

# TWENTY CENTURIES

## A Survey of Church History



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### THE THIRD CENTURY

# THE SECOND CENTURY



- 1<sup>st</sup> C – Beginnings / 2<sup>nd</sup> C – Expansion / 3<sup>rd</sup> C - Consolidation
- The Apostles' Creed
- Rome and North Africa
- Imperial Persecution
- Theological Controversy over the Trinity
- Vignette: The Patripassian Controversy
- Vignette: The Novatian Schism

# The Apostles' Creed



- **Historical Origination**

- Church's Expanding Need for Creedal Unity

- ✦ Creedal formulas in the NT: "There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).
- ✦ Creed of Ignatius, 107; expanded in 160: "I believe in the Father, the Ruler of the Universe, and in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, in the Holy Church, and in the forgiveness of sins."
- ✦ Nicene Creed (325) the first official creed for whole church.

- Response to Gnostic Heresies

- Originated from 2<sup>nd</sup> century "Old Roman Creed"

- "Apostles" creed because the church guarded the apostolic faith.

- First mentioned explicitly by Ambrose of Milan in 390.

- Became universal in the Western church by the decree of Charlemagne in the 9<sup>th</sup> c.

## The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
And born of the virgin Mary,  
He suffered under Pontius Pilot,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended into hell.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
And is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
The holy catholic Church,  
The communion of saints,  
The forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body,  
And the life everlasting. Amen.

# The Apostles' Creed



- **Why Do We Need Creeds?**
  - Do creeds compete with authority of Scripture?
  - Need for theological *clarity*. “I believe...” what?
  - Need for theological *consistency*: orthodox standard for teachers
  - Need for theological *catholicity*: what do we *all* believe?
  - Creeds can be amended as biblical understanding grows.
- **Trinitarian Organization/Emphasis**
  - “I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth.”
  - “I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...”
  - “And I believe in the Holy Ghost...”

# The Apostles' Creed

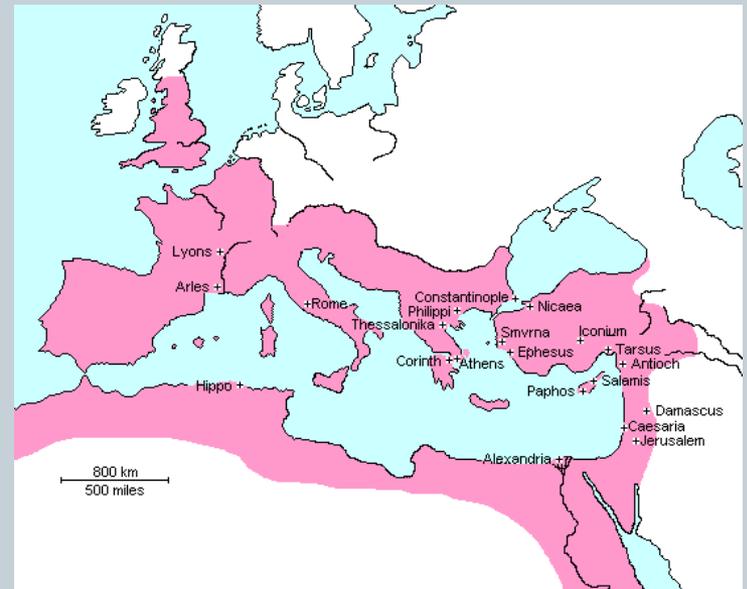


- “He descended into hell”
  - Latest addition (5<sup>th</sup> c.), in response to denials that Jesus really experienced the full reality of death.
  - Theological weakness: what does it mean?
    - ✦ Taken by some to refer to sufferings on the cross (Calvin. But unlikely, since this would break the chronology).
    - ✦ Taken by others as the “harrowing of hell”. Favored by the Greek “went down into the abyss” and Latin “descended into the underworld.”
  - Biblical weakness:
    - ✦ Where is this taught? 1 Pet. 3:21?
    - ✦ Jesus said, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43).
  - Therefore, omitted by some churches (including ours).

