

FROM DANIEL TO REVELATION

The main purpose of this independent website is to interpret Daniel and Revelation.

2011-08-29 BY ANDRIES VAN NIEKERK

The Roman Empire gave the church its throne and great power.

This is an article in [the series on the vision of the seven last plagues](#) (Rev 15-16), but it also summarizes the history of the church during the first about eight centuries to show how the Roman Empire first opposed the church but then accepted the church and made it part of the government of the Roman Empire, giving the church her power and throne and authority:

*"The dragon gave him (the beast) his **power** and his **throne** and great **authority**" (Rev 13:2).*

The beast, in other words, received its throne from the dragon.

"Power," "throne," and "authority" are understood to be synonyms. As discussed, the beast's throne is [Christian religious authority](#) and the beast is [the church of the middle ages](#).

PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE

To understand how the beast receives this authority, we need to know what the dragon is. The article that discusses [the identity of the beasts](#) with seven heads in the Book of Revelation concludes that the dragon represents Satan in the context of the war in heaven (Rev 12:7-9) but, in the context of the birth of the beast (Rev 13:1-2), **it represents the Roman Empire**. The question then is,

how did the church of the middle ages receive its Christian religious authority from the Roman Empire?

ARTICLE SERIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRINITY DOCTRINE

This website has [a series of articles on the development of the Trinity doctrine](#) which also explains how the Roman Empire gave the church of the Middle Ages its throne and power. That series starts with the church fathers of the first three centuries, such as [Polycarp](#), [Justin Martyr](#), [Ignatius of Antioch](#), and [Irenaeus](#). This is followed by a series of articles on the development of that doctrine over the three centuries, including articles on:

- The [Council of Nicaea](#),
- The [Nicene Creed](#),
- In the period of about fifty years after Nicaea when [Arianism dominated the church](#),
- The [death of Arianism](#) under emperor Theodosius in the year 380,
- The [Fall of the Western Roman Empire](#) in the fifth century,
- Which left the [Arian Germanic tribes](#) to dominate Europe, and
- [The eastern emperor Justinian](#), who suppressed the Arian tribes and initiated a period of about 200 years, known as the Byzantine Papacy, during which the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire controlled affairs in the west THROUGH the church of Rome.

OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

As the reader might notice from this brief description, it is not possible to separate the development of the Trinity doctrine from the development of the church. For this reason, this article provides extracts from these articles to show how the Roman Empire gave the church of the middle ages "*his power and his throne and great authority.*"

FIRST THREE CENTURIES

During the first three centuries, the Roman authorities suppressed the church. It always was a challenge to maintain the unity of the huge empire, consisting of so many different nations. One of the methods the emperors used was unity of religion. New religions, such as Christianity, therefore, were regarded as a threat to the unity of the empire.

But Christianity "*went out conquering and to conquer*" (Rev 6:2). It kept on growing until emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in the year 313.

COUNCIL OF NICAEA (AD325)

After Christianity was legalized, the prestige of the church spiraled upwards but the church became part of the state and the emperor, effectively, became the real head of the church. The emperor governed the church to ensure church unity.

For example, there developed a major controversy in the fourth century concerning the nature of Christ. To enforce unity, emperor Constantine had a huge role in the formulation and acceptance of the Nicene Creed. He called the council, presided over it, actively guided the discussions, proposed the key word Homoousios, enforced the formula that his advisor had agreed on, exiled all bishops that were not prepared to sign the creed, and ordered all copies of Arius' book to be burned. This creed is still today regarded as a watershed decree in Christology.

FOURTH CENTURY ARIAN PERIOD

However, after the Council of Nicaea, the Arian controversy continued for there was no unanimity at Nicaea. The bishops went on teaching as they had before. Soon after Nicaea, while Constantine was still emperor, the consensus shifted away from the Homoousian view toward Arianism. The chief advocate for the Nicene Creed (Athanasius) was banished and the bishops who were condemned and exiled at Nicaea were readmitted. During the next 50 years, the emperors

Constantius and Valens enforced Arianism. They actively encouraged the church to reverse the Nicene Creed. Since religious freedom was not part of Roman culture, the emperors exiled bishops teaching the Nicene Creed, crushing the Nicene party.

WHAT DOES ARIANISM BELIEVE?

The Nicene Creed of 325 makes the Son equal to the Father. The modern word "God" is the proper name of the One who exists without a cause. In Arianism, the ancient Greek word theos, when describing Jesus, or any being other than the Father, would today be translated as "god." In Arianism, the Father is the only God, the Son is our god, but the Father is His god and the Holy Spirit is not a Person, but a power; subject to the Son.

THEODOSIUS OUTLAWED ARIANISM.

