

# Short history of Christian theology

## Year(s)   Event

- 190: St. Irenaeus writes his books against the Gnostics. The Gnostics oppose mind and matter: the physical is evil, only the mind is good. For the Gnostics, Jesus is of divine nature only, he has no human nature. For Irenaeus, Christ is the incarnation of God, according the Gospel of John 1.
- 310: Prayers for the dead are documented for the first time. Tertullian (160-220) is the first church father to name such prayers but does not recognize them as biblical.
- 322: The Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity and makes the christian religion the official state religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine and his successors do not interfere in the theological debates, but use state power to enforce decisions of the councils against groups that think differently.
- 325: Emperor Constantine calls the Council of Nicaea: After Christians were persecuted for almost 300 years, 318 bishops were able to congregate for the first time. The Council grants the Bishops of Alexandria, Antioch and Rome an exceptional authority. The Creed is formulated, with which all Christian churches still agree (Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Baptists, etc.).
- 367: Athanasius defines the canon of the New Testament based on the consensus of the churches of the Eastern Empire. (See « Definition of the Canon » below for details).
- 381: The Council of Constantinople recognizes the extraordinary authority of the Bishop of Constantinople. The council also defines the notion of Trinity.
- 394: The term « sacrifice » is used for the first time in a church service.
- 397: The Council of Carthage defines the canon of the New Testament for the Eastern Empire.
- 420: Boniface I, Bishop of Rome, claims the right to designate the Bishop of Corinth.
- 431: The Council of Ephesus defines Mary as the « Mother of God » (Theotokos).
- 593: The Pope Gregory the Great establishes a connection between earthly penance and purification after death. Some notions of the « purification of the soul after death » can already be found in Augustine and Clement of Alexandria.
- 600: Latin becomes the only language of the liturgy in the Western Empire.
- 602: As bishop of Rome, Gregory the Great gives himself universal jurisdiction in church matters. He defies the claims of the patriarch of Constantinople to be an « ecumenical » (universal) bishop.
- 607: Boniface III gives himself the title of « universal bishop » (universal = Catholic) and thus becomes the first pope as a hierarchical head of the bishops of the Roman Empire.
- 650: Services in honor of Mary are documented for the first time.
- 787: The Second Council of Nicaea introduces the worship of images of saints and relics. The Council of Elvira (305) had banned images in churches.

- 831: The Benedictine Radbertus is the first to define the doctrine of transubstantiation (the transformation of the elements of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ). The church father Origen (185-254) described the Eucharist as a symbolic act of communion with Christ.
- 850: The use of holy water is widespread.
- 965: Pope John XIII introduces the baptism of church-bells.
- 993: Pope John XV makes the first canonization. He canonizes the bishop Ulrich from Augsburg. In the year 1634 Pope Urban VII claimed the right of canonization exclusively for the Pope.
- 1050: Pope Leon IX accepts the popular habit to have church services for the deceased.
- 1074: A decree of Pope Gregory VII makes celibacy mandatory for priests. Previously, celibacy was just a recommendation.
- 1076: Pope Gregory VII makes a great reform of the Church and claims for the first time the infallibility of the Church in matters of the doctrine of the Church.
- 1090: The rosary is used by the Cistercian monks. In 1570 Pope Pius V gave it the present form.
- 1140: The dogma of the 7 sacraments is accepted. (Sacraments are means of grace whose effect is independent of the faith of the recipient).
- 1195: The sale of indulgences is introduced by Pope Urban II. The first indulgences offered the forgiveness of all sins to those who participated in the First Crusade.
- 1215: Fourth Lateran Council: The confession becomes compulsory once a year. The Pope Innocent III bans the funeral of people in a cemetery if they did not attend the Easter Mass. Transubstantiation (see 831) becomes a dogma. Jews and Mohammedans must wear a mark on their clothing.
- 1220: Worship the Host and bells for the Mass are first documented at about that time.
- 1231: Pope Gregory IX introduces a Special Court called « Inquisition ». During the 500 years of its existence, this court fights « heretics » and sentenced between 400 and 500 « heretics » to death. The court annuls also the marriage of the English King Henry VIII.
- 1261: Pope Urban IV commissions the theologian Thomas of Aquinas to make a synthesis of all knowledge, especially to bring together Christian theology and the teachings of the greek philosopher Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas writes e.g. the « Commentaries on Aristotle » and "[\*Summa Theologiae\*](#)". Since then, the church teaches that Jesus Christ has not died for all human sins but only for the original sin. For the consciously made sins, humans must purify themselves by suffering. Suffering begins in this world and continues in purgatory. The Catholic teaching has since departed from St. Paul and St. Augustine, for whom the forgiveness of God concerns all the sins of all men and women, if they ask for forgiveness.
- 1264: Pope Urban IV celebrates the feast of Corpus Christi in honor of the Mass Sacrament. All people who attend this feast service receive an indulgence.

