**Church History # 3**

The Apologists

**Introduction.**

**1. Our purpose: To give a brief outline of the major events in the history of the church.**

a. **Lesson 1: The NT Church**

1) In God’s plan; prophecy; ministry of John and Jesus.

2) Establishment of the church on Pentecost

3) Work, worship, organization, mission of the church.

4) Apostasy foretold.

**2. Lesson 2: The Apostolic Fathers (100-150 AD)**

a. Those closest in time to the Apostles and some personally knew the Apostles.

b. Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Epistle of Barnabas, The Didache, Papias, Polycarp,

Shepherd of Hermas.

**c. Value of studying:**

1) Reading and studying the Church Fathers and the Ante-Nicene Fathers

gives us a glimpse of **what is and what is not going on** in the early

churches after the time of the Apostles.

2) The many quotes in the ANF’s from the New Testament books would

allow us to completely reconstruct the NT just from these writings.

\* This gives added weight to the accuracy of the NT that has come down

to us.)

3) The churches were still governed by elders (plural) with no “head” bishop

or “presiding” elder.

\* Ignatius’s argument for a ruling elder (bishop) over the others shows

that it was not the prevailing practice yet.

4) The basic practices of the early church are still intact.

\* **Plurality of elders** in each church.

\* **Baptism** by immersion for the remission of sins.

\* **Church worship** – weekly LS, singing, prayers, etc.

**I. Challenges to the Early Church (100-200 A.D.)**

**A. Development of opposition to Christianity.**

1. The church grew up during the time of Roman rule.

2. The Roman government required each religion to be duly authorized and

licensed before it had a right to function in the empire.

3. Since the Jewish religion was the religion of ancient Judea, it was allowed

to remain pretty much unmolested as long as they behaved.

a. At the beginning, Christianity was seen as a sect of Judaism by the

Romans and therefore remained unmolested.

b. The early persecution of the Christians came mostly from the

Jews.

4. But as time went on, the Romans began to see the distinctiveness of

Christianity.

**B. False Accusations Against Christians Arise**

1. **Cannibalism**. Rumors of cannibalism persisted because the Christians ate

“flesh and blood” in the Lord’s Supper.

2. **Atheism**. Christians were accused of being atheists because they would not worship the “gods” of the Greeks and Romans.

3. **Gross immorality** (including incest). This was a totally unjust rumor. Christians, as a rule, were exceedingly more moral than the society they left behind. Some say this accusation was cast because they called one another “brother and sister” and professed “love for one another.” My feeling is that it was more about hatred, distrust, prejudice than any real “reason.” Over time this rumor fell apart when people saw the true character of early Christians.

4. **Disruption of business**. In some places the growth of the church hurt the

hurt the income of the pagan religions by curtailing their sale of animals

and sacrificial meat. (See also the disruption caused in Acts 19:21ff.)

5. **Anti-family behavior**. Again, some truth to this since once one became a

Christian their loyalty to Christ became # 1, and their physical family # 2.

6. **Novelty.** The Roman world honored tradition and the ancient religions were revered because they were old. Christianity was accused of being a new “upstart.” Traditional Romans feared that converts were merely seduced by the novelty of this new faith. Christians countered that they were heirs of Judaism, an ancient faith the Romans recognized. Besides that, the Christians claimed they were the most ancient faith of all - they worshiped the God who existed before creation.

7. **Lack of patriotism**. Romans made no distinction between “church and

state.” To turn away from the gods was to turn away from the state and not be loyal.

8. **Causing Disasters**. Because the Christians would not honor the Roman religions and gods, when flood, famine, or disaster came, it was assumed that the Christians were the cause. The gods were sending punishment.

**C. False doctrines become a challenge to the early church.**

1. The writers of the NT warned Christians that false teachers and false

doctrines would enter the church. (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Tim. 4:3;

2 Pet. 2:1-3).

2. F. W. Mattox outlines four movements are affected the church.

a. **Marcionism**

1) At different times there has been the danger to turn the

gospel of Christ into a legalist system. The temptation to

exalt the letter of the law above the spirit of the law.

2) Marcion was reacting to this problem, but he overreacted.

3) Wanted to throw out the Old Testament completely.

4) Said the God of the OT was a different God than the God

of the NT (a God of justice vs. a God of love and mercy).

5) Said Paul was the only apostle to understand the gospel.

6) The church at Rome withdrew from Marcion in 144 and

he and his followers formed a new church.

7) **Marcion’s canon**: Did not include the OT; only had one

gospel, his own hybrid gospel mostly following Luke;

no book of Acts; most, but all of Paul’s epistles; no epistles

from the other NT writers; did not include the book of

Revelation.

b. **Gnosticism**

1) A dualism that says the material world is evil and the spiritual is good.

