

TWENTY CENTURIES

A Survey of Church History



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THE SECOND CENTURY

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- The Challenge of Heresy
- The Apologists
- Imperial Persecution of the Church
- Transition to Bishops
- Patriarchal Consolidation
- Advances in Canonization
- Christian Apocrypha

The Challenge of Heresy



- **The Rise of Gnosticism**
 - Doctrinal Issues:
 - ✦ All matter is evil / pure spirit is good.
 - ✦ Denial of Jesus' true humanity
 - ✦ Emphasis on “secret knowledge”
 - ✦ Platonic view of salvation
 - Gnostic “Gospels”
 - ✦ Gospels of Thomas, Mary, Judas

- **The Heretic Marcion**
 - Taught that NT God different from OT God
 - Rejected OT, cut all OT references from NT
 - Ended up with a rejection of atonement theology in favor of moralism

The Challenge of Heresy



- **Docetism**

- A Christological heresy. Dokeo – to seem. Christ only seemed to be human
- Such a Christ could not be a true Mediator; undermined doctrine of atonement

- **Montanism**

- Emphasis on special revelations, ecstatic experiences
- Seems to have grown out of a desire to recapture apostolic power/experience
- Undermined authority of Scripture.

THE SECOND CENTURY

The Apologists



- Writers who defended Christianity from criticism and persecution
 - Quadratus (c. 100) presbyter of Athens: wrote to Hadrian to contrast pagan and Christian worship
 - Justin Martyr (103-165) . Presbyter at Ephesus and Rome.
 - ✦ Two apologies: Wrote to Roman emperors and Senate to defend Christianity .
 - ✦ *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*: evangelistic discussion with a Jewish opponent of Christianity
 - ✦ Executed under Marcus Aurelius in 165.

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The Apologists



- Writers, cont.
 - Tatian (120-180)
 - ✦ *Address to the Greeks*: contrasting and defending Christianity vs. Greek paganism.
 - ✦ *Diatessaron*, to harmonize the four Gospels.
 - Tertullian of Carthage (160-225)
 - ✦ *Apology*: “We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum,—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods.

The Apologists



- **Typical Arguments of the Apologists:**
 - The best of Greek philosophy anticipated the New Testament
 - Miracles of Christ and apostles proved truth of Christianity
 - Only Christianity meets the deep needs of men and produces a true peace in society.
 - Defense of Christianity against false, pagan charges.
 - Christians are ordinarily among the nation's most loyal and productive citizens.

Imperial Persecution



- **Persecution in the Second Century**
 - Throughout period, Christianity was outlawed. Most persecution resulted not from official programs but from local hatred and mob activities.
 - Most persecution resulted from Christian refusal to participate in public, civic pagan sacrifices and emperor worship. They were deemed insurgent and unpatriotic.
 - Trajan (98-117)
 - ✦ Expanded empire, sought uniformity and cohesion. Persecuted Christians as they were found, but did not seek them.
 - Hadrian (117-138)
 - ✦ Imperial consolidation. Moderated father's policies.
 - Antoninus Pius (138-161)
 - ✦ More moderation. No vigorous persecution.

Imperial Persecution



- Persecution in the Second Century, cont.
 - Marcus Aurelius (161-180)
 - ✦ Greek philosopher. Expansionist who vigorously persecuted Christians.
 - Commodus (180-192)
 - Septimus Severus (192-211)
 - ✦ Official persecution aimed at Christian clergy and churches
- Examples of Persecution
 - Ignatius of Antioch (born 50, martyred 117).
 - Polycarp of Smyrna (born 69, martyred 156)
 - Sanctus & Blandina (Lyons, 177):

Imperial Persecution



- **Excerpt from Polycarp's Martyrdom:**

9:1 But to Polycarp, as he entered the arena, there came a voice from heaven, saying, Be strong, and play the man, O Polycarp. And the speaker no man saw; but the voice those of our people who were present heard. And when he was brought in there was a great tumult, when men heard that Polycarp was apprehended.

9:2 Then, when he had been brought in, the proconsul asked him if he was Polycarp. And when he confessed, he would have persuaded him to deny, saying, Have respect unto thine age, and other things like these, as is their custom to say: Swear by the fortunes of Caesar; Repent; Say, Away with the Atheists. But Polycarp, when he had looked with a grave face at all the multitude of lawless heathen in the arena, having beckoned unto them with his hand, sighed, and looking up unto heaven, said, Away with the Atheists!