- 1275: Since the Council of Lyons, the Pope has been elected by cardinals. Until the beginning of the 7th century, the bishop of Rome was elected by the faithful of the diocese of Rome.
- 1287: Scapulars are introduced (Scapulars are two blessed pieces of cloth which are hung with a chain around the neck). If you carry scapulars regularly, you will not spend more than a week in purgatory.
- 1414: The Council of Constance is convened by the Emperor Sigismund I and the Counter-Pope John XXIII. Since then, the wine is no longer given during the Mass. The reformers John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Hieronymus of Prague are declared heretics and burned alive.
- 1435: Pope Eugene IV publishes an encyclical banning slavery (The Spaniards started taking slaves in the Canary Islands). The Pope demands the release of the slaves under threat of excommunication. The authority of the pope was not much respected at that time in Spain. The Pope Paul III repeats the condemnation of slavery in 1537, Pope Urban VIII in 1639, Pope Benedict XIV in 1741 and Pope Pius VII in 1815. Since slavery had almost disappeared in Europe and took above all place overseas colonies, the Popes did not have much influence.
- 1439: The Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church sign a decree at the Council of Florence reaffirming the reality of purgatory.
- 1478: The Spanish Inquisition is created by Pope Sixt IV shortly before the « Reconquista », at the request of the « Catholic Kings ». The Spanish Inquisition has killed between 5,000 and 39,000 people over 3 centuries. (Reconquista: Muslims are expelled from Spain).
- 1517: Martin Luther attaches his 95 theses to a church door in Württemberg. He rejects the theological changes of the last 1000 years, above all the redemption through works and sufferings and the indulgences. He returns to the legal understanding of grace of St. Paul and St. Augustine. He rejects the authority of the Pope. Luther keeps only 2 Sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist.
- 1528: Schleithem Creed of the pacifist Anabaptists (later called Mennonites). In addition to the 90 theses of Luther, the Anabaptists want to separate church and state, baptizing only people who personally confess their faith and refusing to carry arms. They are severely persecuted in the Germanic-Roman Empire that inherited a law from the emperor Theodosius II that pronounces death penalty for re-baptism.
- 1529: At the second Diet of Speyer, the Lutheran princes protested against the condemnation of Luther. Since then they are called « Protestants ».
- 1545: Since the Council of Trent, the church tradition has the same authority as the scriptures. Some apocryphal writings of inter-Testamentary time are added to the Canon. The separation between Protestants and Catholics becomes definite.
- 1555: The Peace Treaty of Augsburg ends the fighting between Catholics and Protestant princes in the Roman-Germanic Empire. The people must take over the religion of the prince or relocate.
- 1663: Under the influence of Roger Williams, the Quakers, Mennonites and Baptists prohibit slavery in their colonies, especially in the area of the state of Massachusetts (USA). They also write petitions to Pennsylvania Governor William Penn to ban slavery.

