

Church History - Table of Contents (tentative)

Session	Topic	Scripture References	Page
1	History & Modern Man <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolutionary Perspective • Viewpoints on Church History • Holding Hands with the Past 	Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3	2
2	Analysis of the Acorn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pentecost - the Birth of the Church • Eyewitness News • Filling in the Gaps 	Acts 2:1-4	15
3	Authority & Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation of the Church • Those Who Rule Over You • Elders & Deacons 	Titus 1:5-9	28
4	The Rise of the Episcopacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clement & Ignatius • Irenaeus & Cyprian 	II Timothy 2:2	41
5	The Development of the Canon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apostolic Succession • Challenges to Orthodoxy • Rule of Faith 	II Peter 3:14-16	54
6	Danger from Within <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History is Written by the Victor • Gnosticism 	Acts 20:27-31	66
7	Early Reform Movements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcion • Montanus & Tertullian 	I Timothy 4:1-11	79
8	The Development of Theology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antioch to Alexandria • Carthage to Rome 		90
9	The Mystery of the Trinity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Divine & Human in Jesus Christ 	I Timothy 3:16	107
10	The Council of Nicæa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantine's Troubles • Arius versus Athanasius 	Romans 9:1-5	119
11	The Doctrine of the Trinity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Holy Spirit at Nicæa • One Essence, Three Persons 	Matthew 28:19	129
12	The God-Man Jesus Christ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christological Controversies • The Divine & Human in Christ 	Philippians 2:5-11	139

Church History

13	The Rise of the Papacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defense of the Faith • Ubique, semper, ab omnibus 	Matthew 23:8-10	154
14	The Rise of the Papacy - Part II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popular Popes • Highs & Lows of Romanism 		167
15	Augustine & the Sovereignty of Grace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The First Catholic Theologian • Augustine vs. Pelagius • The Sovereignty of Grace 	Romans 9:6-24	179
16	The Church and the World <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Decline & Fall of the Empire • <i>De Civitate Dei</i> - Augustine 	I Corinthians 7:29-35	195
17	The Travail of Grace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hegel's Synthesis • How Strong is Grace? 	Ephesians 2:8-10	205
18	The Means of Grace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptism • The Lord's Supper 	Matthew 28:18-20 Matthew 26:26-30	215
19	The Rise of Neo-Judaism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacerdotalism & Sacramentalism • Sacraments of the Catholic Church 	Colossians 2	228
20	Everywhere, Always, and by Everyone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement of East & West • Sliding into the Middle Ages 	II Timothy 3:1-9	239

Session 1: History & Modern Man

Text Reading: Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3

*“The New Testament is from start to finish
a proclamation of what God will do,
His purpose for mankind and the world.”
(Adolf Schlatter)*

A recent news article reported the sudden wave of ‘tweets’ on the social media Twitter as people all across the country (and perhaps the world) discovered that *The Titanic* was more than just a movie starring Leonardo de Caprio and Kate Winslet – it was a marine disaster *that actually happened* in history! As events are scheduled to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the tragedy (April 15, 1912), the reality finally dawned on thousands of 21st Century technogeeks that the *movie* was actually taken from an historical *event*. One person tweeted, “Is it bad that I didn’t know the Titanic was real?” Another responded, “Yes, I’m afraid it is bad.” Now there is an understatement of epic proportion.

But this manifestation of historical ignorance is nothing new to modern man. Reports are legion concerning the dearth of knowledge among the most recent generations concerning some of the most commonplace events of American history – to say nothing of history beyond the life of our own country. It was never expected of people that all should possess a thorough knowledge of the events of the past – the names, places, and dates of infamy from High School History exams. There are, however, certain events from the past that are high- or low-water marks of man’s own progression from the ancient past to the present. All events of the past are formative, impacting the path of the present and future in ways often hard to perceive even in retrospect. But some events are more formative than others (like the loss of the unsinkable ship). Such occurrences are

Church History

at times indicative of the spirit of an age, or of the death of that spirit and the transition to another.

The Progress and Triumph of Man was for the late 19th Century what Germans call the 'zeitgeist' - the 'spirit of the times.' Technological advancement, the eradication of war through diplomacy, the liberation of slaves and women from millennia of bondage and political isolation - all pointed toward a 'Brave New World.' A world of which the unsinkable super-liner *RMS Titanic* was the proud herald - until she hit an iceberg and sank on her maiden voyage across the North Atlantic. Within two years Europe and the world would be plunged into a senseless and bloody conflict - the Great War - initiating a century of warfare and death unparalleled by any previous century in mankind's history. The sinking of the Titanic was *epochal* in that it manifested both the epitome and the end of an era: the death of a zeitgeist, the passing of the spirit of an age into oblivion.

During the same era in which the Titanic was being launched, philosopher George Santayana famously wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Winston Churchill later modified the expression, adding the necessity of learning from the past in order to avoid repeating its mistakes. But the modern ignorance of such epochal events as the sinking of the Titanic seems to indicate that Santayana's observation was more elemental, and thus of greater danger to mankind. How can one learn from a past one cannot even remember? The modern detachment from history is itself matched by an equally disturbing detachment from reality, evidenced by the ease with which people slide into the world of film as encompassing the atmosphere of their existence. Another example of this trend was exhibited at the premiere in 1994 of the movie, *The Madness of George III*. One person interviewed after the showing wondered aloud how it happened that he missed the first two films in the trilogy! In the world of Rocky IV and Shrek Infinity, is it any wonder that

Church History

someone would fail to remember that George was the third king of that name to rule England, and that during the very birth of this nation?

History is no longer a popular study among modern Americans, and it has not been for many years. Church History, beyond the seminary, is a non-existent study within modern churches. This neglect of History is itself indicative of a new zeitgeist, one whose seed was planted back in the 18th and 19th centuries. The two men most responsible for this new 'spirit' of our age would probably be appalled by the unintended consequence of their teachings and philosophy. Charles Darwin, in the 19th Century, and Immanuel Kant in the 18th, provided the philosophical framework onto which would be built modern man's ignorance and disdain of history. The evidence of the conjoined philosophies of these two unbelievers is present in variegated form in the church today.

Briefly, Kant was the foremost philosophical mind of the Enlightenment who effectively divorced the mind's perspective with reality from any objective connection to the world around it. In Kant's view, reality becomes so only through the operation of the mind's sensory faculties, and the reality thus created belongs solely to the mind that created it. The fact that so many of us may share common realities was to Kant a coincidence of having similar mental faculties, but not indicative of an objective reality that exists outside of one's own mind. Kant's emphasis on a self-created mental reality became the foundation of what is now known as Post-Modernism. With respect to modern man's association with history it is easy to see how events of the distant past would fade into ignorance, considering the philosophical viewpoint that even events of the immediate present are not objectively real. They only become so inasmuch as they are developed within one's own mind.

Darwin's unwitting contribution to this phenomenon came primarily through his disciples, who extended his teaching on biological evolution to various other fields of study. Sociologists of the late 19th Century adopted

Church History

Darwinian Evolution into the development of a progressive view of human history. In this view Man is continually improving, leaving behind the mistakes and 'lesser organisms' of past civilizations and pressing onward to greater knowledge, greater freedom and, generally, a greater future. Despite the fact that this Pollyanna philosophy ran in the wall of the First World War, the damage vis-à-vis the study of history was already done. It became an ever-increasing perspective of 20th Century scholars that no more could modern man learn from mankind's past, than a vertebrate learn from a single-cell amoeba. The 'evolution' of human civilization rendered all prior ages of no exemplary or intellectual value. Coupled with the man-centered reality of Kant, Darwinian Evolution completed modern man's divorce from his own past.

One would think, or perhaps merely hope, that those who profess faith in a *historic* religion such as Christianity - one that is fundamentally based on events having occurred in history - would resist and reject the tendencies that slowly moved Western civilization into a present-focused, history-blind paradigm. But sadly professing Christendom has not displayed a solid and consistent relationship with its own history over the past twenty centuries. Indeed, in some of its forms and denominations, Christianity predated Darwin's evolutionism and anticipated Kant's separation of Truth from Objective Reality. To a large extent, one's view regarding the importance of Church History will be dictated by one's view of the Church itself. The various manifestations of this phenomenon over the past two millennia may be divided into three basic categories: static, developmental, and organic.

The Status Quo - Greek Orthodoxy:

The static view of Church History is best illustrated in the history of Eastern or Greek Orthodoxy, in which there has been essentially *no* history. The liturgy or worship practice of this branch of professing Christendom has not been significantly modified or changed in almost 1,700 years. The First

Church History

Ecumenical Council at Nicæa in AD 325 pretty much established for the Greek-speaking segment of Christianity what would be the doctrine and practice of the Church in perpetuity. The liturgy is simple: the repetition of the words of Jesus in the Upper Room - "*Do this in remembrance of Me*" - concurrent with the eating of the bread and the wine. Aspects of the Greek liturgy were adopted from the synagogue worship of Passover (the Seder), including the singing of Psalms, with the use of incense brought in from the Temple worship service. Little has changed since then, and modern Greek orthodox services are very much like they were a hundred or a thousand years ago.

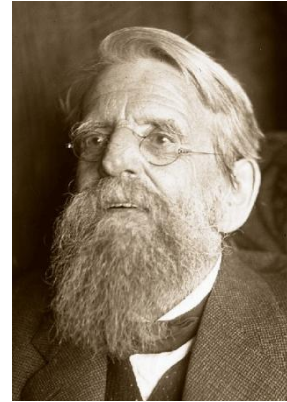
This is the static view in spades. There can be no meaningful study of Church History in such a paradigm, for any 'changes' that might be studied would by definition be perversions of either doctrine or practice. The question to be asked in determining whether this view is correct is in regard to the practice and teaching of the apostolic church as recorded in the Book of Acts. The things that Peter and Paul did during those early years of Christianity, were they *illustrative* only, or were they *normative*?

This question is not limited to the Greek Orthodox Church, for it has periodically troubled Protestant churches since the time of the Reformation. The most recent episode of this ecclesiological soul searching occurred in the 1970s, with many within conservative evangelicalism pronouncing that the Church needed to return to "the New Testament Model." James Rutz published what has become a popular booklet within this movement, titled *1700 Years is Long Enough*, in which he maintains that all that was good and right about Christianity and the Church had already been established by AD 300, everything since has been a detraction or perversion of the true New Testament Church. Written by a professed evangelical to evangelical churches, the booklet advocates a return to the 'status quo' that the Greek Orthodox Church ostensibly never left. But is imitation of the apostles, and the apostolic church, what Christ intended and intends for His Church throughout the ages? At least one notable New

Church History

Testament scholar would answer 'no.' Writing specifically in regard to the modern church's connection to the New Testament Church, Adolf Schlatter comments,

There is only one Church; and this Church, whose members we all are, came into being when the apostolic Community came together. Our connection with her does not arise through our imitation of what then happened - for an imitation would yield only an illusory continuation of her history. Her continuation in us consists rather in our own creative spiritual thinking, and acting derived from that history.¹



**Adolf Schlatter
(1852-1938)**

A comment such as this one has a tendency to scare modern believers who are wary - and justifiably so - of 'creative spiritual thinking' which has often led to error and heresy. But Schlatter was in his day a conservative, evangelical German theologian in the midst of rampant German Liberalism and unbelief, and he carefully circumscribes this 'creative spiritual thinking' by the history, recorded in Scripture, of the New Testament Church. To Schlatter the subsequent life of the Church was not to be static across the ages and cultures into which the Gospel would travel. Rather godly men would carry that Gospel into their own culture by means of 'creative spiritual thinking.' The question then becomes, as a study of Church History progresses, to what extent the changes and developments that have occurred over the past two thousand years were 'derived from' the history of the New Testament Church.

Comparable in results, though vastly different in foundations, to the static view of Greek Orthodoxy and evangelical New Testament Model ecclesiology is the view of Dispensationalism. One of the leading theological seminaries in the United States that espouses a predominantly Dispensational theology is Dallas Theological Seminary. It is telling that the course plan listed for the Master of

¹ Schlatter, Adolf; *The Church in the New Testament Period* (London: SPCK; 1955), 2.

Church History

Theology degree (the primary degree in preparation for church pastoral ministry) contains no Church History core.

Curriculum for Master of Theology Degree: Dallas Theological Seminary

	Core	91
Biblical Exposition		21
Theological Studies		24
Languages (Greek and Hebrew)		27
Ministry & Communication		19
	Custom	29
Internship		3
Thesis (or RS102)		2
Ministry & Communication Electives		9
Emphasis Electives		15
		120

Dallas does offer two courses within its overall curriculum dealing with Church History, but the scope of one of them clearly indicates little more than a cursory overview of two thousand years of Christianity in the world: “The Church to the Modern Era.” The second course is titled “The Church in the Modern Era.” Hence one semester is devoted to 1800 years of the faith, and another semester devoted to the last 200 years. Why might this be?

Well, if a fundamental tenet of one’s doctrine of the Church is that it is an alternative redemptive plan – a Plan B or ‘parentheses’ – in God’s overall purpose for Man and the earth, then the history of that Church cannot have all that much to say to any successive generation of believers. The purpose of the Church in any age is to evangelize as effectively as possible, in order to ‘hasten’ the coming of the Lord. But a view of history that holds the Church to be directly within the eternal redemptive plan of God for both Man and the world gives the unfolding years of that Church’s history a significance within and beyond each generation that the Dispensational view can neither understand nor accept. This view of the Church as integral rather than ancillary lies behind

Church History

Schlatter's comment, "the New Testament is from start to finish a proclamation of what God will do, illuminating his purpose for mankind and the world."² Another church historian puts the matter in a similar, and perhaps even bolder, light. "The study of church history enables us to see the working of great principles through long periods of time. *Church history is a commentary on the Scriptures.*"³

From an Acorn to an Oak: The Roman Catholic Church

When once it is accepted that the history of the Church has significance and is worthy of study, it still remains to be determined just what role history plays in the life of the church in any given generation. Rejecting the *static* view,



**John Henry Cardinal Newman
(1801-90)**

one must now analyze the *developmental* view. This view was popularized and systematized by the Anglican convert to Roman Catholicism, John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman. Newman espoused the 'acorn to oak tree' view of the development of doctrine and practice within the Church throughout the ages. In short, this view holds an almost Darwinian concept of progress in both theology and ecclesiology - the Church grows

and develops and improves with age, just as an acorn grows and develops and improves into an oak tree with time. Change is not only inevitable in the life of the Church, it is to be looked for and welcomed.

Perhaps the most significant feature of Newman's analogy (which was not accepted, by the way, by many within his adopted Catholic faith) is the fact that the developed oak tree looks nothing like the original acorn. In other words, the *developmental* view of Church History might (and probably will) produce

² Schlatter, 8.

³ Newman, Albert Henry; *A Manual of Church History: Volume I* (Chicago: The American Baptist Publication Society; 1899); 18.

Church History

something that bears absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to the original 'New Testament Model.' Yet Newman maintained that there existed an organic continuity between the seminal idea and the developed doctrine, just as there does between an oak tree and the acorn from which it grew. In his defense, Newman was attempting to deal with the reality that the Church as it has existed throughout the ages often bears little resemblance to the Church as it is portrayed in the Book of Acts. Newman writes,

On various grounds, then, it is certain that portions of the Church system were held back in primitive times, and of course this fact goes some way to account for that apparent variation and growth of doctrine, which embarrasses us when we would consult history for the true idea of Christianity.

His argument is plausible, and in his essay titled *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* Newman set forth the doctrine of the Trinity as an example of his thesis. There are many 'doctrines' of the church – countless if one considers the various branches of Christianity – that cannot be proven 'chapter and verse' from the Bible. Newman would consider his theory of development to be akin to the Reformed concept of 'good and necessary inference' whereby theologians must deduce the doctrines of Christianity from statements in Scripture that are not clear in and of themselves. Utilizing the development of doctrine theory, then, Newman went on to defend and justify the Roman Catholic doctrines of the perpetual virginity of Mary, the cleansing of Original Sin in infant baptism, the existence and necessity of Purgatory, and the taking of Communion in one form (bread). Protestants will find fault with all three 'developments'; but is the problem with Newman's theory, or with its practice?

Newman recognized that if God intended for the teaching and doctrine of the Church to develop over time, there needed to be an authority set over this process to protect the Church from error. Newman believed this authority was of necessity *infallible*; otherwise the Church would be in perpetual danger of tares

Church History

(to shift and twist the metaphor slightly) being sown among the acorns. The presence of such an overarching authority for the development of Christian Doctrine has been likened to the Protestant view that God has providentially overseen and protected the copying and translating of the Bible for countless generations, guarding the Scripture from error and handing the true Word of God down from age to age. The analogy breaks down, however, when one realizes that the Protestant doctrine of Preservation of Scripture does not ascribe infallibility to the process – hence the ‘textual variants’ we find in the marginalia of our English Bibles. Still, the consistency of the Bible over twenty centuries and the minutiae of errors transmitted does lend great weight to the view that God has indeed protected His Word from corruption.

The issue of *infallible* authority is the first mistake in Newman’s theory; the second has to do with where he finds that authority. Newman’s whole treatise was a defense of Roman Catholic doctrine against the Protestant charge of unholy innovation. Thus he placed the infallible authority within the Church, and specifically within the Magisterium (the College of Cardinals) and in its head, the Pope. Newman’s final edition of the essay was published in 1878, eight years after the declaration of papal infallibility pronounced at Vatican I in 1870. The ‘official’ statement concerning papal infallibility was, to be sure, more of an acknowledgement of a view long held within Roman Catholicism, than it was a brand new innovation. Yet it would seem that the doctrine of papal infallibility undergirds Newman’s doctrine of development, providing the necessary authority and infallible guide to oversee the growth of the acorn of the Upper Room to the oak tree of the Roman Catholic Church. The logical problem, however, is decisive: the doctrine of development is founded upon a doctrine (papal infallibility) that was itself a developed doctrine!

Cardinal Newman was not entirely off base in his theorizing: Christian doctrine and practice have changed and developed over time. Not all of these changes have been good, but not all of them have been bad, either. The major

Church History

flaw in Newman's thesis is to be found in exactly the same place as much of the error of Rome is centered – the abrogation of divine authority in doctrine and practice by the Roman Bishop, the Pope. If we are going to critically analyze the *developed* and *developing* history of the Church, therefore, we must find a more reliable (not to mention a more biblical) authority to oversee the work.

The DNA of Doctrine (and Practice):

The Reformed view of Church History is certainly more like Newman's Development of Doctrine theory than it is like the static non-history of Greek Orthodoxy, or the neglect of Church History by modern Dispensationalism. Consider the 2 ½ year focus on Church History required in the Master of Divinity program of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary compared to the two semester overview required at Dallas Theological Seminary:

<i>Historical Theology</i>	
HT10 Presbyterian Church History	2 credit hours
HT21 Ancient Church History	3 credit hours
HT22 Medieval Church History	3 credit hours
HT31 Reformation Church History	4 credit hours
HT32 Modern Church History	<u>3 credit hours</u>
	15 credit hours

GPTS, it must be admitted, is a conservative hold-over from days gone by, a modern attempt at resurrecting 'Old Princeton.' But in this emphasis on Church History GPTS is not alone. Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, a solid Reformed institution for the past one hundred years, has a Church History faculty consisting of twelve instructors, a core curriculum of six courses, and an additional list of fifteen elective history classes. The examples of these two Reformed seminaries clearly indicate that the history of the Church holds a very important place in the overall structure of Reformed theology and ecclesiology. The most obvious reason for this is the different view held by

Church History

Reformed theologians with regard to the Church than either Roman Catholics on the one hand, or Dispensationalists on the other. Briefly put, the Reformed view of the Church is that of continuation: God is continuing to unfold His redemptive history during this age every bit as much as in earlier and ancient eras. The history of the New Covenant people of God is just as important as was the history of the Old Covenant people of God. In light of the finished work of Christ, perhaps even more so.

