

ANTE-NICENE

II. THE ANTE-NICENE PERIOD (Pentecost to 325 AD)

A. Survey of Background Materials for the Age.

1. Historical Analysis

Historical Background

The Roman Empire is basically intact. There are three major periods of political instability:

60-70 AD...considerable confusion with a rash of small time emperors and the rebellion in Palestine which eventually pushed Titus into the foreground.

250-270...Including the reign of Trajan and his successors...during which time there was much ecclesiastical persecution and the amicable rule of Galerius as well. An unsettled time

305-313...The years following the days of Diocletian until the time on Constantine. There was no consolidation of rule...the Empire was divided east and west with "Caesars" and "Augustans" (titles) vying for power.

There were some lesser periods of confusion but basically this was an age of strength for Rome. To a great extent there was governmental and economic stability in the Mediterranean world through the continuity of the Roman rule. We can see that the Roman slave culture was producing a hopeless mess in the socio-economic order but that is more easily seen in hindsight.

The state of the church at this time.

Christianity has been illegal throughout this time. Persecution and opposition has been very intense at given times and places but on the whole the opposition has been limited. The persecutions of Nero, Domitian, Aurelius, S. Severus, D. Trajan and eventually Diocletian are dominant. Most of these purges were limited by time and more local than universal and therefore tended to strengthen the character of the church. But the procedures of Trajan and Diocletian would have been catastrophic had they been permitted to continue for a generation.

2. Philosophical Analysis

Philosophical Background.

It is not always easy (possible?) to keep sharp distinctions between religion and philosophy. This is due to the fact that theologians often philosophize and philosophers often theologize. Hence some of our material is divided arbitrarily. Note also that the teacher in the course is not much of a philosopher and is suspicious of men without calloused hands.