- 1793: After 40 years of parliamentary struggle, William Wilberforce and his Anglican and Quaker friends manage to pass a bill in Parliament that prohibits slavery throughout the English Empire. He risked his life several times. The arguments for the abolition of slavery were mainly theological, e.g. : – Black and white people are equally created in the « image of God » and therefore have the same dignity, based on writings of St. Paul such as: « *In Christ there is no difference between Jews and Greeks, men and women, blacks and whites* ».
- 1854: Pope Pius IX introduces the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (Mary was free from « original sin. ») The great Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas rejected this doctrine.
- 1870: The First Vatican Council explains the dogma of the infallibility of the pope in church affairs.
- 1879: Pope Leon XIII, in his encyclical *Æterni Patris*, declares that the writings of Thomas Aquinas adequately describe the teaching of the Church.
- 1907: Pope Pius X condemns modern science and theology in his encyclical *Pascendi*. The break between the Catholic Church and science is only cured at the Second Vatican Council.
- 1950: Pope Pius XII announces the dogma of the Assumption. Pope Benedict XIV had refused in 1740 this doctrine to dogma. (Dogmas are absolute truths for the Catholic Church that cannot be discussed any more, other doctrines can be debated and changed).
- 1961: Since the Second Vatican Council, the Protestants are called « separate brothers » after having been « heretics » for 4 centuries.

**Most important sources:**

- The new international dictionary of the christian church; Paternoster Press Ltd.
- Histoire de l'église; Jules-Marcel Nicole.
- <https://www.herodote.net>
- <http://gameo.org>

# Brief history of the New Testament

Date of writing of the original New Testament books and letters.

## Year(s) Author and name of the writings

48-63 : Paul writes his letters to some churches and church leaders

55-64 : Peter writes his letters to some churches

60-80 : Matthew, Mark, and Luke write the three Synoptic Gospels

60-70 : Letter to the Hebrews, author unknown

90-100: John writes his Gospel

95-105: John writes his letters and the revelation

## Date of the oldest manuscripts of New Testament books and letters

### Year(s) Content of the manuscripts

125-130 : Fragment of the Gospel of John, found in Egypt, preserved in a Museum in Manchester GB.

160-180 : Manuscript of the Gospel of John, chapters 1-14, rest incomplete, preserved in Geneva

190-210 : Papyrus of parts of Luke and John Gospel, preserved in Geneva.

190-210 : Papyrus with letters from Peter and James, preserved in Geneva.

200-220 : Papyrus with the Epistles of Paul and Hebrews, preserved in Dublin.

240-250 : Papyrus of the 4 Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, preserved in Dublin.

270-290 : Papyrus with the Revelation of John, preserved in Dublin.

330-350 : Complete New Testament, Old Testament not quite complete. Found in Rome, preserved in the Vatican, and called « Codex Vaticanus ».

340-360 : Complete New Testament, Old Testament not quite complete. Found in Sinai, preserved in London, called « Codex Sinaiticus ».

400-430 : Complete New and Old Testament, found in Alexandria, preserved in London.

There exist more than 2000 manuscripts from the time of the Roman Empire. Most Bibles show the differences between ancient manuscripts in footnotes.

## Date of the process of the definition of the Canon

### Year(s) Activity

140-145 : Marcion of Sinop makes his canon with all the writings of Luke and Paul. Marcion rejects the writings of John and Peter. Marcion is excluded from the church of the city of Rome.

190-220 : In the churches of the Roman Empire there is a consensus concerning the New Testament, with the exception of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 2nd letter of Peter, 2nd and 3rd Letter of John, letter of Jude and John's book called « revelations ».

367 : A letter from Athanasius to those in charge of the churches of the Eastern Roman Empire in which he acknowledges 27 books being part of the New Testament Canon.

397 : The Council of Carthage accepts the proposition from Athanasius to include 27 books as part of the New Testament. The churches of Africa and the Eastern Roman Empire accept this decision. Pseudo-Gospels such as those of Peter and Thomas were rejected. Other pseudo-gospels were rejected during church history, such as the Gospel of Barnabas, which was invented in Italy in the 13th century and first written in Latin.

420-430 : In the Western Roman Empire, the authenticity of the following scriptures was discussed until 430: letters to the Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude. Under the influence of Augustine and Jerome, the 27 New Testament books are accepted in the churches of the Western Roman Empire.

The New Testament was accepted by a general consensus, no pope or council established it in the Western Church.

### Most important sources

« Evidence that demands a verdict »; Vol.1 und Vol.2, Josh Mc Dowell

« Introduction to the new testament »; Donald Guthery