

CHURCH HISTORY

A Complete History Of The Catholic Church To The Present Day

For High School, College, and Adult Reading

by

Rev. John Laux, M.A.

INSTRUCTOR OF RELIGION, CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL, AND PROFESSOR OF
PSYCHOLOGY, SHEA MADONNA COLLEGE, COVINGTON, KY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

*“Another parable be proposed unto them, saying:
The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard
seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Which
is the least indeed of all seeds; but when it is grown up,
it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, so that
the birds of the air come, and dwell in the branches
thereof.”*

Matthew 13:31-32

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In addition to providing a textbook for students, the author has also endeavored to present to the general reader, especially the Catholic layman, a concise, clear history of the Catholic Church.

Although there are several Church histories in English, some are too elementary to be satisfying to the adult lay reader, while others are too technical or voluminous. More especially, they do not present sufficient matter on the history of the Church in our own country, and they all lack the illustrative material which is so helpful and even necessary to the full understanding of the persons, events, and places read about. It is hoped that the copious illustrations and maps appearing in this volume will make it still more interesting to the reader, while the numerous excerpts from the writings of the Fathers, Doctors, documents of the Councils of the Church and of the Popes, etc., will make for better acquaintance with these interesting phases of Church History.

May these pages, with the blessing of God, have some share in inspiring our Catholic people with a deeper appreciation of our Holy Church, whose history is the most glorious monument of her greatness and her power.

The author desires to thank the Rev. Michael Leick, of Villa Madonna College, Covington, Ky., for his many valuable suggestions and for the time and trouble involved in reading the proof sheets.

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JOHN J. LAUX

COVINGTON, KY.

Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul

June 29, 1930

INTRODUCTION

The pupil whose formal education ceases with his graduation from a Catholic High School has in the past found no place he could read the magnificent epic foreshadowed in the prophetic text "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations" (Matt. xxviii, 18). This little volume is intended to supply the deficiency.

What is hardest in the task of the high school teacher in religion is to show how the human element in the Church is continually thwarting the divine, and how at the same time Divine Providence is daily making use of this human element in helping the Church achieve her destiny. At no time has the tendency to pass by in silence the claims of the Church to a special deference as God's mouthpiece been more blatant than at present. Hence the weight of the old scholastic argument "*Ab esse ad posse valet illatio*," the historical argument. As a review of the practical results of the Church's activity in the world, results both to the world and to the Church, such a compendium of Church History is an indispensable companion volume to a student of the Church's teaching mission. In the eyes of the unfriendly, the *apparent* failure of the Church in achieving the purposes of her dogmatic and sacramental armory, presents the most promising angle of attack and confutation, and hence, the educated Catholic layman must have a correct understanding of the fundamental position of both sides of the controversial problem and a knowledge of the sources of more specialized polemical weapons in meeting these attacks.

Incidentally Church History thus puts the pupil in contact, during his most impressionable years, with the annals of the greatest humanizing agency the world has ever seen, and serves as a correlation point for the more secular intellectual treasures the race is bequeathing the student during his initiation into mental maturity and breadth of outlook. As a supplement to the more formal study of his religion, and its dealings with the individual soul, or as a basic text in Church History, this volume should assist in emphasizing the social values of the Church, values that become more important as society becomes more complex.

The treatment of the subjects is possibly novel but hardly radical. The author has kept in mind very definitely the class of reader for whom the book is intended. While introductory, it is far from a bare outline, and should prove adapted peculiarly well to its objective, the Catholic student high school body of America. As indicated, it would seem to achieve its purpose best as supplementary study in the formal religion classes. Of particular value in this connection are the readings from the original sources appended to each chapter. They give a contemporary flavor to the narrative and acquaint the student with the works of the great Christian writers. This approach is strengthened by the brief but adequate and vivid biographies interspersed in the text. Another feature of classroom value is the series of summaries of the so-called "turning points in the history of the Church." The entire book, therefore, keeps in view not only the needs of the high school pupil, but does it with the help of modern pedagogy, so that we have here a text that should find its way soon into the hearts of both teachers and pupils.

