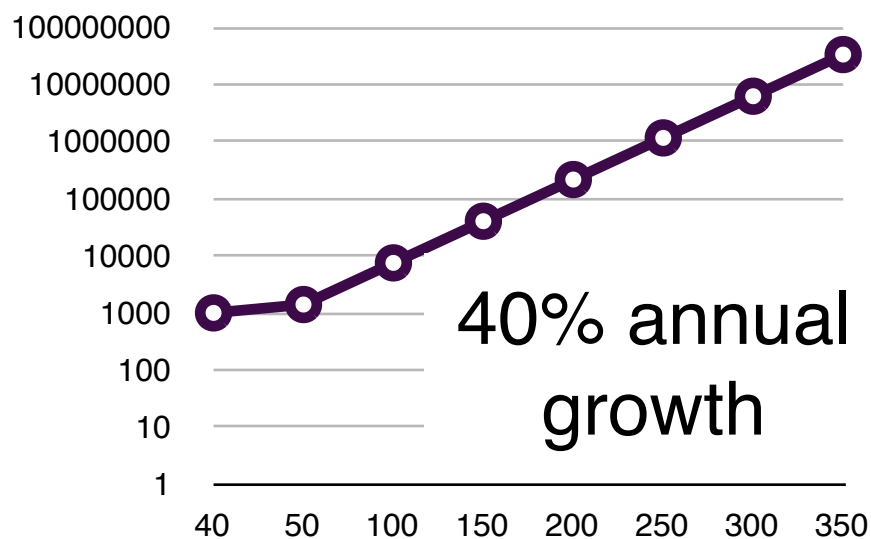


The Apostles Creed

The first 300 or so years of the church was a period of great growth. However, while it might be characterised all in a positive light, it was also a period when the church was under siege.



Acts 1: 15 - In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons)

The creed was a response to the pressure being exerted on early Christians by factions that wanted to influence the fledgling church's still immature theology. Many of the things we hold as central today were not yet clearly understood or even documented. For example, some groups didn't accept Jesus' humanity or have an understanding of the Trinity. There was also the strong influence of Greek philosophy and pressure to abandon faith by persecution from the Romans.

Persecution

Persecution was rarely systematic or applied universally to all Christians. Typically, persecution occurred in specific locations in response to the local government.

For example, the persecution by Nero in the 60s was probably triggered after the great fire in Rome. The fire burned for about over a week and destroyed 10 of the city's 14 sections. Of the remaining sections, two had large Christian and Jewish populations so Nero blamed the fire on them and proceeded to persecute them.

Domitian came later. Although he didn't initially have a problem with Christians, his attitude changed. At the time, there was little understanding of the differences between Christians and Jews. After the destruction of the temple in 70, Domitian decreed that temple offerings ought to be paid in taxes as there was no temple. In response to non-payment strict laws were enacted against Jews and, by association, Christians.

The First Atheists

It's interesting to note that the early Christians were called atheists. While pagans worshipped idols, Christians worshipped an invisible God.

The Apostles Creed

Misconceptions

The early church was grossly misunderstood in its early days. These are just a few of the challenges faced by the early church.

Cannibalism

The nature of the communion meal lead some to believe that Christians actually ate human flesh. Worse yet, some said that Christians concealed a newborn child in a loaf of bread and tricked a new initiate to the faith to cut the loaf and become complicit in the murder.

Allegations of Incest

The way Christians addressed each other as “brother” and “sister”, even in marriage, lead to rumours of incestuous unions.

Intellectual Weakness

In many ways this was the toughest thing to oppose as it wasn't a specific problem but rather a war that was to be fought on many fronts. Many considered that Christianity was a religion of barbarians derived from the intellectually weak Jews rather than the culturally and philosophically superior Greeks and Romans.

Jesus

Some said that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier while others pointed to Jesus as a convicted criminal executed for insurrection.

Challenges and Defenders

There were many other groups and splinters from early Christianity that seriously challenged the growth of the early church.

Gnosticism - the idea that relationship with God required some sort of special knowledge

Marcionism - if you see evil in this world it comes from the creator (ergo - the creator was evil)

Docetism - Jesus didn't have a physical body and didn't physically suffer

Philosophy - prior to the Roman Empire, Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world. The influence of Greek culture and philosophy was wide and deep with many people, including Christians, adopting elements of Greek philosophy in their beliefs

So, Christianity was under siege from many quarters and there were cultural and theological pressures. The early leaders of the church recognised this and reacted by writing several important documents. Amongst these was the Apostle's Creed.

The Apostles Creed

Creeds Aren't New

1 Kings. 18:39: And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."

Matt. 28:19: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:36-37: And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

1 Cor. 8:6: yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Cor. 15:3-7: For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Phil. 2:6-11: who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1 Tim. 3:16: Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Hebr. 6:1-2: Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

1 John 4:2: By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.