What, then, do we do with the obvious development found across the ages in both the doctrine and the practice of the Christian Church? Rejecting the static view (and the effectively static view of Dispensationalism), we turn to an important modification of the development view: the *organic* view. Cardinal Newman did not have the benefit of the discovery of DNA and the unlocking of the mysteries of molecular biology when he wrote his treatise in the 19th Century. But if we take his theory, and the acorn to oak tree metaphor with which it is so commonly associated, and analyze them through what we now know about the organic continuity of DNA throughout the development of a living organism, we can begin to see where he went wrong – and where the Roman Catholic Church has been going wrong for centuries.

Simply put, the modern doctrines and practices of Cardinal Newman's adopted church are not natural developments of biblical doctrine, rather they are genetically engineered mutations. The laboratory where this slicing and recombining of doctrinal DNA molecules was done has been the ecumenical councils of the Roman Church, from Nicæa to Vatican II. The medical reports announcing the cloning of a new doctrine or practice have been the papal bulls published infallibly from the Roman pontiff's throne. The Reformed church historian cannot accept the Roman Catholic premise that the traditions, council decisions, and papal edicts that come from within church history can themselves be determinative of church history. Holding to the absolute authority of God's

Church History

Word, he accepts that Word's self-attestation that believers and the Church have been given "*all things necessary for life and godliness.*"

Therefore we approach this study series with both the acorn to oak tree metaphor and the concept of doctrinal DNA to guide us. Any development of doctrine or practice discovered in our survey of church history must undergo DNA testing - its defining doctrinal structure must be compared to that of the Bible and only those developments that bear a complete match may be trusted as truly deriving from the acorn of divine warrant. The analogy with DNA testing carries a bit further, for even in the world of molecular biology exact matches or complete mismatches do not always happen. Sometimes there just is not enough of the sample DNA to make a conclusive test. That will be the case for doctrines and practices that have appeared throughout church history, and many that are still around today. When this happens we will revisit the realm of *adiaphora* - 'things indifferent.' For it is not the goal of the church historian to achieve absolute perfection and purity in his research - only truth and honesty. It is hard enough work to attain these.

Session 2: Analysis of the Acorn

Text Reading: Acts 2:1-4

*“Ecclesia Reformata,
Semper Reformanda”*

We begin the analysis of the ‘acorn’ by returning to the premise, so vital to Reformed theology, that the seed of the Church was planted by God *on purpose*. The point is critical not only to the study of the history of the Church (which might be done as a curiosity by those who hold a lesser view of the Church’s role in God’s redemptive plan), but more importantly to the understanding of that history as it flows into the modern age and beyond. The Church as Plan B lacks all power, all impetus for men to do anything other than merely ‘hold on’ until the Lord returns. The Church of the New Testament did far more than just ‘hold on;’ it *turned the world upside down*. The Church as a byway to the true path of divine redemptive history is a theory that cannot explain the dynamic force that entered the world through the back door of Judea at Pentecost in or around AD 33. The indefatigable faith of Peter, John, James, and later Paul is truly a mystery if the whole structure of the Church’s existence was built upon failure – failure of Jesus to convince the Jews that He was their Messiah, failure of the Jews to recognize this fact. It does no good to say that God knew what He was doing, especially if we misunderstand completely what it is He was doing.

The key question upon which one’s basic understanding of the nature and history of the Church turns, is whether or not Jesus was the Messiah who came and left, or the Messiah who came. Of course there is no argument among believers that Jesus did leave the earth through His bodily ascension to heaven; that is not the point. The question is whether He also *remained* in the same capacity as Lord that He maintained with His disciples during His ministry in Galilee and Judea. “For there is a difference between hoping for the reign of God

in the future, and believing in a Messiah who has already come.”⁴ The Reformed view of the Church holds that the disciples of Jesus Christ, who became the apostles to the Church, never viewed Christ’s kingdom and power as in any way delayed by His bodily departure. Knowing their Lord to be not only in them by the presence of the Holy Spirit, but also *among* them through the gathered congregation of the Church, the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers of the early Christian era entered the world as citizens and ambassadors of a kingdom every bit as real as the empire of Rome. This is the only viable explanation for the recorded history of the Church in its earliest years, and the only cause for its growth and resilience throughout the ages.

But we must ask what it was that convinced the first disciples that Christ’s bodily departure was not the end of the kingdom, not even a delay of it. What convinced them that the work of God was continuing unabated and with divine purpose and power? The answer lies in comprehending the events of Pentecost, recognizing that what happened on that day was far more significant than the gift of speaking in tongues – it was the testimony of God to the continuation of His work in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It was the beginning of the building of the third and final dwelling place of God with man – the Church.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

Over the past few decades the interpretation of Acts Chapter 2 has been co-opted by both the Charismatic Movement and the New Testament Church Movement. To be sure, there were things in this chapter that needed to be brought back into focus after years, even centuries, of neglect. But the events of that first ‘Christian’ Pentecost have only an ancillary affect on the teaching of

⁴ Schlatter, 28.

Church History

spiritual gifts or of what the Church is supposed to do when it gathers. The visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit is really the main theme of the chapter, and its interpretation is of paramount importance to the Church's understanding of herself and her place within God's plan.

What we read recorded by Luke in the first four verses of Acts Chapter 2 is the beginning of the fulfillment of what the Lord Jesus prophesied would happen with regard to the Temple of God, the dwelling place of God with man. In John Chapter we read,

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

(John 2:19-22)

John records that it was "*when He had risen from the dead*" that the disciples remembered this saying and realized what it was that Jesus meant. But was it immediately after Jesus had risen? Or was it the act of resurrection that convinced the disciples of the true meaning of Jesus' earlier words? When we survey the attitudes and actions of the disciples between the first appearance to them by their resurrected Lord and the day of His ascension, it does not appear that the fullness of comprehension was yet theirs. It seems clear that their understanding of what might happen now that Jesus was alive again was colored primarily by the traditional rabbinic hopes and expectations, not by any understanding of what it was Jesus intended to do.

Even after his resurrection, they seem till to have held for a time substantially the same idea. His death, unaccompanied as it was with convincing evidence of his Messiahship, had bewildered and distressed them, but his reappearance had

Church History

revived all their old hopes in an unchanged form, and they expected now the immediate accomplishment of that for which they had so long been looking.⁵

Those days were marked by misunderstanding and timidity: *“is it now that you will establish your kingdom, Lord?”* they asked just before the Lord ascended from them into heaven. That question, and the manner in which the disciples gazed after their just-departed Lord, and the response of the angels to their wanderlust, might have conspired to give them a very ‘dispensational’ outlook on the coming days and years. They certainly did not return to Jerusalem with power from on high.

Looking further on, to the first chapter of Acts, it is apparent that the disciples intended to stick together. They received enough from their Lord to know that something was about to happen, *“But tarry in Jerusalem until you receive power from on high, after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”* The disciples’ knowledge of the history of Israel would help them interpret what was about to happen.

Twice before in redemptive history God established a specific dwelling place wherein He was to be met and worshiped by His people. In both instances the dedication of this place was attended by a visible display of the Holy Spirit of God in an unmistakable divine witness that God was indeed dwelling with His people. The first, at the tabernacle in the wilderness, was so intense that Moses – who had spent forty days in the midst of the divine fire on Mt. Sinai – was not able to enter the tabernacle.

Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

(Exodus 40:34-35)

⁵ M^cGiffert, Arthur Cushman, *A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons: 1914), 41.

Church History

This visible testimony of the presence of God with His people was unique in that the presence of the cloud and pillar of fire continued with the children of Israel throughout their forty year wandering in the wilderness. Nonetheless the event of the cloud filling the tabernacle on the day of its completion was a significant statement with regard to that place becoming the point of contact between God and His people. The second such occurrence forms a transition between the tabernacle and the Church; this is the dedication of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

(I Kings 8:10-11)

Solomon had no difficulty making the connection between this visible outpouring of the cloud and the abiding presence of God with His people in the Temple. Immediately the king exclaimed,

*The LORD said He would dwell in the dark cloud.
I have surely built You an exalted house, and a place for You to dwell in forever.*

(I Kings 8:12-13)

Consider the impact of the descent of the cloud upon the ministry of first Moses, then the priests - in both instances the power of the presence was so intense that neither Moses nor later the priests could continue to minister until the glory of the Lord ebbed. The sheer awesomeness of the presence was proof positive that the work of building the tabernacle, and then the Temple, was of divine design. As we read in Solomon's doxology, the only possible interpretation of either and both events is "God has chosen to live with His people in this place."

Yet neither the tabernacle in the wilderness, nor Solomon's Temple, represented the final form of what God had intended for His people and for His

Church History

relationship with man. The tabernacle gave way to the Temple, and eventually that was utterly destroyed by Israel's enemies. Later, after the Exile, a temple was rebuilt – nothing like the one Solomon had constructed, and unaccompanied at its dedication by any visible manifestation of God's presence or approbation. It is not that God was no longer with His people, but rather that the rebuilt temple was nothing more than a continuation of the dispensation of grace started at the dedication of Solomon's Temple. Indeed, God had commanded the Israelites to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. But of the building they put together, so obviously to them a mere shadow of the former glorious Temple, God said through Haggai,

*For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. **The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,**' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts.* (Haggai 2:6-9)

The 'glory' of the temple built in Haggai's day never exceeded that of Solomon's Temple. Even the massive restoration and reconstruction started by Herod the Great (and not completed until AD 63) could not compare to the richness and beauty of the first Temple in Jerusalem. But that type of 'glory' is not what the Lord is talking about in Haggai; material glory was not what was noted regarding the tabernacle and the first Temple – rather it was the visible presence of the Lord, the Glory of Jehovah in the cloud and fire. *That* was the promised glory that would come during the lifetime of Haggai's temple and far exceed that which came at the dedication of Solomon's.

Some interpret this 'greater glory' to be the coming of the Lord Himself to the same (renovated) structure of which He spoke through Haggai. This is definitely a plausible interpretation, as the Lord Jesus Christ was without doubt the glory of Jehovah incarnate. But of that physical building Jesus promised

Church History

nothing but complete destruction, "And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'"⁶

It is more reasonable to tie the prophetic promise of 'greater glory' to the biblical wording of the events accompanying the dedication of the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. In both cases it was *the glory of the Lord* that filled the building with such visible intensity that the very ministry of worship could not proceed. The Jews in Haggai's day were well aware of the shekinah⁷ that filled the first two dwelling places; this is what they would have expected in fulfillment of Haggai's prophecy. They also knew through the prophecies of Ezekiel that this glory had departed from the First Temple. So they would not be expecting a person, but a power. Furthermore, they would expect the fulfillment to be visible in the same manner as the glory appearing in the tabernacle and the first Temple was visible. Indeed, the Jewish Targum (commentary) on Haggai states that the shekinah was one of the five things lacking in the Second Temple.

To summarize up to this point, it stands to reason from an analysis of biblical history that the manifestation of God's presence dwelling with His people is the visible shekinah, the 'glory of the Lord,' appearing in His temple. The rabbis centuries before Christ's Advent recognized and documented the lack of this crucial element in the Second Temple. Nothing Herod the Great did as far as embellishments and grandeur would substitute for the shekinah - and no Jew could rest assured of God's stamp of approval on the temple without it. But God himself said that this very same glory *would* appear in the Second Temple, or at least in the period of the Second Temple.

⁶ Matthew 24:2

⁷ It is well known that this cloud of divine glory was called the Shekinah. Although this actual word never occurs in the Bible itself, it is closely related to the Hebrew words for "dwell" (*shakan*) and "tabernacle" (*mishkan*).

Church History

This last caveat cannot be read from the prophecy in Haggai, which clearly indicates that the latter glory of that temple would be greater than the glory of the former temple. But progressive revelation would later unfold the prophecy through the words of Jesus Christ, to shift the focus of God's glorious visible manifestation from the physical building in Jerusalem to another 'temple,' the temple of Christ's own body. With this background in regard to the shekinah and the dedication of the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, reconsider the events of that first Christian Pentecost,

*When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

The shekinah never came to the temple built during the days of Haggai, expanded, embellished, and 'glorified' by Herod in the days of Jesus. That temple was destroyed completely by the Romans in AD 70, with 'not one stone standing upon another.' Thus the prophecy of Haggai either failed, or pertained to a shekinah completely different from what had happened before in the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, or was fulfilled in the same visible manner but on a different 'temple.' The faithfulness of God rules out the first option. Considering again Jesus' disparaging words concerning the temple building - "*tear down this building and in three days I will raise it up*" - and the pattern of the tabernacle and the first Temple, it is perfectly reasonable to see the visible events of Pentecost as that 'greater glory' that would shake the nations. That the manifestation of God's presence did not appear in the physical temple, but rather settled as 'tongues of fire' upon individual believers confirms graphically what Paul would later write regarding the Church. Speaking in the context of the assembly of believers - the Church - the apostle writes,

Church History

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.
(I Corinthians 3:16-17)

Peter expresses the same understanding of the Church's identity as the Temple of Greater Glory, using terminology reminiscent of Solomon's construction crews in Jerusalem,

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, **as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***
(I Peter 2:4-5)

Thus the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost was the manifestation both of God's approval and of His presence, the shekinah signifying that God had once again taken up His abode with men. Pentecost was the dedication of the Temple of Greater Glory prophesied in Haggai, the living Temple that is the Church. This cannot have escaped the notice and understanding of the disciples who knew of the events of the tabernacle, and of Solomon's Temple, and of the promise given through the prophet in the post-exilic time. "Furthermore, the Lord gave the Holy Spirit once to His disciples in visible shape, that we may be assured that the Church will never lack His invisible and hidden grace."⁸

The history of Israel in the Old Testament is generally broken up into categories such as the Exodus, the Period of the Judges, the Monarchy followed by the Divided Monarchy, and so on. From the standpoint of the religious life of Israel, however, scholars look to the Tabernacle Period, the First Temple, and the Second Temple as the three eras covering the history of Judaism from the Exodus to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. After that we have the 'Christian Era,' spanning the last two thousand years. Perhaps, in light of the

⁸ Calvin, John; *Commentary on the New Testament: Acts Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; 1973), 51.

Church History

forgoing discussion, the current age should be called the Third Temple Period. Certainly such a designation would, or at least should, have a powerful impact on our perception of the Church and her history. We would see that the Third Temple has suffered neglect, and periods of cleansing and rebuilding, and subsequent neglect, etc., in much the same manner as did Solomon's Temple. Indeed, the Third Temple has been defiled and abominations set up in her inner sanctuary in much the same way as the Greek general Antiochus Epiphanes defiled the Second Temple. Men and kings have tried to embellish the Third Temple, building an impressive outer structure of buildings and gold and precious stones very much like Herod the Great attempted to placate the Jews by pouring money into the Second Temple in a renovation project that lasted over seventy years. Yet none of these corruptions, neglects, defilements, or additions represented the true dwelling place of God with His people; that was always something hidden and small, the real pearl of value often locked within the thick shell of falsehood. Such is Church History - the history of the Third Temple Period.

The advent of the shekinah at each of the two former times established beyond doubt the pleasure and presence of the Lord with His people. But it did not establish in exhaustive detail all that would later transpire within the tabernacle or Temple. As we read the historical narratives of the Old Testament we read of the developing history of the Tabernacle era, and of the First Temple era - the working out of the basic principles that were given in the Law. The prophets, in addition, come upon the scene to exhort and admonish and rebuke; pointing out where the people of God in each era had gone astray, and consistently directing them back to the 'old paths.' The concept of the acorn to oak tree, and that of always checking the DNA, is apparent even in the words of such prophets as Isaiah during the First Temple era, *"to the Law and to the Testimony; for if they do not speak according to this word it is because there is no light in*

Church History

them,"⁹ and Malachi in the Second Temple era, "*Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and commandments which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.*"¹⁰

Sadly, much of the history of the First and Second Temple eras consists of the corruption and subsequent cleansing (or judgment) of true religion amidst the people of God. Isaiah railed against the observation of the prescribed sacrifices as being an abomination to the Lord, rebuking the worshipers as having 'hands covered in blood.' The First Temple had fallen into such decrepitude by the time of King Josiah that the people were astonished and dismayed when they discovered a copy of the Law, and realized that it had been so long gone from their daily lives that it had been forgotten entirely. The Second Temple was, of course, defiled by the Greeks and later cleansed by the Maccabees, only to fall again into base corruption and a 'den of thieves,' to be cleansed once more by the Lord himself with His corded whip.

Yet there were legitimate developments during both periods; not all was corruption and deviation. Judicial cases had to be handled in the tabernacle period with regard to the application of inheritance laws as they pertained to daughters. Samuel would establish a school for prophets, sort of an Old Testament seminary for the training of men in the Word. David would set apart certain families within the tribe of Levi to lead the worship of Jehovah in song, and would himself write much of the hymnody of the First and Second Temple periods. Synagogue services, attributed by many scholars to the genius of Ezra, would re-introduce the Scriptures (and the history of Israel) into the daily lives of all Israelites. And throughout these different dispensations, the unfolding revelation of God regarding the purpose of each and the promise of succeeding

⁹ Isaiah 8:20

¹⁰ Malachi 4:4

Church History

eras progressed through the prophetic word. The Old Covenant acorn grew into the Old Covenant oak tree.

Thus we should expect that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost would not be the end-all in terms of what the Third Temple era would look like. The Lord prepares us for such development through His parables of growth, such as the Parable of the Leaven, and that of the Mustard Seed. Scottish theologian Islay Burns dates the beginning of this development with the birth of Christ in Bethlehem,

The mysterious birth in Bethlehem's manger imparted at last to the world's life that divine leaven which had been from the first preparing, and from that moment began that process of living and life-giving fermentation which has ever since been making all things new and which will continue on from age to age until the whole is leavened.¹¹

Within the New Testament book of Acts and in the epistles we discover development. We are told what the early Christians did when they gathered together, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the breaking of bread, to praise, prayer, and fellowship. We are instructed as to the polity or governance of local congregations as Paul and his associates established elders in every locale. And again the progressive revelation unfolds through the prophetic writings of the apostles in the letters and apocalyptic writings of Revelation. We are given the early stages of the development of the Third Temple acorn as it is planted in the hearts of believers and sprouts into the first century world of Judea and Rome. This history, and the subsequent developments and disturbances in Church History, are often divided into similar epochs by scholars. Two typical categorizations of Church History are as follows, outlining the basic progression of this current course.

¹¹ Burns, Islay; *The First Three Christian Centuries* (London: T. Nelson & Sons; 1896), 9.

Church History

Description ¹²	Epoch	Description ¹³
From the Advent of Christ to the death of John	Apostolic	From the birth of Christ to the end of the Apostolic Age
From the death of John to the edict of Milan	Martyr/Patristic	From the end of the Apostolic Age to the conversion of Constantine
From the edict of Milan to the fall of the Western Roman Empire	Imperial	From the conversion of Constantine to the founding of the Holy Roman Empire by Charlemagne
From the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Reformation	Medieval	From the coronation of Charlemagne to the outbreak of the Reformation
No separate description	Reformation	From the Reformation to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648

God consecrated His Third Temple through the same visible manifestation of His Spirit among the assembled disciples at Pentecost. “In the Pentecostal Church thus fully constituted and endowed with divine life from above, we behold the image and the type of the true and living Church of Christ in all after times.”¹⁴

¹² Taken from Islay Burns, *The First Three Christian Centuries*, v.

¹³ Taken from Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, 17.

¹⁴ Burns, 27.

Session 3: Authority & Structure

Text Reading: Titus 1:5 - 9

"The apostles owed whatever dignity and authority they possessed solely to their spiritual character and endowment."
(Arthur McGiffert)

Cardinal Newman predicated his theory on the development of doctrine upon the presence in the Church of an infallible authority capable and responsible to keep that development moving along the right path. To Newman this authority was the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. We have seen that the doctrine of papal infallibility was not promulgated until the 19th Century, actually just a few short years before Newman published his treatise. But the authority of the Bishop of Rome over issues of doctrine and practice had been recognized by a large portion of professing Christianity since the early decades of the Middle Ages, perhaps a thousand years before the doctrine was made official at the ecumenical council of Vatican I. And before the views of the Roman Bishop had become predominant, they were dominant in the centuries between Constantine's legalization of Christianity and the spread of Islam over the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. These were years when the Bishop of Rome (not yet called the 'Pope' or 'Father') was *primus inter pares* – the first among equals. Bishops no longer governed single local congregations, but had become overseers of diocese – all of the local churches within a particular geographical area. As early as the 2nd Century we find the title 'bishop' used of men like Polycarp and Irenæus, though it is not so clear whether they used the terms themselves.