REV. FRANCIS J. BREDESTEGE

CINCINNATI, OHIO

June 24, 1929

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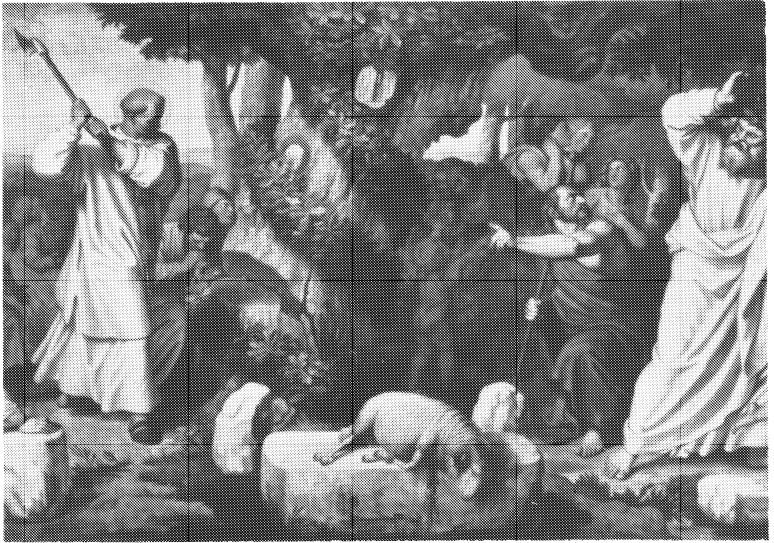
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St. Boniface, the Apostle to the Germans, felling the “sacred” oak tree dedicated to the god Thor at Geismar. A vast crowd of pagans watched intently, expecting some dire misfortune to overwhelm St. Boniface. But when the oak tree fell to the ground and the saintly Bishop remained unharmed, the pagans with one accord praised the God of the Christians and asked to be received among His followers. St. Boniface baptized them, and out of the wood of the tree he built a little oratory dedicated to St. Peter. (See page 221).

SECTION I

The Ancient Church to the Beginning of the Pontificate of Gregory the Great, A.D. 590

FIRST PERIOD

From the Founding of the Church to the Edict of Milan, A.D. 313

CHAPTER I

PREPARATION OF THE WORLD FOR CHRISTIANITY

1. *The "Fullness of Time"*

The Church appeared in the world with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "When the fullness of time was come," writes St. Paul, "God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, that He might redeem them who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4, 4-6). The "fullness of time" presupposes a period of development during which mankind was prepared for the coming of the Redeemer. For the Kingdom of God did not appear unheralded in the world. God had promised a Redeemer immediately after the fall of our first parents, but His coming was delayed for thousands of years. Man had to learn by experience the evil and misery of sin and the necessity of a Divine Liberator.

In order that the hope in a future Redeemer might not vanish entirely from the earth during this long period of waiting, God chose Abraham and made a special covenant with him that the Messiah should be born of his posterity. He also set aside Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites, from all other nations and from time to time revealed Himself to them in a wonderful manner. He raised up prophets among them, who by their teaching and preaching, by their threats and admonitions, again and again converted the people from idol worship, and by their prophecies kept alive the hope in the Redeemer to come.

But when Christ, the promised Redeemer, appeared, the Jews had ceased to be an independent nation. They were a part of the

vast empire of Rome. The existence of such a world-empire as that of Rome, and the fact that the Jewish nation was incorporated with it, was of the greatest significance for the spread of the Gospel of Christ and the development of His Church.

2. The Roman Empire

After several hundred years of almost constant warfare the Romans had succeeded in bringing under their sway all the lands that bordered on the Mediterranean Sea. When Augustus put an end to the Roman Republic by proclaiming himself emperor, his realm was bounded on the north by the British Channel, the Lower and Middle Rhine, the Danube and the Black Sea; on the west by the Atlantic Ocean; on the south by the Sahara Desert and the Ethiopian Mountains, and on the east by the Arabian Desert and the kingdom of Parthia. Britain was soon to be added to this gigantic domain, as well as parts of southern Germany and the lands north of the Lower Danube.