# Rome and North Africa



- **The Church of Rome**
  - Strong influence due to political center
  - Iranaeus of Lyons (140-202)
    - ✦ Survived persecution in 177. Key Western bishop
    - ✦ Wrote *Against Heresies*, a key document opposing gnosticism.
    - ✦ Emphasized: 1) Biblical authority; 2) apostolic succession (from Rome).
  - Hippolytus (170-235)
    - ✦ Important theologian & Bible commentator. Proponent of Allegory.
    - ✦ Early promoter/defender of Trinitarianism
    - ✦ Led anti-papal schism over Trinity



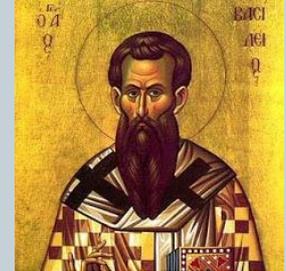
# Rome and North Africa



- The Church of North Africa (Alexandria & Carthage):

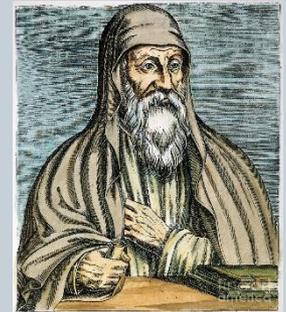
- Clement of Alexandria (150-215)

- ✦ Converted philosopher, defender of Christianity
- ✦ Emphasized Christ as *Logos* – true fount of philosophy.
- ✦ Gave too much influence to philosophy.



- Origen (184-254)

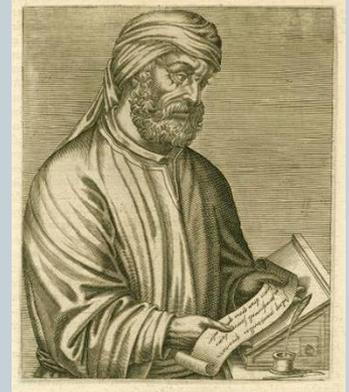
- ✦ Son of a martyr; ascetic Bible student & theologian
- ✦ Student and Successor to Clement
- ✦ Wrote first Systematic Theology, defended Christianity from paganism (*Against Celsus*)
- ✦ Threefold interpretation: literal, spiritual (allegorical), ethical.



# Rome and North Africa



- Tertullian of Carthage (155-220)
  - ✦ Son of Roman Army officer, trained in law, converted in middle age.
  - ✦ Important theologian and apologist. First major writer to use Latin.
  - ✦ Ordered and logical theology, emphasizing knowledge of God.
  - ✦ Promoted the authority of tradition along with Scripture.
  - ✦ Emphasized original sin and salvation by grace. Provided basis of our theological terminology: Trinity, *substance*, sacrament.
- Cyprian of Carthage (200-258)
  - ✦ Educated and wealthy man converted under Tertullian
  - ✦ Taught apostolic succession from Peter & Rome
  - ✦ Forced into hiding/ ruled church by letters.



# Imperial Persecution



- Persecution in the Third Century

- Christianity officially outlawed throughout century. Imperial worship required.
- 192-211 Septimus Severus:
  - ✦ Conversion to Christianity forbidden
- 235-236 Maximinus:
  - ✦ Christian clergy executed.
- 249-251 Decius:
  - ✦ Blamed Christians for imperial problems by making the gods angry.
  - ✦ Empire-wide persecution requiring pagan & imperial worship.
    - Bishops of Rome, Antioch, & Jerusalem executed.
  - ✦ Certificates of imperial worship needed to avoid prison/death.
    - Cyprian went into hiding; Origen refused and was tortured.
  - ✦ Many (most?) Christians purchased certificates to avoid persecution.
  - ✦ Martyrdom took on almost mystical/sacramental significance in church.