9:3 And when the proconsul pressed him, and said, Swear, and I will release thee, revile Christ; Polycarp said, Eighty and six years have I served him, and in nothing hath he wronged me; and how, then, can I blaspheme my King, who saved me?

Imperial Persecution



- Blandina: Excerpt from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastic History*

17. But the whole wrath of the populace, and governor, and soldiers was aroused exceedingly against Sanctus, the deacon from Vienne, and Maturus, a late convert, yet a noble combatant, and against Attalus, a native of Pergamos where he had always been a pillar and foundation, and Blandina, through whom Christ showed that things which appear mean and obscure and despicable to men are with God of great glory, — through love toward him manifested in power, and not boasting in appearance.

18. For while we all trembled, and her earthly mistress, who was herself also one of the witnesses, feared that on account of the weakness of her body, she would be unable to make bold confession, Blandina was filled with such power as to be delivered and raised above those who were torturing her by turns from morning till evening in every manner, so that they acknowledged that they were conquered, and could do nothing more to her. And they were astonished at her endurance, as her entire body was mangled and broken; and they testified that one of these forms of torture was sufficient to destroy life, not to speak of so many and so great sufferings.

Imperial Persecution



- Excerpt from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastic History*, cont.

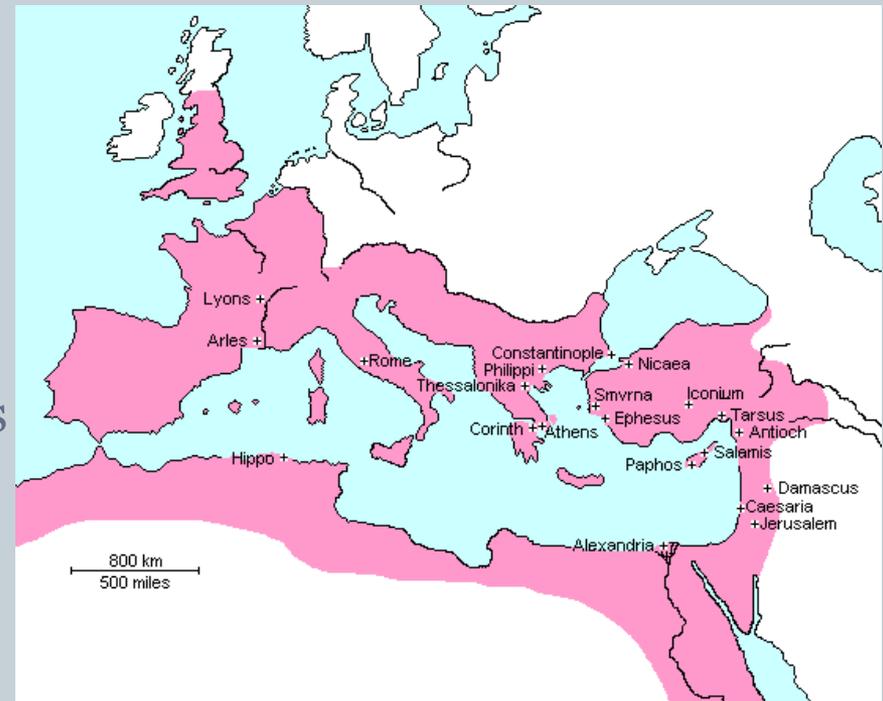
19. But the blessed woman, like a noble athlete, renewed her strength in her confession; and her comfort and recreation and relief from the pain of her sufferings was in exclaiming, 'I am a Christian, and there is nothing vile done by us.'

20. But Sanctus also endured marvelously and superhumanly all the outrages which he suffered. While the wicked men hoped, by the continuance and severity of his tortures to wring something from him which he ought not to say, he girded himself against them with such firmness that he would not even tell his name, or the nation or city to which he belonged, or whether he was bond or free, but answered in the Roman tongue to all their questions, 'I am a Christian.' He confessed this instead of name and city and race and everything besides, and the people heard from him no other word.