This broad-brush swipe of the Church's history from the early 2nd Century to the promulgation of the doctrine of papal infallibility 1700 years later illustrates the concept of 'development of doctrine.' There are many other examples, some of which will warrant our study in this series. But we begin

Church History

with the issue of authority and structure in the Church because it cuts to the heart of the issue of 'development' itself – who is it who has the authority to guide, critique, and condemn doctrinal and practical development within the Church? The Protestant Reformers, writing in the 16th Century, condemned the authoritarian structure of Rome, with the Pope at the head of the hierarchy, as a perversion of biblical teaching. But where and when did the stream of development with regard to church leadership jump its banks and begin to meander into heterodoxy? Is there a clear biblical mandate, or for that matter a clear biblical pattern, for establishing the lines of authority within Christian communities? Newman justified his doctrine of development by appealing to an authority structure that was itself a development in doctrine. Are Protestants correct in rejecting both Newman's logic and the authority structure to which it appeals? And if so, what can be made of the numerous and varied leadership structures found among Protestant denominations? Do any of them share the DNA of the acorn?

The analysis of the acorn as it pertains to leadership in Christ's Church is itself complicated by the evidence of development even within the New Testament documents recounting the earliest years of Christianity. The claims that Rome makes in regard both to the Pope's infallible authority and the collegiate leadership of the College of Bishops (the cardinals of the Roman Church) are based upon the principle of 'Apostolic Succession.' Rome, of course, maintains that the Pope is the spiritual descendant of the Apostle Peter. In holding to this interpretation of Apostolic Succession – a continuing apostolic authority within the church represented by men who 'bear the mantle' of the original apostles – the Roman Church acknowledges something with which Protestants may agree. That is, that the earliest leadership within the newborn Christian congregation was provided by those men uniquely qualified and called by Jesus Christ to be 'apostles.' Whether that calling and authority was passed

Church History

from generation to generation, as the power of Elijah was passed to Elisha, remains to be seen.

The Foundation: *Apostles & Prophets*

Two metaphors are used in description of the Church, both illustrative of the nature of the Church and of her earthly leadership: a building, and a household. The Apostle Paul blends (mixes??) the two metaphors in his epistle to the church in Ephesus,

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

(Ephesians 2:19-22)

This passage reinforces the conclusion of the previous lesson, that the temple imagery dominated the apostolic concept of the Church: “...*being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord...*” It also provides insight into the most basic structural features of the ‘new’ temple: its foundation consists in the ‘apostles and prophets’ laid down in reference and coordination to the cornerstone, Jesus Christ. With regard to these two groups or ministries within the early church there has been and is much confusion as to both the nature of the ‘office’ and its continuance or cessation.

The Apostle is the more familiar of the two groups, though even that word is used in the New Testament in a broader sense than ‘the Twelve.’ The word itself is a transliteration from the Greek participle *apostolos* which means ‘one who is sent.’ The apostle is essentially a missionary, though it is clear that the ‘foundational’ apostles were much more than just missionaries. The most helpful description of the more restricted use of the term, referring to the highest echelon of spiritual leadership in the early Church, comes from the pen of the apostle who was ‘untimely born,’ Paul. Not having been among the original

disciples who had traveled with Jesus during His earthly ministry, and who had been set apart by Jesus for particular leadership, Paul was uniquely challenged within his own ministry to show that he was as much an Apostle (with the capital 'A') as was Peter or John. It is not necessary to reproduce all of the quotes from the Pauline epistles wherein the apostle to the Gentiles defends the authority vested in him by Jesus Christ (and not by the other Apostles) as a first-tier Apostle of the Church. What is important to this study is to note the criteria – having seen the risen Lord in person and having received both commission and content for ministry directly from the Lord. The first was the criteria used by the disciples in the Upper Room to select a replacement for the fallen Judas Iscariot, though many have argued over the centuries that God's choice for Judas' replacement was to be Saul of Tarsus, regenerate as Paul. Be that as it may, the rule is well established in the New Testament that an Apostle of the first-tier was one who was sent *by Jesus Christ Himself*. The relative ranks of apostles, then, is clearly set: the Chief Apostle, Jesus Christ, was sent by the Father; the first-tier Apostles to the Church were sent by Jesus Christ; and the other apostles (Barnabas, Apollos, Timothy, Silvanus, Andronicus, and Junias are all referred to as *apostolos*) are sent either by the first-tier Apostles or by the Church. Thus the authority vested in the apostolic office rests upon the authority of the sending agency.¹⁵

It is interesting to note, in regard to the development of the leadership structure of the early Church, that the apostles (capital or lowercase A) did not seem to possess any position within the local congregation derived simply from their being an apostle. In other words, the apostles (and theoretically also the prophets) were ministers *without portfolio*. They were not pastors by virtue of their being apostles, though the Apostle John did pastor a number of churches,

¹⁵ There is no essential difference between the authority of the Father and that of the Son, Jesus Christ. It stands to reason, then, that the first-tier Apostles of the early Church possessed the same authority on earth as did Jesus during His earthly ministry. This is borne out by the record of the lives of these men as we find it in the Book of Acts and in the apostolic epistles.

Church History

and the Apostle Peter refers to himself as a 'fellow elder.' The most striking example of the disconnected nature of apostolic leadership is found in the account of what is known as the 'Jerusalem Council' in Acts 15. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas all participated in the discussion and debate over the nature of Christian salvation as it pertained to Gentiles, but it appears that James, the Lord's brother and not numbered among the apostles, served as leader and moderator of the Jerusalem Church. It is James who summarizes and, it would seem, passes judgment upon the issues before the whole Council.

*Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. And after they had become silent, **James answered, saying**, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:*

*'After this I will return
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;
I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up;
So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the LORD who does all these things.'*

*"Known to God from eternity are all His works. **Therefore I judge** that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (Acts 15:12-21)*

Paul's allusion to the apostles as part of the foundation of the Church would seem to reinforce the discovery that these men did not occupy permanent offices within any particular local church or congregation, but rather held their authority more broadly within the whole body of Christ. "Their personal significance was not due to the fact that they were the incumbents of the highest office in the church, but simply to the fact that they were Christ's chosen missionaries, and as such had a peculiar responsibility for the spread of the

Church History

Gospel.”¹⁶ It was not the function of the apostle to ‘hold office’ as a leader in the local congregation, or even to function in an official capacity over the Church at large. Their relationship to the churches which they themselves founded was *paternal*, and their authority derived as much from their paternity as from their apostolicity. Hence Paul grieves over the Galatian churches as one in the travail of childbirth, and chastises the Christians of Corinth as one who was their father. John, for his part, exudes spiritual paternity in his epistles to those churches that tradition holds, he also pastured for many years. It would seem, therefore, that the role of the apostle as it appears in the New Testament, does not have reference to ‘leadership’ within the local Church, diocese, denomination, synod, or communion.

If *minister without portfolio* applies to the apostle, then more so to the prophet. It is common within Reformed circles to refer to the prophetic office as being one of the three Old Testament offices for which Christ is the fulfillment. Jesus is frequently referred to as our ‘Prophet, Priest, and King’ and the designation is just, for He is the great High Priest, the King of Kings, and undoubtedly speaks as God’s supreme and final Prophet. But it is somewhat misleading to speak of the prophetic function and gift in terms of ‘office.’ For all that we can tell, it was not an anointed office at all. It was not restricted to any tribe of Israel, as was the role of priest (Levi) and king (Judah). Rather the prophetic gift was mercurial by nature, descending on whom God chose, including such men as King Saul and Balaam. ‘Office’ indicates order and authority, stability and presence within an organization or institution. Officers are in command, and command in person (or at least so they should). The prophet, however, possesses a ministry as broad as that of the apostle – the whole Church is his field of labor, and his responsibility to proclaim ‘thus saith the Lord’ is not restricted to one congregation or diocese.

¹⁶ M^cGiffert, 650.

Church History

Just like apostles, there appears to be somewhat of a hierarchy among the prophets within the New Testament. There are several charismata – ‘spiritual gifts’ – that operate within the local congregation in a prophetic manner, as Paul teaches in I Corinthians chapters 12-14. In chapter 14 the apostle indicates something different about the ‘gift’ of prophecy as it functioned in the local church, and the authority of the apostle as it moved among the churches, the prophetic word was subject to the analysis, critique, acceptance or rejection of the congregation.

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

(I Corinthians 14:26-33)

It is possible, of course, that the ‘others’ who pass judgment upon the prophetic word are the other prophets who are awaiting their turn. But it is clear that the service of an early Christian congregation was much more unstructured (though by no means disorderly) and spontaneous than services became with the passing of time. The question is whether this prophetic spontaneity was intended to remain within the Church, or was an element of the Church’s unique birth and early growth in the world. Paul’s reference to these two functions as foundational indicates that they were meant to be formative, and not normative. Continuing with Paul’s metaphor (as he does elsewhere in the same vein), foundations are only set down once and then the structure is built. Rarely does one build the house with the exact same materials, or even the same techniques, as one lays down the foundation. This feature of the apostolic and prophetic

Church History

ministries, along with their itinerant characteristic, argues strongly for their cessation once the Church itself has been better established.

Historically this fading away of the apostolic and prophetic functions did take place, but not quite as soon as some might think. Both functions continued in the Church beyond the death of the last of the Apostles, well into the 2nd Century. In the famous and important *Didache*, also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve*, we read instructions for local congregations who are visited by itinerant apostles or prophets. Obviously men traded on religion in those ancient times just as much as they do now, and one line in particular seems to come down very hard on the practice now known as 'deputation.'

*Now about the apostles and prophets: Act in line with the gospel precept. Welcome every apostle on arriving, as if he were the Lord. But he must not stay beyond one day. In case of necessity, however, the next day too. **If he stays three days, he is a false prophet.** On departing, an apostle must not accept anything save sufficient food to carry him till his next lodging. **If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.***

(Didache 11:3-6)

Leadership in the Local Church: *Those who rule over you*

There is very early evidence that a form or structure of leadership arose in the Church without much ado and without explicit defense or rationale within the New Testament writings. With regard to the structure of leadership in the Church, one writer comments that it does not pertain to the *being* of the Church, but rather to her *well-being*. Leadership structure (not style, however) is not of the essence of a Christian Church, but rather is an attribute or characteristic. The *style* of leadership, however, is most certainly and clearly established in Scripture: servant leadership. Jesus himself prohibited His disciples from 'lording it over the church' as the Gentile rulers do their own people, and the pattern and exhortation to servant-leadership pervades all of the New Testament writings and history. Tyrannical, top-down, authoritarian, and privileged

Church History

leadership of the type so often seen throughout church history, and still today, is without a shred of defense in the New Testament.

Indeed, it is evident from the writings of Paul that the local congregations possessed a remarkable degree of autonomy, and even the passage just quoted from I Corinthians 14 would indicate that the members of the congregation (the men, that is) also possessed juridical power over the acceptance or rejection of prophetic messages. In this, we should note, the believer in the New Testament Church was no different than the faithful Jew under the Old Covenant, who was also continually admonished by the prophets to 'test the spirits,' as the Apostle John puts it. In another matter, Paul chastises the Corinthian believers for going to civil court against one another before the heathen, clearly indicating his expectation that the local congregation rule upon its own matters. Autonomy and authority go hand in hand, and nowhere do we find either concentrated into the hands of a few, or of one.

But autonomy does not mean anarchy, and we also find evidence that there was a leadership structure, with its attendant authority, within the churches from a very early time. Among New Testament documents, the first epistle to the Thessalonians is considered to be one of the earliest, written perhaps as early as AD 50. In the closing thoughts of this letter Paul writes,

*And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and **are over you in the Lord and admonish you**, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.* (I Thessalonians 5:12-13)

The Epistle to the Hebrews, written a decade or so later, speaks in the same language,

*Obey those **who rule over you**, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.* (Hebrews 13:17)

Church History

Several features may be discerned from these brief and enigmatic references to those 'who rule' over the church. First, they are men who 'labor among' the congregation and not men who have been placed over the churches by a higher authority. Paul alludes to this local origination of the leadership when he speaks to the elders gathered to him from the church at Ephesus,

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

This was the apostle's own practice, to establish an elder leadership within the young congregations of his missionary journeys from among the congregation itself,

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

And it was his instruction given to the apostolic legate Titus for application to the newfound churches on the island of Crete,

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you... (Titus 1:5)

A second feature in regard to the leadership of the local church derived from the above admonitions is that respect and obedience were not to be commanded, but first earned and then given. The idea of a lazy or unproductive leader in the church, not to mention one that does not even live with or visit the flock, is incomprehensible within the context of the biblical teaching. The Thessalonian believers and the Hebrew Christians were to esteem and obey those who both had rule over them and *labored among them*. Paul instructs the churches through another apostolic legate, Timothy, that the elders who *work hard at preaching and teaching* are worthy of double honor.

Church History

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. (I Timothy 5:17)

Herein lies the epitome of servant-leadership, as those who are appointed and ordained as ones who 'rule over' and 'give an account' for the local congregation are powerless to demand respect and/or obedience. Nothing could be farther from the dictatorial and authoritarian nature of Gentile lordship, or the leadership structure of so many professing Christian churches and denominations over the years. To be sure, the congregation that fails to yield the proper respect and obedience that is due to deserving leaders will not go unpunished. Still, it is significant that all references to the relationship between those who 'rule' and those over whom they rule is founded on such voluntary terms.

A third feature gleaned from these passages, and a most consistent feature it is among them, is the fact that the terms for leaders are always in the plural numbers. *Those* who rule over you, *those* who labor among you, *those* who must give an account, and so on. Also, the references already noted, along with every other reference in regard to the elder's relationship to the church, are all plural. Only the generic 'qualifications' of the elder are stipulated in the singular, but it is clear that, at least in the early church, no elder served the church singularly. It will remain to be seen if there existed a hierarchy or gradation within the leadership of the church as it existed in the 1st Century, but there can be no doubt that one developed as early as the 2nd Century.

Temple or Synagogue: *Which Model to Choose?*

There is no evidence in the New Testament that the apostles and leaders of the church at Jerusalem kibitzed together regarding the form of government to be established in the local churches as the Gospel spread throughout the Mediterranean world. Nor did the spiritual leaders in Antioch advise Paul as to the manner of establishing local church leadership prior to his departure on his

Church History

second missionary journey. By all accounts it appears that the early Christians – predominantly Jewish by heritage – drew from their own experience in establishing a leadership structure in the new church. And they appeared to do this almost subconsciously, without explicit conscious deliberation.

These men would have had two religious institutions within their own history to draw from: the Temple and the synagogue. The Temple hierarchy was rigid, tribal (Levi), and authoritarian. It was exclusive and non-participatory by the masses; and it was anything but an autonomous gathering of equals. The Temple represented the separation between God and His people, and the bloody nature of the Temple service was a constant reminder of that veil that stood between them. That veil was torn forever in the body of Christ, and it does not appear that any of the apostles showed the least desire to return to the form of assembly or of worship that prevailed under the Old Covenant.

The synagogue, on the other hand, was a feature of daily community life within the Second Temple era, the social center of the town or village, and the school at which young men were trained in the Torah and traditions of Judaism. Undoubtedly it was in the synagogue that Peter, James, and John learned the Scriptures from a local rabbi, and in the synagogue that Saul of Tarsus sat at the feet of Gamaliel and was schooled in the Pharisaic traditions of the Torah. By the time of Christ's Advent the synagogue had replaced the 'city gate' as the place where the elders of the village would gather, and would render judgment. The early self-consciousness of believers as a self-contained community independent from the overarching Jewish nation around it, made the imitation of the synagogue structure and practice natural within the Church.

The leadership of the synagogue had been from ancient times by elders, with one man serving as 'president' of the synagogue. This council of elders was termed the 'sanhedrin' – the 'Sanhedrin' we read of in the gospel accounts was the Great Assembly of Jewish leaders over the whole nation, a macrocosm of the smaller sanhedrin that formed the leadership structure of the local synagogues.

Church History

Thus the appointment of elders in the local Christian congregations was both logical and natural. “There is no intimation in the New Testament of the introduction of presbyters (elders) as church officers. As a feature of synagogue organization the eldership was too familiar an institution to be considered worthy of remark.”¹⁷

It may be argued, and has been argued, that all of this simply proves elder government as being circumstantial and cultural. Deriving as it does from the Jewish synagogue, this form of government does not necessarily become normative for all churches in all cultures – and especially not in cultures far removed from Judaism. It is true that there is no explicit command that the churches of Jesus Christ follow the leadership structure of the synagogue in order to be *true* churches. But it is also true that God ordains the affairs of men, and His providence governs the paths taken by men and by peoples. The development of the synagogue from the days of Ezra was overseen by divine providence, as was the spread of the Greek language and the rise of the Roman Empire. All of these seemingly circumstantial matters were employed in the advancement of the Christian Church for God’s glory, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the salvation of the elect. While this does not constitute an ironclad defense of elder leadership, it at least establishes it as divinely providential

Ultimately it is not the synagogue origins of eldership, or even the fact that eldership was clearly the chosen form of church government in the 1st Century, that matters. That is form, not substance. The substance is found in servant-leadership, which appears to exist most successfully in plural leadership. While one may not be able to establish a dogmatic ground for eldership as the proper form of church government, one is hard-pressed to come up with a different form that is more conducive to the essential qualities of Christian

¹⁷ Newman, Albert Henry; 127.

Church History

leadership. Eldership has all the features of the true acorn, but from the 2nd Century onward many an errant branch has grown onto the tree.

Session 4: The Rise of the Episcopacy

Text Reading: II Timothy 2:2

*“The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ;
Jesus, the Christ, was sent from God.
Thus Christ is from God and the apostles from Christ.”
(Clement of Rome; Epistle to the Corinthians)*

“Nature abhors a vacuum.” The meaning of this ageless truism is that true emptiness is unnatural, and “nature” does whatever it can to fill the void. Even the very act of Creation was seemingly in response to the universe being “*without form and void*” – a vacuum, so to speak. Polity does not lag behind Nature in its abhorrence of emptiness. Institutions, states, nations alike are quick to fill the void caused by the loss of leadership. One of the most comical examples of this principle came in the glory days of the Roman Empire, when the Praetorian Guard turned on the man it was charged with protecting – the wicked and fickle Caligula – killing him. Immediately they began looking for a new Emperor, and found Caligula’s uncle Claudius – limping, stuttering Claudius – cowering behind a curtain fearing that he too would be murdered. They crowned him Emperor and made great sport of him (he actually made a pretty good emperor, and probably had those particular guards executed once his hold on power was secure).

The void left by the departure of the apostles must have been vast indeed. Endowed not only with the authority of the risen Christ, but also with His spiritual power over the forces of evil, sickness, and even death itself. These were the men of whom Jesus spoke when He said, “*Greater things shall you do, because I go to My Father.*” So great was their power that the apostle Paul could appeal to his possession of the same in defense of his – albeit unique – apostleship.

Church History

I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

(II Corinthians 12:11-12)

The 'signs of an apostle' were evidently something easily recognizable among the early churches, and undoubtedly something quite unforgettable. So when the apostle John died some time in the late first century, the last of the Apostles to pass on, an authoritative vacuum formed - and the churches founded and nurtured by the Apostles moved, perhaps even unconsciously, to fill it.

We have seen that the prophetic ministry lasted into the second century, but that humorous quote from the *Didache* may indicate that a certain skepticism had developed around that itinerant ministry, perhaps due to rampant abuse. Prophets were proscribed to no more than two days' visit in any community of faith. Further in the *Didache* the churches are instructed with regard to any prophet who wishes to remain in their vicinity and church - he must be employed in some craft or trade or, if unskilled, some form of labor is to be found for him. Should he refuse to work, he is "trading on Christ" and is to be turned out. It is not surprising that by the middle of the second century we hear no more of the 'prophet' still functioning in the church than we do of the 'apostle.' The foundation having been laid, these two ministries pass from the scene.