The dependence of all these nations and races upon Rome was not merely nominal. Most of them were governed directly by Rome as provinces; the rest were subject to the Roman authority as allies. The governors of the provinces had to send reports on their districts at regular intervals to the emperor and his counselors; taxes were levied with inexorable severity; garrisons were stationed along the frontiers, and war vessels stood in readiness on the lakes and rivers to repel any attempts at invasion. The old barriers between the different lands had been broken down. Owing to excellent roads, abundance of ships, and the prevalence of peace and orderliness, travel was easy and usual throughout the Roman world. Men might pass on business or pleasure from the Rhine to Carthage, from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, without fear of interference. The language difficulty had also to a great extent been overcome. Since the days of Alexander the Great, Greek was the common language of the East, and Latin was becoming the universal speech of the West. Numerous flourishing cities in the East and the West had become the centers of a common civilization which had resulted from the union of Greek and Latin culture. There were no serious obstacles, therefore, for the spread of common ideas and beliefs. The Mediterranean world was ready, humanly speaking, to receive a common religion.

3. *The Religion of the Empire*

Outside of Palestine the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Empire were *pagans*. Originally pagan worship had been connected with the government of the various cities and countries. As long as these big and little states had remained separate and independent, their religious rites had been faithfully kept up by the public officials. But when they became part of the Roman Empire their official worship of the gods gradually fell into decay. There was no common religion for the Empire as a whole. The Imperial Government required, it is true, the *worship of the genius of Rome and of the Emperor as gods*, and their temples were the meeting-places of the provincial councils, their feasts and games the great popular reunions; but this worship became in time hardly more than the expression of the political allegiance to Rome and her laws. Many, especially the common people, remained attached to **their** ancient gods and temples; others selected whatever gods or goddesses pleased their fancy or happened to be fashionable in their neighborhood; others, again, who had a leaning towards the occult and the mysterious, joined one or other of the numerous secret cults (e.g., of Baal and Astarte, of Isis and Serapis, of Cybele, and of Mithra) that had found their way from Syria, Persia and Egypt into all the centers of civilization. The finer natures among the learned and the wealthy, disgusted with the popular superstitions and the immorality which accompanied them, sought rest for their souls in the stern doctrines of the Stoics.

Pagan worship, no matter what form it took, did not make for morality; quite the reverse. Gods to whom were attributed good and bad qualities; who, at their best, were so little superior to men; who were often at feud with one another; who were patrons of theft, lying, and every disgraceful crime; whose worship in many cases consisted of nothing less than public immorality—such gods could not prove an inspiration to elevate the moral tone of those who believed in them. Is there any wonder that Roman society, from the lowest to the highest, was rotten to the core, that sin and unnatural vices prevailed on all sides? (Cf. Rom. i, 18-32.)

But sin and vice, lust and cruelty are not natural to man, and

therefore cannot satisfy his heart. "Men may be weak, and men may sin, but there is something in human nature that rebels and chafes against a perpetual round of vice and that hopes for higher things." Never before in the world's history had man become so fully conscious of his needs and of his helplessness. The longing for a Divine Liberator from sin and suffering and despair grew more and more intense. Virgil's writings bear witness to this longing. He speaks of the "sighing" of the Sibyls, the priestesses of Apollo, for a Savior, and of their prophecy that when He comes He shall dispel all darkness from the minds and hearts of men.

4. The Jews in the Empire

Alone of all the nations of antiquity, the Jews had preserved the knowledge and worship of the one, true God. In the course of their long and checkered history they had come in contact with all the great empires of the world, with Egypt and Babylon, Assyria and Persia, Macedonia and Rome. Since the eighth century B.C. they were no longer confined to the narrow limits of their barren homeland. Through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, as well as through their own native genius for trade and commerce, tens of thousands of Jews had been scattered throughout the world. These exiles by choice or compulsion were known as the "Jews of the Dispersion." They had their strongest foothold in Egypt, especially in the great city of Alexandria. They enjoyed the reputation of being industrious and peace-loving citizens. Their religion was tolerated by the civil authorities, and their national customs were regarded with respect. Most of them had adopted the Greek language and read their Sacred Books in a Greek translation (called the Septuagint). They held their religious services in the synagogues, one or more of which were to be found in every large city of the Empire. At the seasons of the great national festivals, thousands of them journeyed to Jerusalem to offer the prescribed sacrifices in the Temple.

