5. Early Christian Architecture

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Christianity, the religion developed by followers of Jesus Christ, began as a reforming sect of Judaism.

Over three centuries after the death of Christ, the religion developed into an organized church with a hierarchy of bishops and clergy.

The earliest expression of its beliefs is found in the Nicene Creed (325 CE), still used by the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and some Protestant denominations.

Not until the emperor Constantine proclaimed toleration for all religions of the Roman Empire in the Edict of Milan in 313 did Christians have authority to construct buildings for public worship.

Christian architecture after 313 derived from Roman precedent.

Stylistic developments in this period contributed to later buildings in the medieval period, thus creating a transition between the classical past and the medieval era in western Europe.
EARLY CHRISTIAN BASILICAS

- Church building began on the basis of Roman basilica where assembly hall and court of justice suited the new religion.
- With minor modifications, the Roman basilica form was adapted to Christian ritual.
- The altar was placed in the apse, entrances were set in the opposite short wall and an atrium accommodated gatherings before services and enabled the unbaptized to hear but not participate in the Mass.
- The longitudinal arrangement of atrium, nave, and apse formed an impressive axis for processions that terminated at the altar.
- Cathedral is a church that contains the seat or cathedra of a bishop. While cathedrals are often larger than ordinary churches, not every large church a cathedral.
The Basilica di San Clemente (Basilica of St. Clement)

- an early Christian basilica in Rome dedicated to Pope St. Clement (d. 99 AD).
- It was developed over the centuries from a private home used for clandestine Christian worship in the first century to a grand public basilica by the 6th century.
- When Christian persecution ended under Constantine (313 AD) and Christianity became the official religion of the empire (380s AD), it became a full-fledged church.
- It had paired aisles on either side of a lofty nave, which was concluded by an apse containing seats for the bishop (the cathedra) and priests.
- Clerestory windows high in the nave wall illuminated the central space, while smaller windows above the first aisle colonnade provided light for the ancillary spaces.
- Open wooden trusses spanned the nave and aisles, supported on brick-faced concrete walls and marble columns.
San Clemente Basilica from the Piazza di San Clemente

http://www.sacred-destinations.com/italy/rome-san-clemente

San Clemente Basilica interior

http://www.sacred-destinations.com/italy/rome-san-clemente
A Martyria is a building erected as memorials to commemorate saints or sites of special importance to the Christian faith. Its importance was always attached to the tomb or shrine around which it was built. Old St. Peter’s in Rome (318-22), predecessor of the present Basilica of St. Peter, began as a martyrium marking the tomb of St. Peter and used for several centuries as a place of burial for other Christians as well (Figs. ).

Its plan is that of a basilica, with double aisles on each side of the nave and a transept projecting beyond the sidewalls and extending across the nave in front of the apse. Placed at the junction of transept and apse was the tomb of St. Peter. The transept spaces accommodated those coming to venerate the shrine, while the enormous nave (300 by 64 feet) and aisles functioned as a covered cemetery with space for burials and commemorative funeral meals. A spacious atrium preceded the martyrium, and the whole scheme provided the model for a number of churches built later, both in Rome and elsewhere.
Plan of Old st. Peter's Rome, 318-21
Perspective section of Old St. Peter's, Rome, 318-22
BAPTISTERIES

- from the dead on Baptism is an important Christian rite, and in the early Christian period special buildings were often erected for it.
- Most were centrally planned around the baptismal pool, for at the time baptism was by complete immersion, and baptistery plans were frequently octagonal to reflect the number eight which symbolized Regeneration or the Resurrection.
- The Baptistery of Constantine, Rome is octagonal, and the roof is supported by a screen of eight columns two stories in height.
Mausolea, buildings were erected to contain the tombs of important people. Following Roman practice, these were often centrally planned, and they served as models for later domed churches.

The mausoleum of Constantine's daughter Constantia (now known as the church of S. Costanza) in Rome (350) is a circular monument with a cross-section paralleling that of the basilica, having lower aisle spaces flanking the higher naive lit by clerestory windows (Figs.).

The basilican cross-section was rotated about the center axis to create a circular building.

Originally the resulting dome with encircling ambulatory focused the visitor's attention on the sarcophagus placed in the center.

Twelve paired sets of columns

It is believed that Constantine built a funerary hall beside the mausoleum dedicated to the virgin martyr St. Agnes and resembled others built by Constantine in this period.
7-15. Plan and section of the Church of Santa Costanza, Rome. c. 338–50