The leadership vacuum caused by the death of the Apostles, and the demise of the ministry of the apostles and prophets, was filled by the 'bishop.' One man came to represent the church of a particular city or town - the Bishop of Smyrna, the Bishop of Antioch - and in his hands was vested both the responsibility and the authority for the guidance and preservation of the church. But this phenomenon did not take place either immediately or universally.

Church History

Rather we can trace a clear development of thought on the matter from the latter decades of the first century – while at least the Apostle John was still alive – through to the end of the second century. The transformation was complete, however, by the year 200, long before Christianity was legalized by the emperor Constantine, long before it was institutionalized as the Roman Catholic Church.

In the last decades of the second century the Ancient Catholic Church thus emerges to view, - a single, visible, compactly united Body, with officers succeeding to their stations under fixed rules, and conceived to be endowed in virtue of their office with exalted functions committed to them by Christ. Whether this system was a normal and wholesome development of the Christianity of the Apostolic age, is a question on which men's minds are still divided. One thing is certain; it was a change momentous in its results.¹⁸

Two-Office View:

From the text of the New Testament itself we derive at least the example of the earliest form of local church government in a two-office system of 'elders' and 'deacons.' These are mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles as to the qualifications of the men who hold the offices. They are also mentioned together in Paul's greeting to the Philippian church,

*Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **bishops and deacons**: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* (Philippians 1:1-2)

The use of the English word 'bishops' here does not foreshadow the metamorphosis of church leadership into the episcopacy of the second century and beyond. It is simply the normal English word – indeed a transliteration – of the Greek *episkopoi*. What is significant in Paul's greeting is first, that he uses the plural of both, and second, that he uses only two terms: 'bishops' and 'deacons.' It is likely that Paul used the term *episkopoi* to describe the first office due to the fact that Philippi was a Roman city, the church there would consist primarily of

¹⁸ Fisher, George Park, *History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; 1896), 81.

Church History

Gentile believers. Had he been writing to a predominantly Jewish Christian congregation, he might have rather used the term *presbuteroi* ('elders'), a term synonymous with *episkopoi* in the Pauline letters as it pertains to the leadership of the local churches. Philippians 1:2 as a proof-text for the Episcopal form of church government is a weak reed that will break with the least pressure.

The two-office view of bishops/deacons not only pervades the New Testament apostolic writings, it also fits neatly into what appears to be a twofold categorization of the spiritual gifts - the 'charismata' - by which the Lord empowers His Church to the work of ministry. The lists of charismata found in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 are easily divided into 'speaking' and 'serving' gifts. This division is made even more explicit by the Apostle Peter in his first epistle,

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone serves, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (I Peter 4:10-11)

Thus the two-office view has an *a priori* validity to it that derives both from the actual example of the earliest leadership structures within the churches, and from the pattern of giftedness bestowed within the Church by the Holy Spirit for the common good. While this might not constitute an explicit commandment as to the right and proper form of congregational government for all ages, the burden of proof lies heavily upon any other theory or proposal.

Three Office View:

Be this as it may, the fact of history is that the churches of the post-apostolic era evolved into a three-office structure without so much as a cry or whimper of protest, much less a debate. The development did not occur at the same pace everywhere within the growing Christian world, but it did develop

Church History

everywhere. We can trace this movement through three stages of the post-apostolic era: Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius forming the first group at the turn of the second century; Irenæus at the turn of the third century; and finally Cyprian in the middle of the third century. It is important to note that the full transition from a plurality of elders to the singular Bishop took place *prior* to the legalization and consolidation of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine in the early decades of the fourth century. When it became both legal and fashionable to be a Christian - and influential to be a Christian leader - in the Roman world, the pattern of the episcopacy was already firmly in place in the churches.

Clement of Rome:

The letter written by Clement from Rome to the Corinthian church is the oldest non-canonical writing known. Written circa AD 96, it manifests the thoughts of a man thoroughly familiar with the teachings and writings of the Apostle Paul. This should not be surprising, as we first meet Clement in the writings and greetings of Paul himself.

And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. (Philippians 4:3)

It is interesting to note that the author does not reveal his own name anywhere in the epistle, though early and wide testimony attributes the letter to Clement. He does not refer to himself by any office or title, yet he writes as one familiar with the Corinthians (both the congregation and its leadership), and he writes as one with some expectation of being heeded. The occasion of the letter was, not surprisingly, evidence of division and discord within the Corinthian church. Evidently the impact of Paul's earlier letters to Corinth was either negligible or short-lived! Apparently several members of the Corinthian congregation had

Church History

conspired to turn others against some, at least, of the elders of the church, removing them from office without cause or due process.

It is disgraceful, exceedingly disgraceful, and unworthy of your Christian upbringing, to have it reported that because of one or two individuals the solid and ancient Corinthian Church is in revolt against its presbyters...The result is that the Lord's name is being blasphemed because of your stupidity, and you are exposing yourselves to danger.¹⁹

Note the use of the term 'presbyters' rather than 'bishops,' and note also the use of the plural. That Clement, evidently a disciple and companion of Paul, viewed a plurality of elders as the normal leadership structure of the local congregation is without doubt or dispute in the letter, the only data we have from Clement's mind. It should not be forgotten, either, that Clement was at this time a member – and most likely himself a presbyter – of the Church in Rome. But his ecclesiastical polity was derived from the teachings and practice of the Apostle Paul, and he believed it to be the ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus, the Christ, was sent from God. Thus Christ is from God and the apostles from Christ. In both instances the orderly procedure depends on God's will. And so the apostles, after receiving their orders and being fully convinced by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and assured by God's word, went out in the confidence of the Holy Spirit to preach the good news that God's Kingdom was about to come. They preached in country and city, and appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Holy Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers.²⁰

Clement justifies the two-office view somewhat disingenuously by pulling in a quote from Isaiah to show that the appointment of 'bishops and deacons' was no novelty of the apostles,

¹⁹ *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*; 47:6-7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*; 42:1-5.

Church History

*Instead of bronze I will bring gold,
Instead of iron I will bring silver,
Instead of wood, bronze,
And instead of stones, iron.
I will also make your **officers** peace,
And your **magistrates** righteousness.* (Isaiah 60:17)

The word translated ‘magistrates’ from this passage is, in the Greek translation (the Septuagint) the word *episkopoi*, translated ‘bishop’ in the New Testament. But the word rendered ‘officers’ is not, unfortunately for Clement’s reference, the same word from which we derive ‘deacon.’ Oh well, Clement meant well in his desire to see peace and stability return to the Corinthian Church. And it is evident from his letter that peace would only return when the offense committed against the presbyters was made right.

For we shall be guilty of no slight sin if we eject from the episcopate men who have offered the sacrifices with innocence and holiness. Happy, indeed, are those presbyters who have already passed on, and who ended a life of fruitfulness with their task complete. For they need not fear that anyone will remove them from their secure positions. But you, we observe, have removed a number of people, despite their good conduct, from a ministry they have fulfilled with honor and integrity. Your contentions and rivalry, brothers, thus touches matters that bear on our salvation.²¹

The dignity of the office of presbyter, and the plurality of men within a congregation serving as such, was a truth that was to Clement on par with salvation itself. We are, of course, reminded that Clement was not an inspired author and thus we recognize that the two-office view may not be of the essence of a congregation, the loss of which constituting the loss of its lampstand! Yet we see in Clement, living as he did during the latter years of the Apostles, viewed the position of the bishops and the deacons as having been divinely ordained through the authority of the apostles.

²¹ *Clement to the Corinthians*; 44:4-6.

Church History

In this Clement followed not only the example of Paul but also the teaching of the earliest Church Manual extant, the *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve*. This document dates to the latter half of the first century and is a compendium of acceptable practice within the Christian Church. On the matter of leadership the *Didache* is quite Pauline in tone:

You must, then elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are a credit to the Lord, men who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well tried. For their ministry to you is identical with that of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for along with the prophets and teachers they enjoy a place of honor among you.²²

Polycarp & Ignatius:

It is possible that Clement's view (and the vehemence with which he held it) derived from the fact that he was a companion of the Apostle Paul. Two of Clement's contemporaries – Polycarp and Ignatius – were evidently disciples of the Apostle John, and held distinctly different views on the episcopate than did Clement.

Polycarp is known to history as the Bishop of Smyrna, although he does not utilize that title for himself. Polycarp's life is little known as to the events and places he traveled and lived. His death, however, is one of the most famous martyrdoms in Christian history. The account of his death is the stuff of legend, and probably should be digested with more than a grain of salt. But we may extract one morsel of probably truth, that Polycarp had been a Christian for most of his very long life, having reached his 86th year 'in the Lord Jesus.' Tradition places a young Polycarp as a disciple of John. Although he was evidently well known as a leader in the Christian Church of Asia Minor, and therefore probably wrote a great deal of letters to other churches and men, we have only one of

²² *The Didache*; Early Christian Fathers; 15:1-2.

Church History

those letters extant, *The Letter of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, to the Philippians*. It is impossible to date the epistle with any accuracy, so scholars assign its writing to between AD 110 and 140, roughly within the generation after the apostles. From the very opening line we can see a different tone than in Clement's letter to the Corinthians.

Polycarp, and the presbyters with him, to the church of God that sojourns at Philippi; may mercy and peace be multiplied to you from God Almighty and Jesus Christ, our savior.²³

The difference in tone starts, of course, with the self-designation of the author. Not in itself a bad thing, most of the apostles designated themselves as the authors of their letters. But different from Clement nonetheless. The most significant departure, however, is in the next clause: *and the presbyters with him*. This phrase signifies at least a preliminary form of hierarchy within the plurality of elders in the local church. In Polycarp's letter this hierarchy has the distinct *primus inter pares* form, 'first among equals,' and does not take the explicit three-office pattern of later writers. "The episcopate was developed out of the presbyters, and began in a simple presidency in the board of presbyters."²⁴ Thus it would seem that Polycarp was the 'president' of the board of elders at Smyrna. This model would derive directly from that of the synagogue, where one man served as president of the synagogue, the one who coordinated and moderated the meetings of the synagogue and of the elders.

The elevation of one man to become the president of the presbyters makes sense not only from a transfer of the synagogue model to the early Christian churches, but also from the general composition of the early churches as to their membership. The majority of believers in the first centuries came from the lower and slave classes of society. Paul reminds the Corinthian believers *that not many*

²³ *The Letter of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, to the Philippians*; Early Christian Fathers, edited by Cyril Richardson (New York: Simon & Schuster; 1996). 1:1.

²⁴ Fisher, 78.

Church History

wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called by God in Christ. Given the structure of society in the ancient world, it is highly likely that there were also 'not many educated, not many literate, not many capable of speaking in public.' In other words, even among the presbyters there may not have been more than one or two men at most who had any training beyond the most basic rudiments. The skilled orator and/or writer would have been a rarity indeed. It would be natural, and not necessarily incorrect, for the local congregation to entrust such a man with additional duties and authority.

While Polycarp's position among the presbyters in Smyrna may not have constituted a full-blown episcopacy, it did represent the beginnings of a separation among the leadership of the local congregation from a plurality of elders to a Bishop - Presbytery model which, along with Deacons, constitutes the three-office view of later Christianity. The earliest stages of this distillation of authority may have derived from the synagogue model, which may have been more of an influence to the Apostle John in his own pastoral work within the churches than it was for the Apostle Paul in his. Or the whole situation may have arisen simply in recognition of the need for someone in the congregation to communicate with other churches, to coordinate the ministry of the local church, to preserve the integrity of the doctrine handed down by the apostles, and to guard against heresy. Without any explicit description of how or why these things came to pass, we may at least make an interim judgment that, while there was still a plurality of elders in the churches of the early second century, this did not mean there was complete equality among them. This inequality, for good or ill, becomes even more pronounced in the writings of Ignatius.

Ignatius was a contemporary of Polycarp, and is mentioned by name (though not by title) in the latter's epistle to the Philippians. Ignatius himself was quite prolific in letter writing, and fortunately many of his epistles have been preserved or discovered. Though Ignatius' life spanned only a few years beyond that of Clement, and was within the days of Polycarp, his writings reveal

Church History

a developed three-office view remarkable for so early in the second century. This fact is very illuminating with regard to the whole discussion, for it indicates that there was little or no debate or controversy within or among the post-apostolic churches with regard to the two-office or three-office view. Furthermore, as the three-office view places one man above the other two offices – the Bishop over the presbyters and deacons – it stands to reason that this is the view that would prevail as time passed.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius adopts the same distinction between the bishop and the presbyters as we found in Polycarp. Ignatius, however, more clearly subordinates the presbyters to the bishop than Polycarp does.

Your presbytery, indeed, which deserves its name and is a credit to God, is as closely tied to the bishop as the strings to a harp.²⁵

In his letter to the Church in Philadelphia, Ignatius is apparently attempting to quell some division within the leadership – a revolt within the presbytery against the bishop, but one that did not involve the entire presbytery. The supremacy of the bishop in Ignatius' mind is evident by what he writes,

Yours is a deep, abiding joy in the Passion of our Lord...You are the very personification of eternal and perpetual joy. This is especially true if you are at one with the bishop, and with the presbyters and deacons who are on his side and who have been appointed by the will of Jesus Christ...Be careful, then, to observe a single Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup of his blood that makes us one, and one altar, just as there is one bishop along with the presbytery and the deacons.²⁶

George Fisher maintains in his *History of Christian Doctrine* that Ignatius' elevation of the bishop was purely for administrative and doctrinal stability and peace. He writes, "The early episcopacy where it existed, as we see from the

²⁵ *Epistle of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, to the Ephesians*; 4:1.

²⁶ *Epistle of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, to the Philadelphians*; various.

Epistles of Ignatius, was valued as a means of preventing division and preserving order.”²⁷ Fisher does not see the ‘sacerdotal’ – or priestly – aspects of the episcopacy until later in the second century with the writings of Irenæus, or even well into the third century in the teachings of Cyprian. However, one must take note of the powerful link Ignatius makes, early in the post-apostolic era, between the one Lord, one Bread, one Cup...and one Bishop. That is heady stuff for a mere mortal, a man whose office was derived from the apostles and from the presbyters who had been appointed before him. It is no wonder that so few bishops in the history of the Church have handled their authority in a humble and godly manner.

Irenæus:

The Bishop of Lyon (then Lugdunum, in Gaul of the Roman Empire), Irenæus represents the second generation from the apostles. He was a follower of Polycarp, and the author of the somewhat exaggerated *Martyrdom of Polycarp*; Polycarp in turn was a disciple of the Apostle John. John lived a good, long life as did Polycarp, so these two generations take us to the very end of the second century and the writings of Irenæus, and with him a noticeable advancement in the authority and influence of the bishop.

Irenæus’ most important extant work is his treatise *Against Heresies*. This document represents perhaps the first direct treatment in Christian literature of the doctrine of Apostolic Succession – the doctrine employed by the Roman Catholic Church to trace the spiritual lineage of the Pope and the Bishops back to Peter and the other Apostles. Appealing to the need for authority within the Church to validate the Scriptures and the practice of the churches (in a manner that foreshadowed the writings of Cardinal Newman so many years later), Irenæus “enumerates those who were established by the apostles as bishops in

²⁷ Fisher; 77.

the churches."²⁸ He also is the first in the early church to begin to recognize the supremacy of Rome among all the churches, and even to hold that the church there was founded by the Apostles Peter and Paul (a 'fact' that Paul himself denies in his own Epistle to the Romans). Irenæus writes of the Roman Church, "For every church must be in harmony with this Church because of its outstanding pre-eminence."²⁹

In *Against Heresies* we read for the first time of the belief that the Apostle Peter passed on his apostolic authority to Linus (*cp.* II Tim. 4:21), who was succeeded by Anencletus, followed by Clement, and so on down to Irenæus' own day. He places the center of activity of each of these successive bishops at Rome, yet maintains the relative position of the Bishop of Rome in the same *primus inter pares* as Polycarp viewed the local bishop in relation to the presbytery. But Irenæus has moved far beyond Polycarp, and even beyond Ignatius, in granting the episcopacy - and especially that of Rome - an authority in the Church on par with the Scriptures themselves. He writes,

Even if the apostles had not left their Writings to us, ought we not to follow the rule of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they committed the churches?³⁰

Irenæus was ahead of his time, though not in a good way. He provided early glimpses of views and doctrines that would eventually become firmly established within the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to his views on Apostolic Succession and the Episcopal hierarchy within the churches, Irenæus was also the first (as far as we can tell) to posit the perpetual virginity of Mary, the mother of Jesus. If we are wise to read Ignatius' account of the martyrdom of Polycarp with a few grains of salt, then we would do well to pour the entire shaker on the writings of Irenæus.

²⁸ Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, 3;1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:1.

Session 5: The Development of the Canon

Text Reading: II Peter 3:14 - 16

*“The tradition of Apostolic teaching came to be considered
as under the special guardianship of the line of bishops,
and the unity of the Church to be secured
through the unity of the episcopate.”
(George Fisher)*

There are a number of negative motives that may be assigned to explain the rise of the episcopacy to such a place of singular authority, within so short a span of time. The desire of people to ‘have a king’ like the nations about them, the ambition of men to ‘lord it over’ others, even the social stratification caused by education and erudition – these, and more, may have caused, or at least fueled, the separation of the bishop from the presbyters. Yet it may be the case that the whole process, at least in its earliest stages within the first and second centuries, was not so nefarious as all that. As far as we can tell from extant writings, no word of protest was raised either from within the local churches or from the remaining apostolic witness, John. Like the earlier John’s baptism, the singular authority of the bishop over the local congregation appears on the scene in the early second century without explanation or protest.

Perhaps the placid manner by which the episcopate rose from the presbytery has more to do with culture in the Greek-speaking world than anything else. The synagogue model of leadership would naturally prevail within the Church so long as the congregations were predominantly Jewish converts. But the shift within a generation of Christ’s ascent, from Jewish to Gentile, would just as naturally bring about a more ‘magisterial’ form of local polity (remember, the Greek *episkopos* was a magistrate within a city). If we approach the issue from a positive standpoint, allowing that no opposition was raised at the time and perhaps none should be raised now, we may simply attribute the rise of the bishop over the church to culture and leave it at that. At

Church History

least we could if the condition of the churches during this period in history were as calm as the development of the episcopate seems to have been. But it was anything but calm.

Paul writes an interesting philosophical maxim in his first letter to Timothy,

...knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers... (I Timothy 1:9)

The law is not made for a righteous person. Of course Paul knew, as we know from Paul's own writings, that there are none righteous. What the apostle is saying here is that the presence of law confirms the prevalence of evil. Common grace provides for the relative peace and stability of the world through the civil magistrate, as Paul teaches elsewhere,

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. (Romans 13:3-4)

The necessity for both law and law enforcement pertains not only to the world outside of the church, but sadly also for within as well. Again, the apostle warns the presbyters of Ephesus of the danger that will (not 'might) come within the flock of Christ under their care.

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:18-20)

Church History

Paul charges the elders – plural – with the protection of the flock against whatever manner of evil should come against those entrusted to their care. Undoubtedly this is why Clement was so vigorous in his defense of the wrongfully dismissed elders of Corinth, insisting to the fullest extent of his reputation and authority (which, sadly, may not have been enough), that those men be reinstated with full honor and authority. Clement knew that a congregation without elders was as a flock without shepherds. Perhaps this is the primary function of the presbyters – to set themselves as guardians of all things pertaining to the health and well-being of the congregation: doctrine, practice, life & morals, etc. By teaching and by example, the elders of a church become a hedge of protection – a sheepfold, so to speak – for the believers gathered under their care. With this assessment the apostle Peter agrees,

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (I Peter 5:1-4)

This answers to the need of the congregation, but even the earliest history of the Church shows us that there are issues that go beyond the local church and affect the ‘catholic’ church. For instance, the matter of whether Gentile converts were to be circumcised and otherwise to answer to the Judaistic statutes, was something that Paul not only addressed at the local level, but also took to the broader church. He relates the circumstances in his letter to the Galatians, speaking of a time that corresponds with the ‘council’ of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15,

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by

Church History

*any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we **did not yield submission even for an hour**, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*

(Galatians 2:1-5)

Paul did not come to the broader church to seek advice, but rather to prevent corruption of the Gospel from continuing throughout the whole Body of Christ. By addressing the 'Judaizers' in Antioch Paul and Barnabas, among others no doubt, exercised the responsibility of presbyters - defending the flock of Antioch, and particularly the Gentile converts to Christianity, from the false mixture of the Mosaic old wine with the Christian new. If the matter had pertained only to the Antiochene Church, that would have been the end of it. We see this in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian Church - the controversy and sin troubling that congregation were to be addressed by the leadership *of that church*. No general synod was necessary in order for sin to be rebuked and, if necessary, punished, for conflicts to be resolved, and for peace to prevail within the local body. These matters were under the provenance of the presbyters, and their authority was sufficient to the task.