# Imperial Persecution



- Persecution in the Third Century, cont.
  - 257-260 Valerian:
    - ✦ Christians forbidden to assemble.
    - ✦ Seizure of Christians' property.
    - ✦ Cyprian martyred.
  - 260-268 Gallienus:
    - ✦ Realized persecution was not working; turned to Hellenistic education.
    - ✦ Starting with his reign, the church had 44 years of peace.

# Imperial Persecution



- **Effects of Persecution**

- Large numbers converted in response to Christian conviction and courage.
  - ✦ A few emperors are thought to have had Christian leanings.
- Christians became bold in faith, martyrdom highly celebrated.
- Cleavage between Christians who suffered and those who did not suffer.
- Official collaboration between churches of different regions made difficult.
- Church divisions arose over how to respond to “apostates”.

# Theological Controversy over the Trinity



- **Challenges to Deity of Christ**
  - Question: How does the church handle the Bible's teaching on the unity of God and the diversity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
  - Docetism (2<sup>nd</sup> C):
    - ✦ Denied humanity of God the Son
    - ✦ The Divine Son only seemed to be man.
  - Monarchianism (early 3<sup>rd</sup> C):
    - ✦ God as monarch: only one sovereign God.
    - ✦ Taught *one God as one person*.
    - ✦ Attempt to safeguard unity of Godhead and deity of Christ

# Theological Controversy over the Trinity



- Different forms of Monarchianism:
  - ✦ *Adoptionism*: Jesus not eternally divine, but adopted as God's Son for his obedience. Paul of Samosata: "Out of man he became God."
  - ✦ *Modalism*: One God, in three modes of existence. One God acting in different ways. Defended deity but denied personhood of Christ.
  - ✦ *Patripassianism (father suffering)*: Sabellius: Since there is one person as God, then the Father suffered on the cross in and with Christ. Form of modalism.

# Theological Controversy over the Trinity



- Key Stages on the Way to 4<sup>th</sup> Century Trinitarian Orthodoxy
  - Key Issues Considered and Debated
  - “Arianism” planted in Antioch
  - Hippolytus made powerful arguments against monarchianism that gained wide acceptance.
  - Tertullian developed terminology that would serve orthodoxy, especially *trinity*, *person* and *substance*.

“Everywhere I hold one substance in three cohering... All are of one, by unity of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; three however... not in substance but in form, not in power but in appearance” (Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*).

# Vignette: The Patripassian Controversy



- **Phase 1: Theodotus**

- 189 Theodotus, a wealthy merchant, arrives in Rome from Byzantium, where he had apostatized during a persecution.
- Defended his actions by asserting that Jesus was only a man, so that denying him was not denying God. Assembled team of Bible scholars/theologians to defend this view from the Scriptures.
- 190 Theodotus excommunicated by Pope Eleutherius. Forms schismatic sect, composed largely of philosophers/logicians.
- 235 Theodotus' follower, Artemus, takes teachings to Antioch, where he influences Paul of Samosata and Lucian, the teacher of Arius.

# Vignette: The Patripassian Controversy



- **Phase 2: Wrestling over the Deity of Christ**
  - Christ's deity was supported by means of both monarchianism (adoptionist and modalist) and trinitarianism.
  - Pope Zephyrinus was aided by a priest named Sabellius, who taught modalism and patripassianism (father suffering). Thus a distinction was emphasized between the Father and the Son, so that the Church inadvertently adopted modalism instead of trinitarianism.
  - The great scholar Hippolytus attacked Sabellius for denying distinct personhood within the Godhead. Denounced the pope for supporting Sabellius and Modalism. Started own trinitarian sect as the true church.
  - 217, Calixtus made pope. Condemned Sabellius and rejected Monarchianism. Failed to satisfy Hippolytus and followers, who remained outside Roman church.
  - 235 Hippolytus persecuted, sent to mines in Sardinia. Meets pope Pontianus in mines and is reconciled.

