

Church History

Timeline By Century

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3rd Century

At beginning of century, Edessa (Urfa in modern Turkey) becomes first Christian state.

- Emperor Septimus Severus (202-211) persecutes; forbids conversion to Christianity. Then a generation of peace for the church. Amazing growth and spread of faith continues and church buildings begin to be built.
- North Africa a key Christian center. Egypt alone has a million Christians by the end of 3rd century. Carthage and Alexandria leading centers of Christian theological development with such figures as Origen, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria.
- AD 248 the 1,000th anniversary of Rome but all is not celebration as threats to the empire increase from neighboring populations on borders.
- The first empire-wide persecution instituted under Decius in AD 250. Everyone must offer pagan sacrifice and show certificate of proof.
- Church has to deal with the difficult problem of how to handle the "lapsed"--those who relented during the persecution and now want back into the church.

- Church problems not only political. Intellectual attacks must also be answered. Porphyry writes *Against the Christians* attacking apostles, church leaders, Gospels and Old Testament. Origen around 245 answers attack of Celsus written 70 years earlier and apparently still a threat to the church.
- The role of the bishop continues to grow in strength.
- Before 300 Anthony goes into desert as a hermit, an important early step in development of monasticism--which will be a kind of protest movement against worldly Christianity and an alternative approach to spiritual commitment.