But the heresy of the Judaizers was a 'general' problem, one that infiltrated local congregations from without and threatened to spread its tentacles of corruption throughout the fledgling Gentile Church. In taking the matter to Jerusalem, to be addressed in what is widely considered to be the first 'ecumenical' council of the Christian Church, Paul and Barnabas exercised the role and authority that would soon be centered in the bishop. The local skirmishes were (and are) to be fought by the presbyters, the more expansive war was (and is?) to be fought by the bishops. While this statement is not one that derives clearly and explicitly from any text of Scripture, it is an apt summary of what transpired historically during the post-apostolic era of the Church.

Church History

In the fires of controversy it is often difficult to know who is right and who is wrong. This is especially true if there is either no standard of measure, or the standard that exists is not uniformly recognized and accepted. During the era of the Apostles there existed within the Church a recognized group of authoritative men, who could and did render judgments as needed to guide the catholic church in its infancy. But with their departure a vacuum formed not only in leadership, but also in the standard by which truth and falsehood were to be measured. Not only did the Apostles not leave the Church with a written statement as to what that standard was to be, they did not leave any instructions as to how that standard was to be attained. By the beginning of the second century the Church left behind by the death of the last Apostle, John, had three broad poles from which to triangulate the truth, or determine the falsehood, of any teaching or practice that should arise in her midst.

The first of these poles was the Scriptures of the Old Testament. This constituted the 'Bible' of the disciples of Jesus Christ, and continued to serve that purpose to the disciples of these disciples. The Apostle Paul liberally sprinkled all of his letters with quotations and allusions to the Old Testament "Law and Prophets," and established for all time the divine source of those writings,

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:15-17)

The Scriptures of the Old Testament were handed down to the apostolic descendants as a precious deposit or treasury of wisdom and guidance "*in all things pertaining to life and godliness.*" As if to make the Church jealous of her privilege in holding the inspired Word of God, the Apostle Peter speaks of

Church History

angels “longing to peer into these things.” But, in fact, there were other things needful for ‘life and godliness’ in addition to the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

Thus the second pole of this triumvirate of truth consisted in the traditions regarding the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. These traditions were passed down from the apostles and their legates to the churches through oral instruction, ‘faithful sayings,’ and hymns.

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.
(Hebrews 2:1-3)

Paul may particular use of the ‘faithful saying’ method of transferring the traditions of the Lord to his hearers. An example of this is found in I Timothy,

*God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.* (I Timothy 3:16)

The form of such passages has led many scholars to conclude that these were stanzas from early hymns written not only to ascribe praise to God in Jesus Christ, but also to establish the truth of the Gospel in the minds and hearts of believers. Paul does not use the formula ‘faithful saying’ in this passage, so it very well may have been a well-known stanza or refrain used in the Pauline churches. In several other instances, however, the apostolic ‘faithful saying’ was set forth explicitly.

Church History

This is a faithful saying:

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.

If we deny Him, He also will deny us. (II Timothy 2:11-12)

Paul uses this formulation at least five times explicitly – all in his ‘pastoral’ epistles to Timothy and Titus – and speaks elsewhere implicitly of ‘faithful’ sayings or traditions in numerous places. It is of such simple and condensed summaries of the truth of the Gospel that the apostle may have been referring to when he admonished Timothy to pass these things along, “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*” (II Timothy 2:2).

The third pole along with the Old Testament Scriptures and the traditions regarding the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, was the teachings of the apostles themselves. We read from Luke’s account of the earliest days of the Church’s history that the believers gathered and “*devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.*” The importance of this anchor of truth to the early church is manifested by the name of the earliest creedal statement that has been uncovered by archaeological research: the *Apostles’ Creed* and by the subtitle of the earliest extant Church Manual, the *Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve*. The original disciples of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, were universally recognized as the custodians of the new faith both in doctrine and in practice. So singular was this dignity afforded to the Apostles that Paul frequently had to defend his own unique but valid apostleship, lest his teaching be discredited among the churches.

These three points of orientation informed and constrained each other. No ‘tradition’ of the Lord Jesus Christ was accepted which contradicted or violated the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures, nor was any teaching accepted as apostolic that contradicted the sayings of the Lord. Naturally these

Church History

three poles worked within the life of the Church to form a corpus of writings that formalized and solidified each. The 'traditions' of the Lord, for instance, became the four gospels written by apostles, or under apostolic guidance, to record those traditions in a written and enduring form. The 'teachings of the Apostles' were codified not only in such summaries as the Apostles' Creed and the Baptismal Formula (actually more of a tradition of the Lord - baptizing in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...), but also in the history of the spread of the Gospel to the Jews (through Peter) and to the Gentiles (through Paul) in the Book of Acts. In addition, the authority of the Apostles was recognized as such, so that their letters carried the weight of Scripture itself,

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. (II Peter 3:14-16)

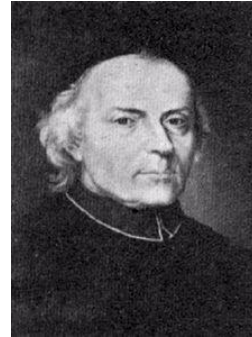
We know that this body of writings - the Gospels and the Epistles, along with a few others - would eventually become known as the Scriptures of the New Testament and be placed in authority and reverence on par with those of the Old Testament. But this event did not happen during the lifetime of the apostles - there was no apostolic synod or general council that specified for the churches exactly which books and letters were to comprise the New Testament. Nor did it happen as a result of any such conclave of Apostolic Fathers, or bishops, or any other ecclesiastical leaders after the apostles departed. Indeed, the strongest case can be made that the New Testament Scriptures were not *determined* or *selected*, but rather *recognized*. And even that was not by unanimous or universal consent.

Once again there is 'development,' this time with regard to the most fundamental doctrine of the young Church. It was as rapid and unassuming as

Church History

that respecting the rise of the episcopate from the presbytery, and by the middle of the second century the form and content of what is now recognized as the

New Testament were already considered authoritative in the churches. The Muratorian Fragment, discovered and published by Ludovico Moraturi in 1740 but believed to be dated from around AD 170, is the oldest known list of those documents considered to be authoritative within the universal or catholic church. The fragment is without its introductory section, and ends abruptly. But what remains



Muratori (1672-1750)

represents early testimony to the unofficial, yet authoritative, "New Testament." The fragment is remarkable not only for the number of now-accepted books of the New Testament already viewed as such by the middle of the second century, but also the exalted tone taken by the anonymous compiler with regard to these writings. Of the twenty-seven books that now comprise our New Testament, only Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and III John are missing from the Muratorian Fragment. One of the more controversial writings of all times, the Book of the Revelation, was included in this mid-second century list of canonical writings.

In addition to the list provided in the Muratorian Fragment, the authority of the apostolic writings within the early Church is also attested by the frequent quotations and references made to them by other writers. Ignatius, for instance, quotes approvingly from the gospel narratives of Matthew and Luke, Polycarp from these as well as from the Gospel of Mark, and both of these early Apostolic Fathers quote copiously from Paul's letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. The famous apologist Justin Martyr (c. AD 155) quoted from all four gospels and from the Book of the Revelation,

Church History

though not at all from any other New Testament books. Thus without any official pronouncement from the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, or any known judgment of a council or synod, the divine inspiration and consequent authority of the writings of Matthew, Luke, Mark, John, and Paul had already settled within the churches by very early in the second century.

But the atmosphere at that time would be very uncomfortable to any modern evangelical or fundamentalist if he or she were to be transported back in time, for the now-settled doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy with regard to Scripture was anything but settled then. Depending on who was writing, the Book of Hebrews might be authoritative or it might not; the three epistles attributed to John were canonical to some, not to others, with only the first epistle being recognized uniformly as Scripture. Some books, like James and II Peter, were amazingly slow to gain acceptance, showing up only in the fourth century. Others, like Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians and the Didache, were accepted as canonical by some but failed to make the 'final' cut. Of all of this we have absolutely no evidence of an organized effort among the churches to settle the canon once and for all, at least not before Christianity was legitimized by the Emperor Constantine.

It appears that the earliest writers of the post-apostolic Church categorized the various narratives and letters that circulated among the congregations into several categories - again, not consistently among the writers as far as each book or letter was concerned. The first category comprised the *homologoumena* - or the 'consistent word.' These were the recognized writings of the apostles - the historical narratives of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (including Acts), and the letters of Paul, the Gospel, First Epistle, and Revelation of John, and Peter's first epistle. It is not now known what it was about these writings that settled them so quickly in the minds of the earliest congregations. Most

likely it had to do with their rapid circulation during the lifetime of the men who wrote them, and the fact that their authorship was never disputed.

The second category, called *antilegomena*, consisted of those writings that were disputed. The dispute generally centered around the authorship of the writing, rather than the content, since false content would condemn a book immediately and place it in another category entirely. Modern scholars have coined a term for the most important criteria in determining the canonicity of any writing: "apostolicity." This means that the book or letter was recognized as having been written either by an apostle, or under the guidance and approval of an apostle. Therefore the Gospel of Matthew was accepted as having been written by an apostle; so, too, the Gospel of John and the letters of John, Peter, and Paul – at least those letters for which the apostolic authorship was undisputed. The writings of Luke were accepted on account of the author's close association with the Apostle Paul, and the Gospel of Mark due to his close affiliation with the Apostle Peter (and later, Paul as well).

A third category contained those writings considered *notha*, or 'spurious.' These would include books with good content but whose authorship was doubtful, or books in which the content was troublesome. Of this category of writings from the early Church era, the Epistle of James is most noteworthy. There does not seem to be any doubt that this letter was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus, so the nature of the conflict had to do more with the letter's content. It is remarkable that this letter only finally showed up along with the other twenty-six books of the New Testament with the discovery of the *Codex Sinaiticus* dating from the middle of the fourth century. Even after that the Epistle of James was handled roughly by churchmen, with Martin Luther describing it as 'strawy.' It is beyond the scope of a church history manual to delve into the doctrinal issues that have caused so much grief in the reading of

Church History

James as canon, but it is interesting to see that what we now consider to be 'carved in stone' was incredibly fluid two thousand years ago.

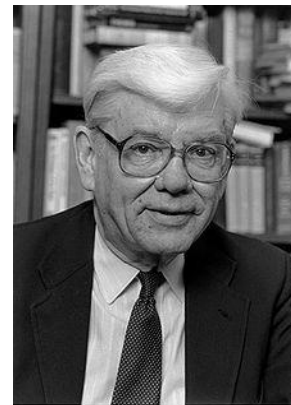
Finally there were the heretical writings, such as the 'Gospels' of Peter, of Thomas, and of Matthias, the Acts of Andrew, and of John. The nature of these writings was such that many of the Apostolic Fathers - the rising episcopacy guiding the Church - simply ignored them. They are not quoted in the episcopal literature of the second or third centuries, and they simply do not show up in any of the canonical lists of the fourth century and beyond. On occasion one of these 'gospels' or 'acts' would be denounced, but it was far more likely that they be relegated to oblivion. The exception, then as now, was with the rise of heretical teachers and sects within the professing Church. Heretics and heretical corruptions of Christianity - such as the Marcionites and Gnostics of the second century, and the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses of today - often latch onto such writings, claiming to have 'found' the truth that traditional orthodoxy has rejected. The first occurrence of this sadly chronic phenomenon involved Marcion, a charismatic but apparently unstable figure whose actions in the early second century constituted perhaps the first full-scale assault upon the doctrinal foundation of the Church. When Marcion hit, we should not be surprised that the Church hit back...through the bishops.

Session 6: Danger from Within - Early Heresies

Text Reading: Acts 20:27 - 31

*"History will be kind to me
for I intend to write it."
(Winston Churchill)*

Jaroslav Pelikan writes in the first volume of his masterful history of Christianity, "History is usually dictated by the victors."³¹ Unless one is able to write the history of events of one's own life - either as an autobiography or, as in the case of Winston Churchill, of the momentous world events in which one played such a major role - the 'facts' are pretty much left up to posterity to interpret. The privilege of this interpretation usually is numbered among the spoils of victory. The vanquished rarely get equal press. This principle applies to world history in general, and to Church History in particular. Thus while we turn our attention to those early struggles of the Church against false teachings and false practices, we recognize that the story that has been handed down through the generation represents the 'orthodox' view - the victors' narrative of battle, and not that of the vanquished. Much of the data now available to church historians comes from the writings of the men who defended the catholic tradition against those teachers deemed 'heterodox' - outside the straight line of accepted doctrine and practice. We remember that Martin Luther and John Calvin were each branded, and are still considered, as heretics by Rome. Only the relative success of their reformation efforts earned their teachings the designation of orthodoxy and the honor of writing their own histories.



**Jaroslav Pelikan
(1923-2006)**

³¹ Pelikan, Jaroslav, *The Christian Tradition; Volume 1*, 68.

Church History

That is not to say that those doctrines and practices condemned by the Church throughout the ages were not, indeed, heresies. We have seen that the rise of the episcopacy brought forth able men to both establish and defend biblical orthodoxy. Many of those battles were won by the 'right' side with regard to biblical merit. But it is also true that not all doctrinal views nor all unorthodox practices deserved the designation of 'heresy,' and even within this classification there was often a great deal of truth blended with a measure of error. It is hard to reconstruct the actual events when one is dealing only with the perspective of the victors; nonetheless it is worth the effort in attaining a more objective reading of the history, and a more accurate assessment of the issues involved.

Regardless of which 'side' won the battle, there stands the undeniable reality that heretical teachings and unbiblical practices were both prophesied as coming into the church, and entered early. Paul warned the Ephesian presbyters that the savage wolves and false teachers would come in 'after his departure.' In truth the apostle had had to contend with such threats to the peace and health of the young congregations during his own lifetime. He was not warning the Ephesian church of something yet to come, but rather of the continuation and intensification of something that had already been happening. The first battle royal was fought while the Christian Church was still predominantly Jewish in heritage, when Paul challenged and defeated the Judaizers. This episode does not constitute 'Church History' proper because the controversy was engaged during the Apostolic Age, while the New Testament Scriptures were being penned. Thus we have the defense of the true and gracious Gospel given to us through Paul's various epistles. Yet we can see something of the vigor not only with which the apostle earnestly contended for the faith, but with which all apostolic successors were to do so as well. Speaking of those who demanded that Gentile converts to Christianity first be circumcised, Paul writes to the Galatian church,

Church History

*But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. I wish that those who are troubling you would even **mutilate themselves**.*
(Galatians 5:11-12)

The Judaizing heresy was one of practice more than doctrine and, while quite virulent, was a rather short-lived strain. The other major first century heresy that derived from the Jewish community was one of doctrine. The Ebionites were strict ascetic Jewish 'Christians' who were generally willing to admit much of the new sect's teaching, except for the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Ebionites taught that "though born as other men are, Jesus was elected to be the Son of God, and that at his baptism Christ, an archangel, descended on him, as he had on Adam, Moses, and other prophets."³² Ebionitism was somewhat of a last gasp of first century Judaism, after the fall of the Temple in AD 70, to come to grips with the growing religion of Christianity. Its influence on the Church of that era was minimal, but the basic tenets of Ebionitism were rejuvenated in the 7th Century by an Arab Bedouin named Mohammad.

Doctrinal and practical attacks from surrounding Judaism were dangerous to the early church, and were not taken lightly by the apostles as we can see from Paul's strenuous defense against the Judaizers. But Judaism, and the Jewish nation itself, was on the wane and soon to pass entirely from the scene. The real and lasting danger facing the young church came from the remarkably cosmopolitan nature of the Roman Empire of the first several Christian centuries.

By the time of Jesus' death during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, Rome spread its influence from the shores of Gaul upon the English Channel to the north, to the sands of Persia at the borders of the Parthian Empire to the east. Rome would reach its apex in the second century under the 'five good emperors' from Trajan to Marcus Aurelius. In the latter years of John's life, and certainly during the lives of the apostolic fathers, economic intercourse between the far reaches of the empire was common, and it would not be unusual for a merchant

³² Pelikan, 24.

Church History

from Brittania to encounter a trader from Parthia. Often this encounter would be in a major trade port, like Corinth. The 'world' as it was known then was united by the Pax Romana – the Roman Peace – and by the excellent Roman roads defended by garrisons of Roman legions.



Equally significant, however, was the linguistic unity that prevailed over the same region. Begun during the conquests of Alexander and continued through the travels and battles (and writings) of Julius Caesar, the Mediterranean world was by this time broadly separated into two similar languages: Greek and Latin. Both were languages well suited to philosophy, though the former more so than the latter, and the spread of ideas was as broad and wide as was the spread of commerce. Philosophy was a hobby of emperors and the residue of greatness to the Greeks. In other words, it was important; and there was little chance the young Christian Church would entirely escape its influences.

Philosophy is not religion, though the two are closely related. Philosophy is an exaltation of human rationality and rarely has much room for divine

Church History

revelation or 'faith.' The Golden Age of philosophy was in Ancient Greece from the fifth to the third century before Christ. By the early centuries of the Christian Era philosophy had become a mishmash of widely diverse and sometimes contradictory theories, cosmogonies, theologies, anthropologies, and more pulled together from the far reaches of the Roman Empire. The result is known as syncretism, and the first two centuries of the Christian Era were perhaps the most syncretistic age in human history, with the possible exception of our own time.

To use an analogy from the modern era, biblical Christianity is like Teflon - nothing should stick to it that does not belong; syncretism, however, is like Velcro. It was not uncommon for pagan religions to adapt and adopt the religions of conquered people, or simply people with whom one nation traded economically (religion always did make for good sales). It was undoubtedly annoying to the apostles and to the early bishops of the Church to hear the name of Jesus being bantered about by today's street corner Stoic or yesterday's Epicurean, or the local neo-Platonist tomorrow. But stuff sticks to Velcro, and it did not seriously endanger the health of the Christian community that some of its men and doctrines were being blended into non-Christian pagan heathenism. This is what occurred later with Islam, and even later with Mormonism. The Church has always had its hands full keeping the Household of God clean, without wasting its energies tidying up the devil's backyard.

So we rarely find the apostolic fathers going on the offensive against pagan philosophies or heathen religion. There were exceptions, like Justin Martyr for example, but in general the problem with Greek philosophies only arose when Christianity started acting like Velcro instead of Teflon. There are a remarkable number of doctrines within biblical Judaism and Christianity that touch upon the same questions that man has struggled with from the beginning. Questions like 'Whence evil?' 'Where did the world come from?' and 'What is Truth?' to name only a few. When Greek and other philosophies latched onto

Church History

professing believers, and philosophical musings became mingled with theological studies, the result was the phenomenon known historically as 'Gnosticism.'