2) To get to the spiritual, a man must go through a hierarchy of intermediate beings of which Christ is only one.

3) Through special knowledge (Gnosticism from the Greek

word ginosko, “to know”) one may rise above the sinful, material world.

4) Angels are important and can be worshiped.

5) A man must buffet his body through asceticism (self-

denial, extreme abstinence).

6) God is spirit and could not have made the material world

(since the material world is evil).

7) Instead, God breathed out emanations that resulted in the

formation of a lesser God, Jehovah of the OT, who made the physical world.

c. **Docetism**

1) Docetism is from Greek *dokein*, “to seem”. The belief that Christ did not really suffer on the cross, but rather that He just “seemed” to suffer.

2) Again, Docetism had a similar belief as Gnosticism that matter was essentially evil therefore Jesus could not have really lived in the flesh or been a part of a material world.

3) Ignatius, in his writings, describes the doctrine of Docetism, defended true Christianity, and insisted that the sufferings of Christ were real.

d. **Montanism**

1) Montanus taught in the mid 100’s (about 135-175 A.D.)

2) Montanus was reacting to the growing formalism and

reliance on human leadership in the church.

3) He opposed the growing importance of the bishops in the

Church (in this, he probably had valid concerns).

4) But instead of emphasizing the Scriptures and apostolic

authority, he espoused a belief in the direct guidance of

the Holy Spirit.

a) Said the promises of Jesus to the apostles concerning the HS applied to him.

b) Said he was the first to receive the HS in its completeness.

c) His movement has been compared to the modern Pentecostal / charismatic movement.

**II. The Apologists**

[“The Apologists” refers to early Christian writers that defended Christianity against attacks from their secular opponents (Roman culture) and/or defended the faith from the false teaching of heretics.]

A. **Quadratus (125-129)**

1. Was the first to write a defense of Christianity from the attacks of the Roman culture.

2. Written to the Emperor Hadrian.

3. None of Quadratus’ work has survived to modern times, but his writings are referenced multiple times by the historian Eusebius (326 A.D.).

4. He wrote about the miracles of Jesus as proof of Jesus’ claims. He said those who had been healed and raised from the dead were still alive “even to our day” (early 2nd century) (Mattox, p. 68).

B.  **Aristides** (138-147)

1. The first complete defense of Christianity (Mattox, p. 68).

2. Contrasted Christian worship, morals, and practices with human religions.

3. “His closing chapters contain valuable information concerning the

practices of the church in the middle of the second century” (Mattox,

p. 68).

C. **Justin Martyr** (103-165)

1. As a young man, Justin studied various worldly philosophies to find answers to the serious questions of life.

2. He met an aged Christian in Ephesus (about 133) and became a Christian.

3. Eusebius mentions eight different works he wrote, but only two survive.

a) **Apology** (addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius, 150 A.D.)

1) Appeals to the Emperor to inform him that Christians are not atheists, or idolaters or immoral.

2) He argued that Christianity was more noble than pagan religions.

3) Argued that Jesus was foretold in OT prophecy.

b) **Dialogue with Trypho** (a Jew).

1) Was the longest book up to that time.

2) Justin argues that the prophecies of the Messiah in the OT

were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and that the God of the OT and NT are the same God.

4. **Called Justin “Martyr”** because he was killed for the faith in about 165

A.D.

a) Debated with a Roman philosopher named Crescens.

b) He was accused of being an atheist by Crescens, and Justin

confessed to being an “atheist” to Roman gods.

c) Some believe Crescens was behind the political plot to have Justin

convicted and beheaded. (History is unsure about Crescens’ role.)

5. **Other interesting notes**:

a) Tells us that Christians met on the 1st day for worship.

b) Said baptism was referred to as a washing because

immersion was the common form.

c) Teaches that baptism was for the remission of sins.

D. **Tatian** (125-200)

1. Another young man who was studying philosophy looking for truth.

2. Met Justin Martyr and was converted to Christ.

3. In 152-155 A.D. he wrote “Address to the Greeks” where he ridiculed Greek philosophy’s claim of superiority to other beliefs and showed that Christianity holds the higher position.

4. Said that Greek immorality is seen in their art, sculpture, sports, and religion.

5. He later wrote what is considered by many his greatest work, *Diatessaron* (Greek meaning “through four”), the earliest attempt to take the four gospel and weave them into one story. Written in Greek but translated into Syriac and became very popular with Syriac-speaking Christians.