When Theodosius I became emperor in the year 380, the imperial capital (Constantinople) was solidly Arian. Commentators often refer to the council of Constantinople of 381 as the watershed where Nicene Christology replaced Arianism, but that council was a mere formality. Already before the council, emperor Theodosius, being a zealous supporter of Nicene Christianity, made Nicene Christianity the State religion, enforced the Trinity doctrine through legal prescripts, outlawed Arianism, and exiled Arian bishops. Consequently, Arians were not allowed to attend the Council of 381. It was for that reason that the 381 Council was simply a formality. The real decisions were taken by the Roman Emperor Theodosius. He persecuted Arians so effectively that Arianism disappeared among the elite in the empire.

FALL OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE

Theodosius was the last emperor to rule the entire Roman Empire; east and west. He died in 395. His death initiated a series of major events, including incompetent emperors and further migration of massive numbers of Germanic peoples into the Empire. Rome was sacked by barbarians in 410. This shows how weak the Empire has become in the only 15 years since Theodosius died.

Already in the fourth century, Germanic people began to migrate to the Roman Empire in large numbers. The basis of the power of the Roman Empire was its military. These immigrants were accepted into the Imperial Forces but, due to their numbers and military skills, took control of it. They, therefore, became a dominant force in the Western Roman Empire. They controlled top positions in the Empire but tolerated figurehead emperors in the west until 476.

In that year an Arian Germanic chieftain deposed the last Western Roman Emperor and the Germanic peoples divided the territory of the western empire into various Germanic kingdoms.

THE WEST WAS ARIAN AGAIN!

During the fifty-year Arian period in the fourth century, the church converted many Germanic peoples to Arian Christianity. Even after Theodosius outlawed Arianism, the Germanic peoples (called 'barbarians' by the Romans) remained Arian in their Christology. Since these Germanic tribes were Arians, after they took control in the fifth century, the Western Roman Empire was once again Arian-dominated.

The Nicene Church of Rome remained to function in Europe but was now subject to the laws and customs of these Arian nations. Nevertheless, it survived throughout this turmoil. One reason is that the Germanic tribes wished to remain part of the Roman Empire. They tolerated the Roman Church because it was an official part of the Roman system of government. This allowed the emperor in the east (emperor of the Byzantine Empire) to exert a level of control over affairs in the west THROUGH his authority over the church of Rome. For that reason, the Roman Church grew in strength despite Arian domination. (See – Byzantine Papacy)

JUSTINIAN LIBERATED THE CHURCH IN ROME.

In the sixth century, Justinian, emperor of the eastern (Byzantine) Roman Empire – a keen supporter of the Nicene church in Rome – considered it his divine duty to liberate the church in Rome from Arian domination.

He significantly weakened the Arian kingdoms in the west by sending troops to combat them. His troops dispersed the Vandals to the fringes of the empire, forced the Ostrogoths back north to South Austria, and barricaded the Visigoths with the new province of Spania.

Justinian's conquests commenced a period of about two centuries which is known as the Byzantine Papacy. The Nicene Church, with the protection and status it received from the Byzantine Empire, became a powerful social and political institution in Europe. The Germanic tribes, consequently, during the Byzantine papacy, abandoned Arianism in favor of Catholicism.

CONCLUSION

This overview shows that "*the dragon* (the Roman Empire) *gave him* (the church) *his power and his throne and great authority*" (Rev 13:2):

1) THE CHURCH BECAME SUBJECT TO THE EMPERORS.

Firstly, in the fourth century, the church became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Consequently, the church enjoyed the protection of the emperor but it also meant that the emperor used the church to maintain unity in the empire. Consequently, the church became part of the Roman system of government; subject to the emperor, who appointed the bishops. This remained to be the situation also during the Byzantine Papacy; from the sixth to the eighth century.

2) THE EMPERORS FORCED THE CHURCH TO ADOPT THE TRINITY DOCTRINE.

Secondly, in the first three centuries and also for 50 years after Nicaea, the church viewed Christ as subordinate to the Father. The decision to suppress the Arian branch of the church and to establish Nicene Christology as the official doctrine of the church was taken by the emperors (particularly Constantine, Theodosius, and Justinian) and enforced by the Roman Army.

3) THE CULTURE OF PERSECUTION

Thirdly, the culture of creating creeds and persecuting people that teach anything different was established by the Roman emperors in the fourth century and continues to this day in the church.

OTHER ARTICLES

- **NEXT:** [What does it mean that the Euphrates dries up?](#) (Sixth plague)
- [List of all articles on the Seven Last Plagues](#)
- [All articles on this website](#)

📁 **SEVEN LAST PLAGUES**

DANIEL 7, FIFTH PLAGUE, LOUD CRY, MIGHTY ANGEL, REVELATION'S DRAGON, THRONE OF THE BEAST