



# **Goahead Theological Seminary & College**

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## **Early Church History**

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The history of the Early Church encompasses the history of Christianity from the birth of Jesus Christ (circa 4 BC) to the end of the sixth century—specifically, the period marking either the fall of the Roman Empire or the accession of Gregory I (590 AD). This era represents the formative period of Christianity, during which orthodox theology—particularly regarding the Trinity and Christology—was established in the face of persecution by the Roman Empire and the rise of heresies (such as Gnosticism), while the Gospel was simultaneously disseminated throughout the world. Spanning the Apostolic Age, the Age of Persecution, and the Age of the Church Fathers, this period laid the foundational framework for Christianity, chronicling its emergence, its struggle against both external persecution and internal heretical forces to define orthodox doctrine, and its eventual establishment as the official state religion of the Roman Empire.

### **1. Major Historical Periods**

- **The Apostolic Age (Jesus – 100 AD; 1st Century):** This period began with the establishment of the Church following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' death; it was a time when figures such as the Apostles Paul and Peter actively preached the Gospel and ultimately met their deaths as martyrs.
- **The Age of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists (100–313 AD; 2nd Century):** During this era, the Apostolic Fathers—disciples of the original Apostles—carried forward the Christian faith, while Apologists



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**philosophically defended Christianity and proclaimed the Gospel within intellectual circles.**

- **The Patristic Age (The Age of the Universal Church; 313–590 AD; 3rd–6th Centuries):** This period saw the active ministry of Church Fathers—including Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Augustine—who systematized orthodox doctrines such as the Trinity and Christology. It was marked by the official recognition of Christianity through Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 AD, and the subsequent establishment of orthodox Trinitarian theology through events such as the Council of Nicaea (325 AD).

## **2. Key Events and Characteristics**

- **Roman Persecution:** Beginning with the false accusation regarding the Great Fire of Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero, Christians endured centuries of persecution; however, through the believers' martyr-like faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel spread even further, and the Church experienced explosive growth—fueled by the blood of martyrs—even amidst the ten major waves of Roman persecution.
- **Struggle Against Heresy:** In response to factions—such as Gnosticism—that threatened the very essence of Christianity, the Church worked to establish standards of faith (creeds) and orthodox theology. Confronting internal heresies like Gnosticism and Marcionism, it established theological standards through



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**the canonization of the Bible, the formulation of the Apostles' Creed, and debates concerning Christology (the divinity and humanity of Jesus).**

- **Official Recognition and State Religion Status:**  
Through the Edict of Milan (313 AD) issued by Emperor Constantine the Great, Christians secured freedom of worship; subsequently, as Christianity was officially recognized as the state religion of the Roman Empire, the organizational structure of the Church became systematized.

- **Establishment of the Seven Churches of Early Christianity (as described in the Book of Revelation):**  
The Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

### **3. Theological Development**

**Early Christianity established its theological foundation through attempts to integrate Greek philosophy and the Latin spirit with the Gospel. In particular, discussions surrounding the \*Logos\* served as the starting point for the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, through which the tradition of the universal (Catholic) Church was established**

Prominent Church Fathers of that era included Augustine (in the West), Athanasius of Alexandria (in the East), and Tertullian; through their efforts, orthodox theology was codified. Furthermore, in reaction against the secularization of the Church, the monastic movement—which pursued asceticism and piety—began to emerge.

(Provided by Goahead Theological Seminary)