Gnosticism in its day was much like post-modernism in ours, about as easy as Jell-O to nail down in a definition or description. The key to remember is syncretism - mixing together diverse and worldly philosophical views with a more-or-less biblical Christian theology. Gnosticism, as it was found in the Church, represented accommodation and assimilation with the world and so the study of the history of the Church versus Gnosticism has direct benefits an age like our own, when accommodation and assimilation are rampant. One historian calls Gnosticism "the first attempt in the history of the Church to bring the world into subjection to the Church by interpreting Christianity in harmony with the world."³³

The other essential feature of Gnosticism stems from the meaning of the name itself. *Gnosis* is Greek for 'knowledge,' and so Gnosticism as a philosophical religion focused on knowledge rather than faith. Not, however, knowledge gained through the normal use of human reason exerted in study, but rather a knowledge that was itself a form of revelation available only to a few elite. "This 'gnosis' did not mean a mere intellectual knowledge acquired by mental processes, but rather a supernatural knowledge which came from divine revelation and enlightenment."³⁴ Gnosticism in its Christian forms was very much concerned with 'salvation,' though the meanings of such words as spirit, soul, sin, and redemption carried vastly different meanings to the Gnostic teacher than to the Christian preacher. "Gnosticism may be defined as a system which taught the cosmic redemption of the spirit through knowledge."³⁵

Gnostics divided mankind into three categories depending on the proportion of spirit trapped within their material bodies. The Gnostic

³³ Seeburg, Reinhold; *The History of Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 1977), 94.

³⁴ Neve, J. L., *A History of Christian Thought; Volume One* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; 1946), 53.

³⁵ Pelikan, 82.

anthropology used terminology familiar to New Testament readers and was thus easily incorporated into New Testament theology. First there are the 'spiritual' – the *pneumatikoi*, in whom a larger measure of spirit become attuned to the 'true knowledge' which leads to redemption. Then there are the 'psychical' or soul-ish – the *psychikoi*, who constitute the normal and unenlightened Christian. These may, with faith and good works but not through 'true knowledge,' attain to some form of redemption. Finally there are the 'carnal,' – the fleshly or *somatikoi*, for whom redemption is impossible. Christian Gnosticism tied the origin of these three classes of humanity to the biblical narrative of Creation,

Three kinds of substance came into existence: the material, the psychic, and the spiritual. Corresponding to these were three classes of men, represented by the three sons of Adam – Cain, Abel, and Seth. The truly spiritual men were not in need of salvation, and the material were incapable of it; but the psychic...were both vulnerable to the fall and capable of redemption.³⁶

To understand how mankind came to be in such categories, one must investigate the Gnostic doctrine of origins, or cosmogony. Gnosticism takes its beginning essentially from Platonism and the view that the one, true divine Being was unknown and unknowable. The ineffable God is not personal, but powerful in the manner of energy or light. From this eternal power came emanations like rays of light, called aeons, that retained a measure of divine power inversely proportional to their distance from the One. The Divine Being is pure and unadulterated Spirit and any movement away from that Spirit is a movement down the scale of power and value, ultimately arriving at the opposite end of the spectrum, with Matter. Thus Gnosticism is essentially dualistic, a character that is manifestly unbiblical but one which found many adherents throughout the world and time. Removed from pure Spirit, the universe becomes a scene of conflict between two irreconcilable opposites: spirit

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

and matter. "The world of the spirit and that of matter stand dualistically opposed to each other, as above and below, as good and bad."³⁷

One of the most diabolical among the aeons or emanations is the *Demiurge*, who is alleged to be the Creator of Matter. In 'Christian' and 'Jewish' Gnosticism it is this aeon who is equated with Jehovah of the Old Testament. To some Gnostic teachers the *Demiurge* is inherently evil, to others he/it is not so much evil as he/it is perfectly *just*. Thus arises the perennial falsehood that the God of the Old Testament was a hard deity of righteous and unforgiving justice, whereas the God of the New Testament is one of mercy and goodness. The fruit of Gnosticism has lived on long after the originally tree was felled.

The rubber meets the road in Man, in whom spirit has somehow become entrapped within Matter and for whom spiritual redemption was – for some inexplicable reason – provided by a greater aeon called 'Christ.' Neve writes, "A high estimate was attached to the person of Christ and His appearance was praised as a great turning-point in history. It was this note in their teaching which deceived so many Christians."³⁸ But because of the dualism inherent in Gnostic teaching, the *body* of Jesus was of no consequence. Indeed, the whole concept of a bodily resurrection was anathema to Gnosticism, in that it brought back into being worthless flesh, mere Matter.

Therefore the redemption that comes through Jesus Christ is not at all the redemption foreshadowed in the Old Testament and taught in the New. For starters, the man Jesus of Nazareth was not coequal or coextensive with the aeon Christ. Rather Jesus was a good man he was 'possessed' by the Christ, but he was certainly not (according to the Gnostic) the God-Man.

Christianity knows of no doctrine of atonement save through the Incarnate Son of God. But Gnosticism rejected the doctrine of Incarnation. It declared that Christ could not possibly have a body: (1) because the absolute cannot enter into

³⁷ Seeburg, 95.

³⁸ Neve, 54.

a real union with the finite; and (2) because matter is evil, and the spiritual world is ever in conflict with it.³⁹

The resultant amalgam of Christ and the man Jesus of Nazareth is thus described by *docetism*, from the Greek word that means 'seem.' Thus Jesus only 'seemed' to be the Christ and Christ only 'seemed' to die on the cross. When Jesus, the man, was nailed to the cross the impassable aeon Christ departed from him and returned to the One.⁴⁰ The redeemer of mankind was not, strictly speaking, a man at all; but rather an aeon/emanation more powerful and more good than the one (the *Demiurge*) who created the world and the bodies within which the spirits of men were trapped. "Thus Gnosticism with its docetic conception denuded the Redeemer of any real humanity and destroyed the historic Person of Christ."⁴¹ It is significant to note that Gnosticism failed to deal with, much less answer, the question as to just *how* those spirits became entangled in matter to begin with. Later developments - farther afield from orthodox Christianity - would incorporate tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism, especially reincarnation, in attempts to deal with this conundrum.

It was on this point as to the relationship between the man Jesus and the Christ that Gnosticism, at least in a nascent form, shows up in the writings of the New Testament. It appears that the apostle John was battling a form of this false teaching in his first epistle, where we find his inspired definition of the spirit of antichrist,

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

(I John 4:1-3)

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁰ Another Gnostic version has Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus' cross, as the one who actually perished on that cross.

⁴¹ Neve, 55.

Still, Gnosticism held appeal to Gentile believers especially because of the presence of revered philosophy within its tenets, on the one hand, and the offer of ultimate redemption, on the other. Since the Redeemer Christ did not effectuate Man's redemption through his death, there is no element of atonement in Gnostic Christianity. Redemption comes through knowledge; first, the knowledge that Christ the aeon came bringing to the enlightened, and then that true knowledge that came to the enlightened through spiritual revelation and insight. These insights were both teachings and practices and were denominated 'mysteries' attainable only by a select elite. In this ancient Gnosticism very much resembles such modern orders as the Masons, and parallels the elitist teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses that there are only 144,000 truly spiritual among mankind. Ultimately, in whatever form, Gnostic redemption comes by way of learning the mysteries and being able to recite or practice them among others who already 'know' them. This is the *epignosis* - the 'true knowledge' of the Gnostic religion.

Again this provides another point of contact with the New Testament writings, this time with those of the apostle Paul. The opening section of the second chapter of Colossians is a veritable salvo against Gnostic error, in which Paul utilizes many of the buzzwords of the syncretistic heresy.

*For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you ... that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to **the true knowledge of the mystery of God**, both of the Father and of Christ, **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words ... Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. **For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily**; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, ... buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, **who raised Him from the dead**. (Colossians 2:1-15)*

The “*true knowledge of the mystery of God*” does not come through esoteric human imagination, but rather is embodied in Jesus Christ in whom “*dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.*” This phrase alone would have caused serious conniptions to any self-respecting Gnostic. Paul uses the word ‘pleroma,’ translated ‘fullness’ and used by the Gnostic to describe the entirety of the emanations that proceed from the One. Paul declares unmistakably that the pleroma consists of Christ alone – who dwelt *in bodily form* in Jesus the man.

Gnostic redemption is therefore completely independent of any bodily resurrection – a doctrine the Gnostics vehemently repudiated – for only the spirit of man is either worthy or capable of being redeemed. “Gnosticism taught that the emancipated soul would simply ascend to the place of its origin – the kingdom of light – where it would present itself, repeat the mysteries, and finally be reabsorbed into the fullness of the Godhead.”⁴² Once again, the correspondence between this Gnostic redemption and Buddhist/Hindu ‘salvation’ – as well as much New Age redemption seeping into the modern church, is uncanny. “The spiritual man would shed their souls and having become intelligent spirits, would be admitted into the very pleroma.”⁴³ Ultimately the ingathering of all these spirits to the pleroma would unleash somewhat of a supernova of glorious light, that would consume all Matter, first, before consuming the Pleroma itself resulting in absolute nothingness.⁴⁴ At least one can say that in Gnosticism, nothing was Left Behind.

The practical and ethical outworking of Gnosticism took two diametrically opposite tacks. Due to the belief that Matter was inherently evil, some Gnostic sects taught a strict asceticism that denied all bodily pleasure, marriage, fine food and drink, and so forth. This may have been what Paul alluded to in Colossians,

⁴² Neve, 55.

⁴³ Pelikan, 91.

⁴⁴ *Idem.*

Church History

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:20-23)

On the opposite side of the spectrum, however, were those to whom the excesses of the body were of no redemptive consequence since the body was matter and could not interfere with the redemption of the spirit. This resulted in a moral laxity often leading to open licentiousness, a plague within professing Christian churches that may have been exemplified by the church at Corinth. If that was indeed the case – that there was an incipient Gnosticism taking root at Corinth – then the apostle’s commendation of the Corinthians believers as being “enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge (gnosis)” would have an ironic tinge to it, and his classification of them as ‘carnal’ and not as ‘spiritual’ would have been downright stinging.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

Gnosticism represented the first great battle for the heart of doctrine and practice within the Church, and the accessibility of salvation to all types of men. It was in response to this syncretistic perversion of biblical Christianity that the bishops first rose up as singular and collective defenders of the “faith once for all handed to the saints.” It was to prove a very long battle indeed.

Session 7: Early Reform Movements: Marcion & Montanus

Text Reading: I Timothy 4:1 - 11

"The present life they regarded as of no consequence except as a time of preparation for the life beyond."
(Albert Newman)

Heresy is a concept, but it never manifests itself as a concept. Heresy is known only through heretics; there is always a human face on it. And there is usually a good reason for the divergent teaching or practice, at least according to the one through whom it comes. Gnosticism had too many adherents and teachers to enumerate here; no one advocate stood out as the prime mover of Gnostic Christianity. As a philosophy it was too syncretistic, and its teachers too widely varied in their own cosmologies, theologies, and philosophies, for any one of them to be considered the leader of a movement. One might say that Gnosticism represented the 'world thought' in which Christianity fought to advance its knowledge of the truth, *"truth as it is in Jesus Christ."* Since the Christian faith is also a 'thought' it was inevitable (and remains inevitable) that it should clash with the prevailing world thought of that age. As with all subsequent battles, in some areas biblical Christianity won; in others it absorbed and adapted elements of the 'world thought' into its own.

Whereas Gnosticism appears as a seemingly faceless power in opposition to orthodox Christianity, most of the real and alleged heresies that we will encounter through the history of the Church were intimately and thoroughly embodied in an individual man. The first two examples of this phenomenon occurred around the middle of the second century - Marcion and Montanus - both of whom developed sub-church cultures within the catholic church which persisted long after their own departures. Furthermore, each movement started as *reform* efforts on the part of their leaders, as ecclesiastical traditionalism and moral laxity began to seep into the congregations throughout the catholic church.

Church History

Branded as heresies and cast out from the orthodox faith, the teachings of Marcion and Montanus both had the noble and needful goal of bringing the churches back to the purity and power of the New Testament Church. Each was fraught with error, and both probably correctly branded as heretical (one more than the other, however); yet it is crucial to take note of the fact that both were instigated not by some demonic power railing against the sanctity of the Church. Rather these two false paths – and countless more in the centuries since – were taken due to the perception that the catholic church was heading down the wrong road. Such reform movements have often forced the Church into corrective action, and stimulated within the leaders of Christianity a rejuvenation of basic biblical principles. Sadly, however, and equally often, the Church has not responded well at all.

Marcion & the Development of the Canon:

The first of these ‘reform’ movements was a reaction against the ecclesiastical traditionalism that was settling upon the Church even as early as the first half of the second century. The rise of the magisterial episcopate – a level of authoritative bishops whose judgments were fast becoming canon law – created among the congregations spread throughout the Mediterranean world a system of accountability designed to prevent both false teaching and sinful living from spreading from city to city. In and of itself, this is undeniably a good thing; unless one happens to run afoul of the system. Marcion seems to have been just such a man. He arrived at Rome sometime around AD 140, allegedly having been cast out of his home church in Sinope due to adultery.⁴⁵ Contemporary accounts have his father as the bishop of Sinope, but this fact is unverifiable. He became a member of the Roman congregation, and soon began to develop an antagonism to the ‘orthodox’ teaching of the bishop and presbyters there.

⁴⁵ Almost all that we know of Marcion, both as to his life and his teachings, comes from other writers who were, to a man, in opposition to him.

Historians disagree as to Marcion's basic philosophical paradigm, with the older of that class assigning him as a representative of Gnosticism. Schaff writes, "Marcion was the most earnest, the most practical, and the most dangerous among the Gnostics, full of energy and zeal for reforming, but restless, rough and eccentric."⁴⁶ There does appear to be a powerful element of dualism in Marcion's teachings, especially with regard to the identity of the 'God of the Old Testament' versus the 'God of the New Testament.' Yet Marcion was no Gnostic mystic, and did not set out to establish esoteric associations of 'enlightened ones' within the catholic church. "[R]ather, he sought to reform the Church by establishing rival congregations in opposition to the Catholic parishes. Marcion was thus a reformer who desired, on the basis of Paul's writings, to free the Church from the law and to plant is squarely on the Gospel."⁴⁷

It is difficult to coordinate the allegation of Marcion's adulterous behavior with the moral earnestness with which he pursued his doctrine. Although he vehemently opposed what he considered to be the pervasive Judaistic legalism within Christianity, he and the congregations he founded did not appear to advocate licentiousness. It seems that Marcion was set off by his own meditation on Jesus' words with regard to putting new wine into old wineskins. To Marcion this became a dominical commandment to the effect that Christianity was to be an entirely different sort of religion than Judaism. The latter was a religion of Law, the former a faith of grace. In Marcion's mind there developed a theological dualism between Law and Grace that prefigured many similar conflicts throughout Church history. "He magnified the contrast of law and grace into a direct antagonism."⁴⁸ The modern 'Lordship Salvation' debate has its ancient roots deep in the teachings of Marcion.

⁴⁶ Schaff, Philip; *History of the Christian Church; Volume 11* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1995 rprnt), 483.

⁴⁷ Neve, 57-58.

⁴⁸ Fisher, George Park; *History of Christian Doctrine*, 58.

It is probably incorrect to class Marcion as a Gnostic, or at least as a Gnostic *first*. It may be closer to the truth that as he worked out the implications of his own theological dualism between Law and Grace he incorporated Gnostic dualistic concepts like Matter versus Spirit, and the Just God of the Old Testament versus the Good God of the New. Thus Marcion did not come to Christianity from Gnosticism, but rather from Christianity into Gnosticism – and even then only adapting a few Gnostic concepts into his own theological system. His was a practical and not a mystical, mind. He had no place in his own faith for pagan mysteries, but struggled in his mind to establish the Christian faith wholly upon the foundation of Grace. Marcion saw himself as the ardent defender of the true Gospel and thus the true Christianity. “In his view, Christianity has no connection whatever with the past, whether of the Jewish or the heathen world, but has fallen abruptly and magically, as it were, from heaven.”⁴⁹

In this role his exemplar was Paul, who was to Marcion the only true Apostle. “Paul was the only one who had transmitted the gospel without adulteration. Paul alone knew the truth, and to him the mystery was manifested by revelation.”⁵⁰ Marcion concluded that the ‘other gospel’ of which Paul speaks in Galatians was the ‘gospel’ taught by the apostles: an adulterated gospel full of Jewish legalism and founded in the false writings of the Old Testament. In this assessment we can see Marcion’s adaptation of the Gnostic cosmology – assigning Creation and the whole of the Jewish religion to the Demiurge, and the advent of the Christ as the completely independent work of the truly good God of the New Testament. His judgment of the gospel of Peter and John, and the histories of the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and John, as adulterated stems from the content of Old Testament Scripture and heritage found in them. It did not pass Marcion’s notice that Paul’s writings were also permeated with

⁴⁹ Schaff, 485.

⁵⁰ Pelikan, 78.

Church History

Old Testament quotations and allusions. Therefore he developed his own 'canon' of Scripture, the first attempt at enumerating the truly divine writings known in the history of the Church.

Marcion set about purging the Pauline epistles of such elements as the acknowledgment of the Christian authority of the Old Testament and the identification of the Creator with the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. In place of the so-called Gospels he put a purified Gospel of Luke, which he took to be the only authentic Gospel and the one most closely connected with Paul.⁵¹

Marcion's actions should be viewed as an extreme example of those who have, across the centuries, diminished or removed the influence of Old Testament Scripture from the life and teaching of the Church. Though most have refrained from setting up a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, nonetheless the practical outworking of those who emphasize 'grace' to the exclusion of 'law' and who practically excise the Old Testament Scripture from the canon are simply a more moderate example of the spirit of Marcion. In effect, such negligence of the whole counsel of Scripture is of the same origin and has the same fruit as the 'purging' of Scripture by the second century heretic. Indeed, in order to separate the written revelation that God has joined together requires not a 'purging' but, as most historians refer to Marcion's labors, a 'mutilation.' It may be said of Marcion what has more recently been said of Dispensationalism: Attempting to rightly divide the Word of Truth, he wrongly divided the Word of God.

Yet some good came from Marcion's folly. Being the first to set the concept of an authoritative canon of Scripture before the Church, Marcion stimulated the Church to begin formulating its own canon. Apparently it did not enter into the minds of the bishops who arrayed themselves against Marcion to issue a decisive edict proclaiming the twenty-seven books of our New Testament

⁵¹ Pelikan, 79.

to be alone valid and authoritative. Rather it was the case that those who wrote against Marcion also wrote in defense of the various parts of the New Testament Scripture - defending the Gospel of Matthew here, of John there, of the General Epistles by Peter and those again of Johanne authorship - and establishing the religion of Christianity firmly within the soil of Old Testament Judaism. Orthodox Christian writers of the second century opposed both the emended canon published by Marcion and the philosophical dualism that undergirded it.

Marcion was, as one historian describes him, 'a practical genius.' The congregations he established were solid in their adherence to his teachings and to his 'canon.' Marcionite churches are reported in Asia Minor as late as the sixth century, although by that time further perversion by elements of Gnosticism and Greek dualism had almost obliterated what little remained of Christian teaching in Marcion's own life. But the very success of Marcion in spreading his message produced an even more effective counter-reformation within the Church with regard to the foundation of theological and practical authority. The tendency among the early post-apostolic fathers (i.e., Clement and Polycarp) to quote copiously and broadly from both the Old Testament and the now-recognized inspired New Testament writings, became in response to Marcion a settled practice among orthodox writers. Perhaps Marcion was the unintended author of the 'proof text,' as more and more Christian writers sought to validate their teachings with quotations and references to Scripture. In any event, it may be said that the Marcionite phenomenon moved the Church forward toward the concept of a settled canon, an authoritative corpus of writings viewed by practice and acceptance as having been *"God breathed, profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

How is someone like Marcion to be judged in the court of history? Was he a heretic, or was he a misguided zealot for what he perceived to be the truth? (One might also ask if there is a difference between the two) Marcion was almost

certainly not a Gnostic, for his teachings hold nothing but contempt for paganism and display no tendency to syncretism. In his own faith he was a Christian, in that he maintained that Christianity – the hope of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – was the only true religion. Perhaps Philip Schaff most accurately measures Marcion's pulse when he writes, "...he was utterly destitute of historical sense, and put Christianity into a radical conflict with all previous revelations of God; as if God had neglected the world for thousands of years until he suddenly appeared in Christ."⁵² If so, then Marcion not only stands as the one to whom the Church owes (unwittingly, of course) its established canon of Scripture, but also as the abiding example of what happens when one either ignores or misinterprets history, especially redemptive history.