Consolidation into Patriarchies



- **The Transition to Bishops**
 - Authority figures as bulwark to heresy
 - Strong leadership in response to persecution
 - The question of apostolic succession
 - Yet late in the 2nd century, bishops shared authority with elders
- **The Patriarchal System**
 - Four Patriarchies: Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Rome
 - Tensions with Rome



Advances in Canonization



- **What is the Canon?**
 - word means “rod,” and came to mean standard of measurement.
 - The authoritative collection of books in the Bible
 - Criteria: 1) apostolicity; 2) antiquity; 3) orthodoxy; 4) catholicity
- **Second Century Issues**
 - Which books should be considered canonical
 - Apostolic writings not universal known or accepted
 - Heresy both challenged and promoted canonization

Advances in Canonization



- **Second Century Advances**
 - NT quotations in second century writings (Apostolic Fathers, etc.)
 - Challenge of Marcion and Montanism promoted canonization
 - Muratorian Fragment (175). Twenty books approved
 - ✦ Current NT, minus Hebrews, 2 Peter, James, 2-3 John, Jude, Revelation
 - ✦ No books not ultimately in NT
 - ✦ Identified many books not permitted in canon
 - Development of “the rule of faith”

Second Century Apocrypha



- What are the Apocryphal books?
 -
- Key Apocryphal Writings:
 - The *Didache* (AD 60?). Handbook of Christian doctrine and practice.
 - *Epistle of Barnabas* (AD 120). Strongly anti-Semitic.
 - The *Shepherd of Hermas* (AD 100-140). Call to moral purity in church.
 - *Fragments of Papias* (110-130). Preserve sayings of Jesus and apostles not found in the NT.
 - *The Letter to Diognetus* (early 100's): Demonstration of superiority of Christianity.
 - The Apostolic Fathers (AD 95-130)
 - ✦ Clement of Rome (*Epistle to Corinthians*, 95). Using the Bible to solve a dispute.
 - ✦ Ignatius of Antioch (Seven Epistles, 110). Letters to churches as he was taken to martyrdom in Rome.
 - ✦ Polycarp of Smyrna (*Epistle to Philipians*, *Martyrdom*, 110). Attack on heresy based on NT quotations.

Second Century Apocrypha



- **Value of the Apocrypha**

- Give us a picture of life in local churches in the age after the apostles.
- Show a pure, simple pattern of worship: Word, prayer, singing (no instruments).
- Reveal the kinds of problems facing the church after the apostles: false teaching and persecution
- Prove the authority of the Scriptures in the early church. Gospels and epistles frequently quoted with authority.
- Doctrinal grid of early church: deity of Christ (not so much humanity), atonement, faith, justification by grace, creedal confession.

Second Century Apocrypha



- Excerpts from *Epistle to Diognetus*:

1:1 Since I see, most excellent Diognetus, that thou art exceedingly anxious to understand the religion of the Christians, and that thy enquiries respecting them are distinctly and carefully made, as to what God they trust and how they worship Him, that they all disregard the world and despise death, and take no account of those who are regarded as gods by the Greeks, neither observe the superstition of the Jews, and as to the nature of the affection which they entertain one to another, and of this new development or interest, which has entered into men's lives now and not before: I gladly welcome this zeal in thee, and I ask of God, Who supplieth both the speaking and the hearing to us, that it may be granted to myself to speak in such a way that thou mayest be made better by the hearing, and to thee that thou mayest so listen that I the speaker may not be disappointed.

Second Century Apocrypha



- Excerpts from *The Shepherd of Hermas*:
 - 3:2 But the great mercy of the Lord had pity on thee and thy family, and will strengthen thee, and establish thee in His glory. Only be not thou careless, but take courage, and strengthen thy family. For as the smith hammering his work conquers the task which he wills, so also doth righteous discourse repeated daily conquer all evil. Cease not therefore to reprove thy children; for I know that if they shall repent with all their heart, they shall be written in the books of life with the saints."

Second Century Apocrypha



- Excerpts from Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*:
 - "For Isaiah did not send you to a bath, there to wash away murder and other sins, which not even all the water of the sea were sufficient to purge; but, as might have been expected, this was that saving bath of the olden time which followed those who repented, and who no longer were purified by the blood of goats and of sheep, or by the ashes of an heifer, or by the offerings of fine flour, but by faith through the blood of Christ, and through His death, who died for this very reason, as Isaiah himself said, when he spake thus: 'The Lord shall make bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the nations and the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God... All we, like sheep, have gone astray. Every man has turned to his own way; and the Lord laid on Him our iniquities'"

The Church a Century after the Apostles



- “The second century [was] decisive for the shaping of what would become the Christian church” (Judith Lieu).
- Christians were learning to be a prophetic voice within a hostile culture.
- Organized under metropolitan bishops, with patriarchies that experienced tension.
- Established Christianity as “a bookish religion” (Mike Kruger).
- Commitment to worship: “It was their distinctive worship that made Christians seem scandalous and superstitious. And it was this, above all, that Christians were committed to doing” (Kruger).

Recommended
Reading:

