans could become divine. Therefore, the divine nature of Jesus must be identical to that of the Father.

**NOTE:** The Arian position is very similar to the view taken by numerous “Christian” cults – like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as the religion of Islam. All believe that Jesus is a created being and therefore, not God.

**3. Julian the Apostate (361-363)** – after the death of Constantine in 337, most of his family were killed by the army to insure his three sons would have no rivals. Julian, only six at the time, and a cousin of the three was spared. However, he lost his entire family except for his older half-brother Gallus. Both were exiled from the court Gallus was later called upon to help lead the empire by Constantius in 350 AD as a junior Caesar but his leadership was lacking and when Constantius thought that he was conspiring against him, he was beheaded. Julian was raised a Christian but studied philosophy in Athens where he took a liking to the literature and religion of classical Greece. After the death of Gallus, Constantius asked Julian to lead as a junior caesar. His proved to be a good administrator in Gaul and even general against the Germanic tribes on the border. This led to conflict with Constantius who after calling on troops to join him against the Persians, they rebelled and proclaimed Julian as augustus (chief emperor). Constantius prepared for war now on his West side but died enroute. Julian marched on Constantinople and was proclaimed emperor. He purged the court of his enemies and established order. But he is most known for his religious police which earned him the title: “the Apostate.”

Julian sought to reestablish paganism and weaken the power of the Church. He had repudiated his Christian faith as a young man and now was set to rescue Rome from those who had “*abandoned the ever-living gods for the corpse of a Jew.*” He reorganized the pagan priesthood along the lines of the Church hierarchy. He authorized massive sacrifices of animals to appease the gods. He sought to encourage all to go back to the pagan rituals. He did not authorize the persecution of Christians, however, believing it wouldn't work (as history had already proven). However, he passed laws forbidding Christians (he called them

pejoratively “Galileans”) to teach classical literature so they could not influence those who studied Greek philosophy. He also wrote the book, *“Against the Galileans”* in which he harshly criticized the Bible, mocking its contents and the teachings of Jesus. He even planned on rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem to counter the belief that the Bible had predicted its destruction.

From his writings, we learn that as he travelled Galatia and saw the old pagan temples in disarray, he lamented that the reason why this had happened was due to the decadence of the temple priests. He erroneously believed that the gods taught to do good works and give to the poor. But it was really the Christians who were doing such things! Rather than doing good deeds, the temple priests engaged in dancing, cross-dressing, and self-castration. In order to redeem the old religion Julian sent subsidies to the region and ordered that *“a fifth be given to the poor who serve the priests, and that the remaining be given to travelers and to beggars.”* He wrote, *“How apparent to everyone it is, and how shameful, that our own people lack support from us, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans (Christians) support not only their own poor, but ours as well.”* Julian’s hatred of the Christian could not hide the fact of how much the gospel had changed the Roman empire and even had moved the conscience of the unbelieving emperor to think that reaching the poor and downtrodden was a pagan virtue!

The Apostle Paul’s words in **Gal. 2:10**, *“to remember the poor”* echoed in all churches as weekly offerings were taken for the orphans and widows, the imprisoned and impoverished, the shipwrecked and sick. As the Church grew an entire social security safety had developed. The pagans couldn’t compete with such generosity and love, and Julian knew it. His grand plans of pagan revival came to an end early on when he was killed in battle by a Persian spear. Many in the Church believed it was God’s judgment.

**4. Theodosius (379-395 AD)** – sought to solidify the Church and its influence upon the empire. He is famous for affirming the Christian Faith as the principal religion of the empire. After his baptism during a serious illness, he affirmed the Nicene Creed and called on the bishops of the church (over 150) to gather at Constantinople to clarify further the understanding of the nature of God and the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was during this Council (of Constantinople) that the same understanding concerning the Father and the Son were to be applied to the Holy Spirit as well as further clarifications were added to the Creed of 325 (see italicized words below). This is the creed we currently use on Sundays. Due to the influence of three bishops, known as the Cappadocian Fathers – Gregory of Nazianzus, and brothers Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa – where they articulated the concept and meaning of person as opposed to substance in an explanation of how to understand the triune nature of God. They used the social analogy of a family of persons but still a divine being of one. As a result, the Latin West and Greek East agreed on the language to describe the Trinity.

**NICENE CREED 381:** We believe in one God, the father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father *before all worlds*, light from light, Very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down *from heaven*, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; and suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

*And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*



On significant incident that showed the character and nature of Theodosius occurred toward the end of his reign. In the city of Thessalonica, a famous charioteer, accused of homosexuality was imprisoned before the races were about to begin. The spectators demanded he be released and when he was not they rioted killing the governor and freeing the man. Upon hearing the news, and outraged Theodosius ordered revenge.: a chariot race was announced, citizens gathered in the circus arena, the gates were closed and soldiers stationed at the entrances. Then they descended upon the crowd and slayed 7,000 with the sword.

Ambrose, the bishop of Milan who was a spiritual and political adviser to Theodosius, was furious. He called on the emperor to repent. He wrote in a letter, *“I cannot deny you have zeal for the faith and that you fear God, but you have a naturally passionate spirit which becomes ungovernable when you are excited. I call on you to repent. You can only atone for your sin by tears, by penitence, by humbling your soul before God. You are a man and as you have sinned as a man, so you must repent. No angel, no archangel can forgive you, God alone can forgive you and He forgives only those who repent.”*

Ambrose refused to give Theodosius communion until the emperor performed public penance. While the emperor stayed away from the church for a time he publicly appeared before a crowded congregation, too off his splendid imperial robes and asked for pardon for his sins. He did this on several occasions until on Christmas Day Ambrose gave him the sacrament.

When Theodosius consented, it marked a new chapter in the history of church and state. It took incredible courage to confront an emperor. For the first time, a secular ruler submitted to the church. Less than a century earlier, emperors were trying to wipe out the church. It also set the stage for the church to be able to use the threat of excommunicate humble rulers. This trend would repeat itself in the West far more than in the East where the emperor was seen as on equal footing with the bishops.