# Vignette: The Patripassian Controversy



- **Lessons:**

- Theological wrestling, often going from one error into another error on opposite side
- Ecclesiastical wrestling over the authority of the church and of the popes vis a vis the Scriptures.
- Theological disputes often become personal disputes; the second often dominates over the first.

# Vignette: The Novatian Schism



- Phase I: Development of Penitential System
  - Jesus' "keys to the kingdom"
    - ✦ "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mt. 16:19)"
  - Idea develops that bishops may forgive sins, not merely declare forgiveness.
  - Penitential system tied to Sacramental System, so that forgiveness was tied to baptism, with both under the power of the bishop.

# Vignette: The Novatian Schism



- **Phase 2: The Problem of Repentance**
  - Question: Are post-baptismal sins forgiven through repentance?
  - Q: What constitutes repentance? A: Exomologesis (Tertullian in *De Penitentia*, 211):
    - ✦ Exomologesis = “Out of confession”
    - ✦ Once only, a sacrifice of penance to atone for one’s sins. Often very lengthy – fasting, sack cloth, etc.
    - ✦ Church’s intercession makes penance efficacious
    - ✦ Not possible for apostasy, murder, or adultery
    - ✦ Not many would accept; led to the delay of baptism
  - Exomologesis modified by Pope Calixtus I
    - ✦ Allowed repentance for adultery
    - ✦ Based his decision simply on own authority as pope.
    - ✦ Bitterly opposed by Tertullian, who left the Church.

# The Novatian Schism, cont.



- **Phase 3: Persecution & Apostasy**
  - In some persecutions, such as the Decian persecution (c. 250), the government gave tickets to those who worshiped the emperor. A majority of Christians purchased these tickets without worshiping. Were labeled apostates, so that most professing believers were barred from church.
  - After the persecution, “apostates” sought to reenter the church.
  - The practice developed whereby “apostates” could be reconciled only at the request of a “martyr,” i.e. a Christian currently in prison awaiting execution for the faith.
  - Problem: transferred authority from popes/bishops to martyrs.

# The Novatian Schism, cont.



- **Phase 4: Cyprian of Carthage and Novatian (c. 250-1)**
  - Cyprian denied authority of martyrs to restore apostates. Instead martyrs should intercede to bishop on apostates' behalf. Bishops would decide case-by-case.
  - The martyrs rebelled and cities rioted on their behalf. Cyprian wrote to Rome for support.
  - At the time, Rome was without a pope. A priest named Novatian wrote back endorsing Cyprian.
  - The new pope, Cornelius, allowed apostates to be received via Exomologesis
  - Novatian rebelled, declared no forgiveness for apostates, and had himself made pope by three bishops, set up rival church. Rival bishops consecrated by Novatian were sent to cities, but were rejected by the churches.

# The Novatian Schism, cont.



- **Issues and Lessons:**
  - The prestige of the Roman church, as the imperial capital, grew over time.
  - The pope became the arbiter of disputes, so that his authority was increasingly accepted.
  - The church's primary concern was for its own authority, not the forgiveness of sinners.
  - Sacramental salvation and papal tyranny advanced hand-in-hand.
  - Armed with the “power of the keys,” the popes made no attempt to justify actions biblically.

# At the End of the Century



- As the Church transitioned to the 4<sup>th</sup> century:
  - Military situation of the Empire tottering. Stabilized by Diocletian (284-305).
  - New religious movements:
    - ✦ Sun worship: pagan movement to monotheism / December 25.
    - ✦ Neoplatonism: Doctrinal influence on and on-ramp to Christianity.
    - ✦ Manichaeism: Gnostic conflict vs. Light and Darkness (dualism).
  - The gospel had penetrated to every province of the Roman Empire (including Britain).
  - Christianity most strongly located in the central provinces of key political importance.
  - Many officers of government and imperial servants converted.
  - Widespread penetration of the gospel into the Roman Army.