Unlike their co-religionists in Palestine, the Jews of the Dispersion mingled freely with their pagan neighbors. In this way many Greeks and Romans became acquainted with the Jewish religion and its Sacred Writings. The great antiquity of this religion,

its pure concept of the Supreme Being and its sublime moral code made a deep impression on them and induced not a few to adopt it as their own. But only those who promised to obey the whole Law of Moses and submitted to the rite of Circumcision were regarded as Jews; the rest were known as the "God-fearing." Many of these *proselytes* eagerly embraced Christianity when it was preached to them by the Apostles. They formed, as it were, the bridge by which the Gospel passed from Judaism to the Gentile world.

In Palestine, since the days of the Machabees, the Jews were divided into two great parties, distinguished from each other both in politics and religion. The *Pharisees* were rigorists in religion and extreme nationalists in politics. They not only insisted on the strict observance of the letter of the Law, but were also most zealous defenders of the traditions and usages that had grown up around the Law and made its observance an intolerable burden. They were bitterly opposed to all foreign influence in the affairs of Palestine. The *Sadducees*, to whom most of the Jewish nobility and the priesthood belonged, were the liberals and freethinkers of their day. They acknowledged the Law of Moses, but rejected tradition and attributed no value whatever to rites and ceremonies. They denied personal immortality, the resurrection of the body, and the existence of good and bad angels. Politically they favored peace and co-operation with Rome.

When the "scepter had passed from Juda," and the Promised Land had become a Roman province (63 B.C.) the thoughts and hopes of the people centered on the Messias, the Christ, whose coming their prophets had foretold. But they did not look for a Redeemer who would be merely a religious reformer; they expected a national hero, a victorious King, another David, who would restore the independence of their country and "make their enemies His footstool."

Thus, we see that the poor benighted pagans of the far-flung Roman realm, with all their crude superstitions, their mad novel-ties in religion, their lust and their cruelty, were better prepared to welcome the Savior of the world than the self-righteous Phari-sees, the sneering Sadducees, and the multitudes who followed these blind leaders to destruction. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

The Emperor Gaius Caligula Insists on Being a God

During the reign of Gaius Caligula (37-41 A.D.), one of the worst emperors of Rome, the people of Alexandria burned down several Jewish synagogues and set up images of the Emperor in the rest. The Jews protested vigorously against such an outrage, and there was civil strife and bloodshed in the city until each side sent an embassy to wait upon the Emperor. The Jewish embassy was headed by the learned philosopher *Philo*, who has left a description of the interview, which J. B. Bury has summarized as follows:

"Gaius was at this time engaged in transforming the house and gardens of the Lamias into a royal residence, and the rival embassies from Alexandria were summoned thither. They found him hurrying about from room to room, surrounded by architects and workmen, to whom he was giving directions, and they were compelled to follow in his train. Stopping to address the Jews, he asked:

"'Are you the god-haters who deny my divinity, which all the world acknowledges?'

"The Alexandrian envoys hastened to put in their word.

"'Lord and Master,' they said, 'these Jews alone have refused to sacrifice for your safety.'

"'Nay, Lord Gaius,' said the Jews, 'it is a slander. We sacrificed for you, not once, but thrice; first when you assumed the empire, then when you recovered from your sickness, and again for your success against the Germans.'

"'Yes,' observed Gaius, 'you sacrificed *for* me, not *to* me.'

"Thereupon he hurried to another room, the Jews trembling, and their rivals jeering, as in a play. The next remark he addressed to them was, 'Pray, why do ye not eat pork?' Finally he dismissed them with the observation, 'Men who deem me no god are, after all, more unlucky than guilty.'"

—J. B. Bury, *Student's Roman Empire*, p. 228.

Review Questions and Hints for Further Study

1. What is meant by a "covenant"?
2. What is the difference between a *Hebrew*, a *Jew* and an *Israelite*? Look up these words in the dictionary.
3. Give four reasons why travel was easy and usual in the Roman Empire.
4. Can you name some great roads that connected different parts of the Empire with Rome?
5. Show from the sad state of morality in the Roman Empire that Religion and morality are intimately connected.
6. Comment on the following statement: "The Jews of the Dispersion formed the bridge by which Christianity passed from Judaism to the Gentile world."
7. Do you know why we speak of the "stern doctrines of the Stoics"? Consult the *Cath. Encyclopedia*, art. *Stoics*.
8. Why was Christ rejected by the vast majority of the Jews?