Montanus: The First Charismatic Movement

In the first half of the nineteenth century the counties of upstate and central New York became known as the 'burnt-over district' due to the almost continual passage of revivalist evangelists through its villages and towns. That area subsequently became a seedbed of Christian heresies and aberrant Christian sects. The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Christian Science movement – all had their beginnings within these much-evangelized districts of New York. Jesus' statement with regard to the return of an exorcised demon – bringing with him seven demons far worse than himself – became true of the burnt-over district: the latter state was worse than the former.

Interestingly a similar case may be made for the region of Asia Minor known as Anatolia – the vast, central and sparsely populated region of the hinterland. The ancient names for the districts of this land are familiar to the reader of Acts: Phrygia, Pontus, Bithynia. Marcion's home town of Sinope was in Bithynia, on the shores of the Black Sea. The second of our second century 'reformers' – Montanus – hailed from an unknown village in Phrygia. Unlike

⁵² Schaff, 483.

Church History

Marcion who was apparently the child of a Christian home, Montanus was an adult convert from paganism to Christianity. His conversion is dated *circa* AD 157, just about the time generally attributed to the death of Marcion, AD 160.

The circumstances of Montanus' conversion are lost to history, but it appears that he was attracted to the purity of Christian morality, at least as it was taught in Scripture. Having become a Christian, however, he was immediately stunned by the moral laxity and worldliness of much of professing Christianity around him. This may seem a remarkable statement to the modern believer, taught for so long to believe that the early Church was kept pure by the reality of persecution and the threat of martyrdom. But moral laxity and worldliness had already infected the Corinthian Church during the lifetime of the apostle Paul, and this condition continued to afflict congregations then as it does now. Montanus' reaction in the middle of the second century has been repeated sporadically throughout the history of the Church, under different leaders and different names. "Montanism was the first movement of any distinction that was called forth by the problem of the Church's worldliness."⁵³

Montanus' reform movement was the polar opposite of Marcion's. Marcion was practical and stern, seeking to establish Christian congregations on a sound and solid foundation of grace and not law. Montanus was a mystic, and claimed to be either the instrument, or the incarnation (depending on whose history one reads), of the Paraclete promised by the Lord Jesus Christ. Montanus believed and taught that, as the promised Paraclete, he was the harbinger of the end of the age and that after he and his two female disciples passed, there would be no further prophecy. He believed himself to be the instrument of divine revelation - as the age of the Father was revealed in the Old Testament, and the age of the Son revealed in the New Testament, now the age of the Spirit was being revealed in and through Montanus.

⁵³ Neve, 59.

It is important to note that even in the middle years of the second century, the phenomenon of prophecy and of the 'charismata' – the spiritual gifts – was still present within and among Christian congregations, and accepted as valid by Christian bishops. Montanus could not be opposed merely on the basis that 'the gifts had passed away with the last of the apostles.' Furthermore, Montanus' own contention that the diminution of the operation of spiritual gifts within the church – a historical fact, while still in operation such gifts were becoming increasingly rare – was due to the moral laxity and worldliness of the Church was hard to deny. Like so many charismatic leaders of the modern era, Montanus maintained that the Holy Spirit had been 'grieved' by the sin of the Church, and 'pushed out' by the increasing legalism, hierarchical structure, and traditionalism of the congregations. Opposition to Montanus was made even more difficult in that he represented a revitalization of the apocalyptic expectation of the end of the age that so vividly characterized the earliest years of the Church, but had faded into a distant memory. "When the apocalyptic vision became less vivid and the church's polity more rigid, the extraordinary operations of the Spirit characteristic of the early church diminished in both frequency and intensity."⁵⁴ The Church of the mid- to late-second century had become somewhat sedate and resigned to an indefinitely delayed Parousia; this Montanus attacked head on.

Being revivalistic in nature and moralistic in tone, and coupled with the claim of divine inspiration through the Holy Paraclete, Montanism caught hold within the Mediterranean world and spread rapidly through the churches. No less than the great Latin theologian Tertullian would become a devout Montanist and give impetus and sanction to the movement. Islay Burns captures the attractiveness of this phenomenon – an attractiveness most recently found by many within the Charismatic Movement,

⁵⁴ Pelikan, 98.

Church History

It was orthodox in faith, enthusiastic in feeling, rigoristic in discipline, and ascetic in life. Originating, in great measure, in violent reaction from the listless formalism which was then first creeping over the Church, its great theme was an exaggerated doctrine of the Spirit's influences and gifts. It proclaimed a new dispensation of the divine Paraclete, whom the Lord had indeed announced but who had never till then fully come.⁵⁵

Montanus overreached, that was his great error and the downfall of his reform movement. Delusional, to say the least, he led his disciples into the kind of spiritual elitism that Paul condemned among the Corinthians a hundred years earlier. He denounced second marriages of widows and widowers as adulterous, and maintained that even first marriages were merely a divine accommodation to the weakness of the flesh and should be avoided by the 'spiritual.' His asceticism was severe and was applied to all 'true believers.' "Prescribing for all Christians a monastic rigour which the Catholic Church in its sternest mood confined to the clergy and professed ascetics alone, they heaped up mortifications and fastings, and multiplied days of special penance and prayer."⁵⁶ Montanism engendered a contempt among its adherents for the members of all non-Montanist churches, and claimed that only truly Spirit-filled Montanist prophets could absolve sinners from their sin.⁵⁷

Montanism's elitist attitude toward 'non-spiritual' believers, along with its over-the-top ascetic rigor, doomed it to failure from the start. But its appearance on the scene may have been the impetus that brought the Church to a post-pneumatic age wherein the 'charismata' - the gifts of the Spirit - were declared to have passed away. As long as the church continued to recognize the validity of spiritual operations within the society of believers, it was forced to analyze each individual case as to whether the inspiration was divine or demonic. The 'defender of the orthodox faith' was Hippolytus, a disagreeable but erudite

⁵⁵ Burns, 154.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁷ Seeburg, 106.

theologian in Rome. Hippolytus cut the Gordian Knot by declaring both that the end of the age was not imminent and that the gift of prophecy had ended with the death of John, the last apostle. He defended the rise of the episcopacy and the authoritative nature of the writings of the apostles, against the mercurial and dangerous charismatic prophets whose personal claims to revelation were disruptive to the peace and security of the Church. "By setting the authority of the biblical prophets, both in the Old and in the New Testament, against the claims of the new prophets, Hippolytus struck at the foundation of the Montanist movement. But in doing so, Hippolytus and the theologians that followed him also struck at the Christian movement that had preceded them."⁵⁸

Hippolytus did not eradicate Montanism, nor the 'spirit' of Montanism that has reappeared throughout the centuries in the form of pneumatic communities of believers who claim the revival of the charismata. "The history of the church has never been altogether without the spontaneous gifts of the Holy Spirit, even where the authority of the apostolic norms has been most incontestable."⁵⁹ As long as worldliness and moral laxity are present in the church, as well as formalism and stale traditionalism, there will be 'Montanist' uprisings. Neve summarizes both the good and the bad that resulted from the advent of Montanus and his movement's eventual demise.

The elimination of Montanism reacted mightily upon the Church. It strengthened the prestige of the Canon. It sanctioned the spirit of conniving at moral laxity, and as a result the differentiation between a higher and lower morality. It raised the position of the bishops, and promoted the development which changed the Church from a communion possessing the assurance of salvation to an institution which must guarantee salvation.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Pelikan, 106-107.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁰ Neve, 60.

Session 8: The Development of Theology

Text Reading:

*“The biography of their lives
is also the theological history of their times.”
(Islay Burns)*

It is probably safe to say that during the first generation or so of the Christian Church, the thought never occurred to anyone within the churches to write a Systematic Theology. First the first half century the apostles were still around, available to give counsel and direction. After them came the apostolic fathers, men who sat at the feet of the apostles, to whom the apostle entrusted the propagation of sound doctrine and practice. The churches founded by the apostles and their legates were relatively small, self-contained and self-governed, and the charismata were still in full vigor. Furthermore, there was the widespread belief in the imminent return of the Lord; no credence whatsoever would have been given to someone claiming that 2,000 years would pass and still the Lord would not have returned. Indeed, the danger in the early church came from those who claimed the Lord Jesus *had already* returned; a claim which could only have been believed if there existed a pervasive view that the Second Coming would not be long delayed after the Ascension.

The lack of a theological system, however, does not mean that the early Church was without means for establishing ‘orthodox’ faith, and for discerning those who made a fair profession of faith in Jesus Christ from those who did not. Traditionally viewed as being handed down by the apostles, the “Rules of Faith” are found early in the post-apostolic era as simple but firm guidelines as to what constituted orthodoxy within the widely scattered congregations. These *regula fidei* were brief, easily-memorized summaries of New Testament doctrine, particularly those points directly impinging upon the Trinitarian nature of God, the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Church with its

Church History

sacraments. One of the earliest of the *regula fidei* is now known as the Old Roman Symbol, and one can easily see the development of such formulae from this to the more famous Apostles' Creed.

Old Roman Symbol

I believe in God the Father almighty;
and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our
Lord,

Who was born from the Holy Spirit and
the Virgin Mary,
 Who under Pontius Pilate was
 crucified and buried,

on the third day rose again from the
dead, ascended to heaven,
sits at the right hand of the Father,
whence He will come to judge the living
and the dead;

and in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy Church,
the remission of sins,
 the resurrection of the flesh
(the life everlasting)

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
 Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our
Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died and was
 buried; he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the
dead; he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God
the Father almighty; from there he will
come 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 life everlasting. Amen

These early confessions covered the essentials with regard to the Christian faith and were sufficient testimony by an unbeliever to warrant baptism. Later, however, with the rise in false teaching and practice throughout the congregations, a separation occurred between a person's confession of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and baptism. A period of time - in some instances years - would elapse, during which the convert would undergo catechism training. At the beginning of this phase the training was conducted somewhat informally by a presbyter or by the bishop of a diocese. Later, as the number of converts grew to significant percentages of the local population, catechetical schools began to

Church History

appear. These were not seminaries in the modern sense of the term, but they did represent a focalizing of the academic aspects of Christianity into a handful of 'schools,' undoubtedly leading to the seminary concept. Converted philosophers, men who were gifted at teaching but not necessarily desiring the burden of a pastorate, itinerant Christian 'rabbis,' all now found a home for their didactic labors in the catechetical schools.

The advent and growth of these schools, along with the passing of decades from the death of the last apostle and the progressive disappearance of the charismata from the local congregations, combined to produce a more settled atmosphere in which to investigate and systematize the Christian religion. As is so often the case with religious studies, the catechetical schools that arose in different regions of the Mediterranean world developed unique theological styles and emphases, and often disagreed vigorously with one another. Four major theological centers of study arose from the middle of the 2nd Century to the beginning of the 4th Century. In chronological order of impact upon the overall ('catholic') church, these centers were Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, and Rome.



Church History

The locations of these schools also represented a growing dissimilarity – that would eventually lead to a theological and practical split within Christianity – between Eastern, Greek-speaking churches (Antioch & Alexandria) on the one hand, and Western, Latin-speaking churches (Carthage & Rome) on the other. The differences in language and culture between the eastern and the western reaches of the Roman world had existed for generations prior to the advent of Christianity. What is interesting with regard to the development of theology within the catholic church spread across the whole of the region, is the emphasis on law and practice in the West versus an emphasis on grace and spiritualism in the East. The speculative, philosophical character of the Greek pervaded the growing theology of that region of the Church, while the practical, legal mind of the Roman permeated the doctrines of the Western regions.

These four centers of theological development and learning are each represented by a famous theologian of the period from the middle of the 2nd Century to the middle of the 3rd. For Antioch, that ‘representative’ man was Irenaeus – born and raised, converted no doubt, in Asia Minor though he was to serve his Episcopal office in the southern coastal regions of Gaul (modern France). Clement of Alexandria, but even more particularly his successor Origen, stood for the Alexandrian school and school of thought. In the starkest possible contrast to the Alexandrian Origen, we find the presbyter Tertullian of Carthage and his heir Cyprian, later bishop of Carthage. The leading thinkers of Rome often were men who received their academic and oratorical training in the Imperial City, but who practiced their theological study and writing elsewhere. The theologian who came to represent Rome most powerfully in the first millennia of Church History is Augustine, whose story and theology warrant the devotion of at least one lesson and will therefore be put off until a later chapter.

Of the earlier men Islay Burns writes, “They are emphatically representative men; each stands as the type of a class, each occupies a most intimate relation with some one of the leading phases of the intellectual and

spiritual struggles of the age. The biography of their lives is also the theological history of their times.”⁶¹ Burns adds Justin Martyr to the beginning of his list, but Justin’s contribution to the church, while deserving of note, was apologetical rather than theological. He was an eloquent writer and speaker, but probably should not be classed among the theologians.

Irenaeus:

In support of this contention, one historian claims “Irenaeus is the first writer of the Post-Apostolic Age who deserves the name of theologian.”⁶² Later in life (no one knows exactly when), Irenaeus became the bishop of Lyon in southern Gaul. He was born, raised, converted, and evidently taught in the Christian faith entirely within Asia Minor. The date of Irenaeus’ birth is, of course, unknown; but it can be placed within the first half of the first century due to the fact that he was a companion and disciple of Polycarp, who was martyred for the faith in AD 155. Thus historians place the birth of Irenaeus somewhere around AD 130. His death is easier to place, though not exactly, to around AD 200 as by that time he was a bishop of a growing religion within the Roman Empire and was thus a man of some notoriety to the Romans, and fame to the Christians. Though early tradition claims that Irenaeus met his end through martyrdom, recent historical study has turned up no evidence for that and one must keep in mind the prevailing view in the early church regarding the elevated dignity of the martyr’s death over a mere natural passing.

The school of Antioch, as represented by Irenaeus, laid claim to apostolicity through John. In his many writings, Irenaeus makes frequent reference to the last of the Apostles and his own connection through intermediate teachers such as Ignatius and Polycarp. As to his theological contribution to the catholic church, Irenaeus is known preeminently as the Anti-Gnostic Father for his many polemics against the Gnostic heresy and his many

⁶¹ Burns, 122.

⁶² Quoted by Neve, 81.

treatises in support of sound, biblical, Johannine Christianity. “The great work of his life was the defense of the pure gospel of Christ against the insidious and pernicious theories of the Gnostics, which had just before reached their climax of bold and impious speculation, and threatened to sap the very foundations of the Christian faith.”⁶³ Irenaeus was therefore vigorously anti-speculative, and his theological system was far from innovative. Rather it was a stern reiteration and reminder to the church of the doctrines ‘once for all handed down to the saints’ by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Owing perhaps to the necessity of combating the Gnostic heresies, or perhaps to his own spiritual and doctrinal lineage from John, the writings of Irenaeus were focused heavily on the biblical teaching (and the accepted Church belief) concerning the Person of Jesus Christ. The bishop of Lyon did not, however, attempt any metaphysical or philosophical dissection or description of the unity of the Divine and the Human in Jesus Christ. Irenaeus toed the traditional line, stemming from the *regula fidei* but worked out with Scripture references and proofs from both Testaments. “His weapons were twofold – the testimony of the word, and the testimony of the Church. In the one he found the one infallible source and test of truth; in the other its living witness.”⁶⁴

J. L. Neve interestingly calls Irenaeus’ theology “a theology of biblical facts.”⁶⁵ This is not to say that the other theologians that will be mentioned utilized other sources of truth than the Bible (though some did). Rather it is to emphasize that Irenaeus, at least in matters of doctrine, “*did not go beyond that which was written.*” Heavily colored by the biblical teachings of John, Irenaeus’ theology may be summarized as follows,

Christ is understood to be the revelation of God. As such He is pre-existent and co-eternal. The Father and the Son belong together from all eternity. Just as Christ is the revelation of God, so God has always been revealing the Son; and

⁶³ Burns, 129.

⁶⁴ Burns, 134-5.

⁶⁵ Neve, 79.

the relation between the two includes the personal differentiation. The manner in which the Father generated the Son is altogether incomprehensible.⁶⁶

The downside to the theological framework and methodology of Irenaeus, and really of the whole Anti-Gnostic and anti-speculative field of early church theology, is that the necessity of 'connecting' with the first apostles generated an unhealthy development of Apostolic Succession. Irenaeus was not the inventor of the Roman Papacy, and in his own lifetime he opposed a forced obedience of the widely spread episcopate to the bishop of Rome. Nonetheless his language is intemperate with regard to Rome, often unbelievable, and had the unintended consequence of being used in defense of the eventual elevation of that diocese over all the others. "Irenaeus calls Rome the greatest, the oldest church, acknowledged by all, founded by the two most illustrious apostles, Peter and Paul, the church with which, on account of her more important precedence, all Christendom must agree."⁶⁷ It is beyond the scope of this particular lesson to refute the views of the theologians introduced, but even a cursory knowledge of the New Testament and of early Church History will confirm that Rome was not the oldest church, nor was it founded by Paul or Peter. But the height of glory of the Roman Empire was through the middle and end of the 2nd Century, and Rome possessed a certain magnetism that attracted the attention and devotion of even this unworldly Christian bishop. Sadly Irenaeus' words would help to validate and vindicate the progressive usurpation of ultimate Episcopal authority by the bishop of Rome, resulting in the Roman Papacy.

The Alexandrian School: Clement & Origen

Alexandria was one of the many cities the great Greek conqueror named for himself as he and his armies overwhelmed the Ancient Near East during the 4th Century before Christ. All of the others of that name, however, faded quickly from memory as the Greek troops were turned back after Alexander's death in

⁶⁶ Neve, 79-80.

⁶⁷ Schaff, 159.

Church History

Babylon in 323 BC. Alexandria, Egypt survived and thrived, becoming a center of learning in the Greek world – a second Athens in the Mediterranean region. Greek philosophy flourished there for centuries, and was synthesized with Judaism by the influx of Jewish immigrants attracted to Alexander’s friendliness toward their race and religion, and to the cosmopolitan features of Egypt in that age. The Septuagint – the Bible most likely used by Jesus and his disciples, and most definitely used by the Apostle Paul – was a Greek translation of the Old Testament ordered into existence by Ptolemy Philadelphus, the second in succession from Alexander along the Ptolemy line. The Hebrew Talmud explains,



Ptolemy Philadelphus

King Ptolemy once gathered 72 Elders. He placed them in 72 chambers, each of them in a separate one, without revealing to them why they were summoned. He entered each one's room and said: "Write for me the Torah of Moshe, your teacher." God put it in the heart of each one to translate identically as all the others did."

Ptolemy was not a convert to Judaism, but rather a patron of the literary arts. He was building the greatest library in the world (numbered by some historians as one of the seven ancient wonders of the world), to which he commissioned translators of all races and religions to transcribe their books into Greek. Inadvertently, however, he started the blending of Hebrew Scripture and Greek philosophy that would become so violently problematic within Second Temple Judaism and within Early Christianity. Alexandria was the hotbed of this conflict.

It is therefore understandable that Alexandria would be the first Christian diocese to have a stated catechetical school formed for the training of young converts, and of men to the ministry. Learning has ever and always been the mainstay of Greek philosophy, though not always the learning of Truth. The pattern of the great philosophers – the Academy of Plato, the Lyceum of Aristotle

Church History

- were bound to be duplicated within Christianity, and no Greek city of the early Christian era was more attuned to the synthesis of Greek and Jewish and Christian thought than Alexandria.

Thus by the latter decades of the 2nd Century we find a catechetical school already up and running, and gaining both fame and infamy within the broader Church world. Pantaenus, a former Stoic philosopher, is believed to have been the first teacher and perhaps founder of the Alexandrian catechetical school. But it was his successor, Clement, who put the school on the map, so to speak, by his erudition, oratorical skills, and controversial lifestyle. Reinhold Seeburg writes of Clement that he was "a talented dilettante with the virtues and vices which belong to such character."⁶⁸ It is difficult to sort the precious from the vile in Clement's writings, so well mixed and blended was his synthesis of Christianity with any and all other brands of learning in his day. Islay Burns gives a much more generous summation of Clement's style than most Christian historians.