6. Sadly, later in life, Tatian became a Gnostic and left the true faith.

**E. Melito (169-190)**

1. Melito was an elder in the church at Sardis (the church mentioned in the book of Revelation).

2. Produced 18-20 apologies (according to Eusebius).

a. One titled “On Baptism”

b. One titled “On the Lord’s Day”

3. In 170 he wrote “Apology.”

a. He wrote to the Emperor to show that the church was a force for

in the Empire and that instead of persecuting it, he should defend it.

b. He said that Christianity was the final revelation from God and that it had been foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

c. He wrote that the sacrifices of the OT were typical of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

**F. Irenaeus (130-200)**

1. Born in Asia Minor in about 130 A.D.

2. As a young man he heard Polycarp preach and became a Christian (and

follower of Polycarp).

3. He became a learned scholar and prolific writer.

4. Wrote five books “Against Heresies” in 185.

5. Highlights of his writings:

a) Describes Gnosticism, and offers strong arguments against it.

b) Defends the inspiration of the Scriptures.

c) Argues that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the only 4 gospels.

d) Denies any antagonism between Peter and Paul’s gospels.

e) Defends the virgin birth of Jesus.

6. Irenaeus did not seem to advocate centralized control to avoid heresy, although he was greatly concerned about the many sects in Christianity that were forming.

7. He said that congregations should be independent. “Centralization of authority and submission to Rome was yet in the future.” (Mattox, p. 81)

**G. Clement of Alexandria (150-215)**

1. Name: Titus Falvius Clement

2. Native of Athens, but became known as Clement of Alexandria because

of his association with the famous Alexandria Bible school.

3. As with others, he started his spiritual journey examining various human

philosophies, before meeting a Christian, Pantaeus, in Egypt.

4. Clement attended, then years later, became head of the Alexandria

School (in 190).

5. Some of his works:

*A Hortatory Word to Gentiles* (to unbelievers).

*The Instructor* (for new Christians)

*Clothes-bag* (for mature Christians; like a scrap-bag for keeping odd and

ends. This work is also called *Miscellanies* because of its

miscellaneous nature.)

6. Clement, as well as some of the other early writers, like Irenaeus, were not afraid to study and use human philosophy. They believed the study of human philosophy could prepare them convert the unbeliever. Not all human conclusions are wrong, but one must pick and choose carefully.

**H. Tertullian (155-223)**

1. Born in Carthage (north Africa) in 155 A.D. (the church had come to North Africa at a very early time).

2. He became a lawyer and was living in Rome when he learned and obeyed the gospel.

3. He returned to his home in Carthage to spread the gospel message.

4. In 180 AD, 12 Christians were martyred during the reign of Commodus. 5. In 197 AD, Christians refused to celebrate a victory by Emperor

Septimius Severus, and they were again persecuted. Tertullian wrote a defense of their actions.

a. Argued it was unfair to condemn Christians without examining their beliefs.

b. He said that the common charges against Christians (immorality, cannibalism, disloyalty to government, etc.) were not true.

c. He says that although Christians would not worship the Emperor as a god, they were otherwise faithful and loyal citizens.

d. He argues that persecution would never destroy the church.

“We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed.”

**I. Hippolytus (170-236)**

1. Born in 170 A.D. and studied under Irenaeus in Gaul.

2. Spent more of his adult life in Rome.

3. Mattox describes him as a fiery preacher and a puritan in morals.

4. The Church at Rome had a bishop, Zephrinus, who apparently cared more

for himself than the church. Hippolytus opposed his laxity. The church divided, one part going with each man.

5. During the time of Emperor Maximin a persecution of Christians arose,

and Hippolytus was seized and sent to the Sardinian mines for forced labor.

6. Most of his writings have not survived to modern times, but he seemed to be a strong opponent of the direction the church was taking toward a development of an unscriptural clergy.

**J. Origen (185-254)**

1. Origen was born to a pagan family in Alexandria (Egypt) in 185.

2. When he was 8, his parents became Christians and were said to be very

devout.

3. Origen attended the Alexandria Bible School, and studied under Clement.

4. In 202, when he was only 17, his father was killed during a wave of persecution. He wanted to give himself up and go off to prison with his father, but his mother persuaded him not to do so.

5. In 203, at the young age of 18, Origen was put in charge of teaching the new converts at the school. He taught for 12 years until more persecution came and he fled to Rome. After a few years he returned to Alexandria to work another 13 years at the school.

6. He was a prolific writer. He had seven scribes and a number of young lady assistants.

7. He produced the Old Testament in six languages in parallel columns.

8. He wrote commentaries on each book of the Bible. (291 scrolls).

9. Origen was a brilliant man who believed the Scriptures were inspired by God, but his weakness was is “allegorical interpretations.”