In his philosophical system he was rather an eclectic than the follower of any exclusive school, and delighted to gather in the spoils of all human thought and learning and lay them at the foot of the Cross.⁶⁹

Owing to the difficulty of sorting out the orthodox from the speculative in Clement, we turn to his disciple and more famous successor, Origen, as the more representative of the two for the Alexandrian theological paradigm. Origen is nothing to history if not controversial, as Neve writes, "He was a man whom posterity has with equal right honored as the actual founder of an ecclesiastical and scientific theology, and reproached as the originator of many heretical opinions."⁷⁰ Again Burns, ever diligent to find something nice to say about everyone, defends the more negative aspects of Origen's personality and theology, "The teeming thoughts of so prolific and so creative a mind on all

⁶⁸ Quoted by Neve, 82.

⁶⁹ Burns, 137.

⁷⁰ Neve, 83.

Church History

subjects, human and divine, could not be always kept within the limits of a simple traditional faith."⁷¹

At the foundation of Origen's theological system, putting him at immediate odds with the Western schools, was his wholehearted embrace of Philosophy as the key to knowledge. "Philosophy is the light of reason which the Logos has imparted to mankind. It is the preparation for the higher light which shines in the Gospel. Through the Greek philosophy the soul is prepared beforehand for the reception of faith on which the truth builds up the edifice of knowledge."⁷² As much as Irenaeus represented the Anti-Gnostic, Origen represented the Christian Gnostic.

A true Gnostic, said he, is one who bases this thinking on the faith of the Church. In these thoughts Origen entirely agreed with Clement. The cultured man, who sees the Logos in Christ, is the perfect Christian. He sees divine truth in all things. Every fact is merely a symbol to him of abstract teachings which express higher truths.⁷³

It must be said that Origen was an ardent and orthodox believer in the traditional *regula fidei* with regard to all of the foundation tenets of Christianity. His devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, for which he suffered great physical torment in persecution, and his devotion to the Scriptures together leave no reasonable doubt as to the validity of his profession of faith. He was, as Neve puts it, "a pioneer in the quest for theological method."⁷⁴ For good or for ill, Origen was blazing a trail with regard to the 'how' of theology and of biblical interpretation. Thus he would provide the opening salvoes, and frequently the very terminology, that would later sound throughout the Church on such matters as the nature of the Trinity, and the unity of the Divine and the Human in Christ Jesus. He was a man who dug deep, but not always with the right

⁷¹ Burns, 140.

⁷² Neve, 84.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁴ *Idem.*

spade or even in the right plot of ground. The best example of the questionable and speculative methodology of Origen is found in his threefold sense of Scripture.

Origen believed that God first revealed Himself through the created order – the Cosmos, in itself an orthodox belief on the basis of Psalm 19,

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.* (Psalm 19:1-4)

Origen's speculative talents come into play in his interpretation of the Cosmos, which he views along Greek philosophical lines as consisting of three spheres: the *spiritual*, the *psychical*, and the *material*. Origen then transfers this threefold nature of the Cosmos to God's second revelation, the Scriptures. In reverse order Origen assigns to Scripture first, a *somatic* or *literal* sense "upon which the simple souls of the multitude depend."⁷⁵ The second, and deeper, level of meaning is the *psychical* or *moral* sense "which refers to the individual soul in this life and to its ethical relations, including its relations to God."⁷⁶ Finally there is the third and deepest level of meaning, the *pneumatic* or *speculative* sense. At this level Origen's Christian Gnosticism appears in all of its glory. "Here we have the real spiritual content of Scripture – the profounder meaning which is sealed off to all save the mature believer."⁷⁷

This speculative hermeneutic – the search for the deepest level *pneumatic* sense of Scripture – throws biblical interpretation outside of all objective bounds, and opens up the possibility – inevitability, really – of wild and far-fetched

⁷⁵ Neve, 86.

⁷⁶ *Idem.*

⁷⁷ *Idem.*

interpretations of biblical passages. This is what we find in Origen, and in all subsequent theologians and scholars who have employed the spiritualizing method. Of this category of exegetes we find Martin Luther a sterling example even in the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Still, returning to Origen, we find his basic doctrine to be sound and orthodox – even strong in the case of his view of the eternality of Jesus Christ and in his doctrine of the Trinity. In denial of the Gnostic view that Christ was a creation, an emanation, from the Divine One, Origen believed that “The generation of the Son took place not simply as the condition of creation, but as of itself necessary, for where there is light (i.e., God the Father) there must be the shedding forth of rays. But because the life of God is bound to no time, the objectivizing of His life in the Son must also lie outside of all time. It is not, therefore, an act of God accomplished once and forever, but an eternally continued exercise of living power.”⁷⁸

No doubt the jury will remain hung with regard to Origen – whether the orthodox or the heretical prevails in his theological system. But it cannot be doubted that Origen’s writings made (and still make) one think. “With all his imperfections and aberrations, he did more to quicken and to fructify Christian thought, and to lay the deep foundations of a mature and fully-developed theology, than any other uninspired man before the great Nicene age.”⁷⁹ There can also be no doubt as to the price Origen paid for his adherence to Christianity. Expelled by a jealous bishop from the Alexandrian school, he gathered an equally large following in Caesarea along the coast of Palestine. Here he was caught up in the Decian persecution of the middle years of the 3rd Century and, though he survived the torture to which he was subjected, died of his injuries a few years later, in AD 254, at the age of 69.

⁷⁸ Neve, 87.

⁷⁹ Burns, 141.

The Beginning of Latin Theology: Tertullian & Cyprian

The anti-speculative viewpoint in early Christian theology was solidly represented by the Carthaginian presbyter, Tertullian. Tertullian was quintessentially Roman, all the way down to his name: Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus, born to a Roman centurion and therefore born to a life of privilege and education. Historians debate whether Tertullian was actually a Roman jurist (judge) prior to his conversion to Christianity, but the judicial characteristic of his later Christian writings would tend to support at least some advanced education in the legal profession. His was a practical and analytical mind, and was as adverse to abstract thought as Origen's was congenial. In opposition to the speculative philosophical methodology of the East, Tertullian famously asked, "What have Athens and Jerusalem, the Academy and the Church, the heretics and the Christians in common each other? Our doctrine comes from the hall of Solomon who himself commanded us to seek the Lord in simplicity of heart. Those who teach a Platonic, Stoic, dialectic Christianity may be responsible for what they are doing."⁸⁰

In fact Tertullian employed Stoic philosophy pervasively throughout his own works and theology; he was a philosophical *realist* and an ardent *materialist*. He believed spirits to be material substances, a view he extended in application to God Himself. He stands as a timeless example of how hard (if not impossible) it is to escape the philosophical milieu in which one lives, thinks, and writes. Tertullian's own brand of Stoic Christianity tended heavily toward the importance of duty and of the payment of debt. "The entire religious and moral life of the Christian was viewed from the angle of obligation. He liked expressions which pictured man as God's debtor, and which spoke of a meriting

⁸⁰ Quoted in Neve, 93.

and of a rendering of satisfaction. Christ is pre-eminently the Bringer and Interpreter of the New Law.”⁸¹

On the positive side, Tertullian laid the foundation within the Trinitarian discussion for the theological understanding of the full humanity of Christ Jesus. “He emphasized that Christ was really Man, possessed of a rational human soul and spirit. His suffering was in the ‘human substance’ of His Person, but because of the union of the human and the Divine, Tertullian spoke of the ‘sufferings of God,’ and said that God was ‘truly crucified.’”⁸² In his writings on the doctrine of the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ, Tertullian was the first to use terms that would become central to both the debate and the Athanasian solution a century later. As far as we can tell, he was the first to even use the word ‘Trinity’ (Latin, *trinitas*) to describe the Godhead. In his own words (and reflecting his later adherence to Montanism, as well as his faithfulness to the ancient Rule of Faith) we find Tertullian possessing the oldest extant theological definition of the Trinity,

In the course of time, then, the Father forsooth was born, and the Father suffered, God Himself, the Lord Almighty, whom in their preaching they declare to be Jesus Christ. We, however, as we indeed always have done (and more especially since we have been better instructed by the Paraclete, who leads men indeed into all truth), believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or οἰκονομία, as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. Him *we believe* to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her – being both Man and God, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ... in thinking that one cannot believe in One Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the very selfsame Person. As if in this way also one were not All, in that All are of One, by unity (that is) of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three *Persons* – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in

⁸¹ Neve, 95.

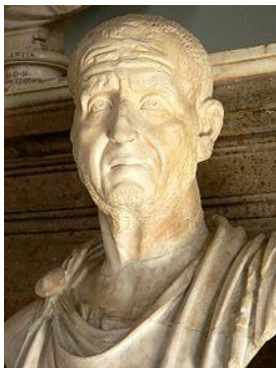
⁸² *Idem*.

Church History

aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.⁸³

Tertullian was never more than a presbyter in the Church, but his mind was such that he overshadowed all of the bishops of his day and has come to be known as the Father of Latin Christianity. His spiritual and ecclesiastical heir in Carthage was Cyprian, who rose to become bishop of that city in AD 249. He was by the time of his conversion in middle age, a wealthy man from his prior employment as an orator ('a pleader of cases in court,' a very lucrative occupation in ancient Rome). Due perhaps to his wealth, and his generosity with that wealth, he rose quickly from the time of his baptism first to become a deacon in the Carthaginian church, then a presbyter and then, by popular acclaim, bishop. His rapid rise to leadership, and his relatively late conversion to Christianity, classify Cyprian as a novice who should not have been in such a position of power. He was, perhaps, saved from promulgating any heresy by the advent of the Decian persecution, which gave another significant twist to his life and his contribution to catholic Christianity.

Cyprian fled from the first outbreak of persecution unleashed in the mid-



Emperor Decius (249-251)

second century by the Emperor Trajanus Decius. The Decian was one of the few 'general' persecutions that befell Christianity in the Roman world, applied with relative uniformity across the whole empire. This inscription was unearthed during an archaeological dig in Egypt, describing the process whereby a true Christian was to be discovered and punished,

⁸³ http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/tertullian_on_the_trinity.htm

Church History

All the inhabitants of the empire were required to sacrifice before the magistrates of their community 'for the safety of the empire' by a certain day. When they sacrificed they would obtain a certificate (libellus) recording the fact that they had complied with the order. That is, the certificate would testify the sacrificant's loyalty to the ancestral gods and to the consumption of sacrificial food and drink as well as the names of the officials who were overseeing the sacrifice.

The prevalence of Gnostic teachings concerning the wickedness of the body and the glory of martyrdom had led to many professing Christians actually seeking out death for their faith. Hundreds, if not thousands, of believers were voluntarily presenting themselves before the Roman magistrates so that they could repudiate the Decian Edict and, consequently, die for their Lord. Cyprian considered this to be foolishness and taught that it was no sin to escape persecution if such an escape was made possible by God's providence. When the tide of persecution rose as far as Carthage, Cyprian escaped into the desert, from there corresponding with the believers remaining in the city. When he returned he faced the castigation of those who considered that he had 'lapsed,' had denied the faith by not staying and facing certain death. Cyprian, however, ably defended the difference between denial of the faith, which he never did, and foolishly seeking martyrdom.

This controversy was the first of many to rage within the Church as to the policy toward professing believers who do, in fact, deny the faith during times of persecution. Cyprian himself took a middle view between a lax policy allowing the 'lapsi' to return merely upon re-confession of faith and the rigid view of the Novatians, who held that the lapsed could never be reunited to the church and could only hope to be reunited to Christ through martyrdom. Cyprian, the pre-eminent episcopalian of the early Church, held that only the bishop could reinstate a lapsed believer into the fellowship of the congregation, and that if a bishop did so, it was binding on the whole church. In other words, those whom the bishop received were to be received by all.

Church History

Cyprian put to rest any residual doubts concerning his own steadfastness and courage during the sequel to the Decian persecutions. In AD 256 a new edict of religious uniformity was passed under the pen of the Emperor Valerian I. This time Cyprian remained in Carthage tending to the needs of his congregation and preparing them for the violence that was to come. He made his 'good confession' before the Roman proconsul and was sentenced first to exile, then after a year was allowed to return to house arrest. A new proconsul instigated a new trial of Cyprian, who maintained the same steadfast testimony of faith, for which he was sentenced to death by the sword. The sentence was carried out immediately.

Session 9: The Mystery of the Trinity

Text Reading: I Timothy 3:16

*“The climax of the doctrinal development of the early church
was the dogma of the Trinity.”
(Jaroslav Pelikan)*

Jesus Christ is the center of Christianity, so it stands to reason that the premier controversy of the first three centuries of Christian history would center on Jesus Christ. The very name of the revered founder of this new sect – Jesus *Christ* – formed a crux or fulcrum upon which the Christology of the Church would balance, or break. He was *Jesus*, the son of Mary & Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth, the remarkable Jewish rabbi who *“spoke with authority and not as the scribes.”* Yet He was *the Christ*, the Anointed One, the Promised Messiah of Israel, the Servant of Yahweh who, according to orthodoxy, was God Himself. He was divine; he was human – how can these things be? The Jews stumbled on His divinity; the Greeks on His humanity. The pendulum swung to extremes, with the Ebionites denying the divinity of Jesus and the Gnostics or Docetists denying the humanity of Christ. It was inevitable that the relationship of the divine to the human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth would become a theological flash point with many different teachings – orthodox and heterodox – mixing to form a volatile and explosive situation. What is perhaps most remarkable is the fact that the ignition did not take place until almost 250 years into the history of the Church.

This delay in the confrontation that must assuredly overtake and threaten to consume early Christianity may be explained along several lines. First, as we have seen before, the newness of the faith and the earnest expectation of the imminent return of the Lord to usher in the Millennial Kingdom both tended to stunt theological contemplation. Doctrinal statements were set down as articles of faith without much in the way of critical analysis. Salvation is by grace

Church History

through faith, *leading* to knowledge; not by knowledge leading to grace. The strength of the faith of the Church was, and has always been, firmly planted in non-theological hymns such as that of Paul in I Timothy,

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh,
Vindicated in the Spirit,
Beheld by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory. (I Timothy 3:16)*

These stanzas each contain a tremendous amount of rational tension, a tension that would build as time passed and the philosophers of the Church would devote increasing time to the implications of each thought. The earliest believers knew enough to reject as heretical those who held that Jesus was merely a man, a mighty teacher; and to treat with the same opprobrium those who attributed all the work to a demigod called 'Christ,' who inhabited the man Jesus until the point of the man's death on the cross. The inaugural sermon of the Christian Church established a rudimentary, yet firm and true, Christology upon which later theological reflection would be built, "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" (Acts 2:36)

A second reason why the unavoidable controversy tarried for almost three centuries may be found in the nature of the controversy itself. Paul calls it a 'mystery,' and philosophically speaking it is the most profound mystery to have confronted man in all of history. The standard questions of 'Who am I' and 'Why am I here' pale in comparison to Christ's abiding and timeless query: "*Who do you say that I am?*" As we will find with other theological controversies within Church history, the earliest disciples did not really possess the *terminology* with which to answer the question regarding the nature of divinity and humanity within the one person of Jesus Christ. The theologians of the first two Christian

centuries would engage in skirmishes, perimeter battles within which one aspect or another of the crucial question were controverted. In doing so, and thus defending the orthodoxy of the Rules of Faith to the extent of their ability, they perhaps unwittingly began to furnish the very language with which the great Athanasius would hammer together the biblical dogma of the Trinity, a dogma that has remained remarkably constant and settled for seventeen hundred years.

That very stability of the doctrinal settlement formulated by Athanasius as the Council of Nicæa actually presents modern students of the dogma – both its content and its history – with a unique challenge. It is simply very hard to get worked up over so ancient a controversy, or to focus much attention of thought upon a theological point agreed upon by every major, and most minor, segments of Christianity the world over. One must almost relive the development of the problem before any true and lasting appreciation may be had for the solution. Thus this particular lesson – essentially ‘Part I’ of the Trinitarian development – will trace the development of the question itself, with the next lesson dealing more particularly with the Nicæan/Athanasian answer.

The fundamental question we are dealing with is, again, that which Jesus Himself presented to His disciples: *“Who do you say that I am?”* This question, if it is to have any degree of biblical content in the answer, must be thoroughly informed by what the Scriptures say regarding who Jesus Christ was and is. This will form the first portion of our analysis: *“Who does the Bible say that I am?”* In light of the historical development of the controversy, however, we turn to the more general dominical question that came before this one, *“Who do men say that I am?”* The various answers to this question from the days of the apostles to the calling of the Council of Nicæa usually stemmed from an imbalanced view of what the Bible had to say about the nature of the Person of Jesus Christ. This biblical imbalance was often motivated by, or exacerbated by, unbiblical Greek philosophical views that moulded biblical passages into an *a priori* Christology, effectively shutting out many other pertinent and important verses. We will

briefly visit several of the more influential 'imbalanced' views as we move along the biblical record concerning the identity of Jesus Christ.

We note at this point that the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth was never an issue of debate either within or without the Church. Orthodoxy proclaimed Jesus' birth of the virgin Mary, again without much deep contemplation. But no one doubted that Jesus was truly a man. Further, and again within the recognized boundaries of orthodoxy, the fact that the divine Christ was somehow intimately and integrally related to the human Jesus was an undisputed point. Pelikan notes that even the heretical teaching of docetism tacitly acknowledges the necessity of at least some relationship between the human and the divine. "Yet the very existence of docetism is also a testimony to the tenacity of the conviction that Christ had to be God, even at the expense of his true humanity."⁸⁴ Thus we may establish as historical 'givens' the following points:

1. Jesus of Nazareth was truly human, born of the virgin Mary in some mysterious way.
2. The Christ was in some manner divine, His relationship with Jesus real and intimate, though undoubtedly mysterious.

The philosophical milieu of the Mediterranean world freely allowed the interrelation of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ, though many formulations of this relationship strained, and some broke, the recognized bounds of orthodoxy. A more fundamental question, as Pelikan summarizes, had to do with the relationship of the divine Christ with the divine God. Speaking of this matter of how the controversy itself seemed to tarry so long, Pelikan writes, "They also had to await the clarification of the more fundamental problem, which was not the relation of the divine in Christ to his earthly life but

⁸⁴ Pelikan, 174.

the relation of the divine in Christ to the divine in the Father.”⁸⁵ In other words, it was obvious to all believers that Christ was somehow divine, endued with divine powers; but was Christ *God*? Was the essential divinity of Christ the same as the essential divinity of the Father in heaven?

In order to establish the true divinity of Jesus Christ, therefore, two concepts must be established. First, the unity of the man Jesus and the ‘divine’ Christ. Although by no means a simple concept, this first one was not questioned within the orthodox church; those who denied the unity of Jesus as the Christ were in clear violation of apostolic teaching and were, consequently, rejected as heretics. Second, however, there is the unity of the divine in Christ with the divine of the Father – a fact, once established, that itself establishes the true divinity of Jesus Christ the Lord. Athanasius himself wrote, “How is it possible for someone not to err with regard to the incarnate presence of the Son if he is altogether ignorant of the genuine and true generation of the Son from the Father?”⁸⁶

In regard to that relationship – between the divinity of the Son and the divinity of the Father – the Scriptures have much to say, though little of it with the explicitness we might wish to see. Passages concerning the nature of the relationship of the Son to the Father are broadly classified into four categories:

- Passages of Identity – in which the divine nature of the Son and of the Father are set forth as identical.
- Passages of Adoption – whereby the Father/Son relationship is described in terms of the Father adopting the Son at some (or so it seems) point in time.
- Passages of Distinction – wherein the Father and the Son are spoken of as two distinct, yet divine, personages.
- Passages of Derivation – in which the origination of the Son is spoken of as from the Father.

⁸⁵ Pelikan, 175.

⁸⁶ Athanasius, *Against Arius*; 1.8

Passages of Identity:

There are numerous passages in Scripture that seem to interchange descriptions that almost certainly refer to the promised Messiah with equivalent descriptions that are just as clearly references to Yahweh in heaven. One such passage is Isaiah 63:9, clearly messianic and clearly identifying the Messiah with God.

*In all their affliction He was afflicted,
And the **Angel of His Presence** saved them;
In **His love** and in **His pity** He redeemed them;
And **He bore** them and carried them
All the days of old.* (Isaiah 63:9)

In this passage the deliverer – the Messiah of promise – is called the *Angel of His Presence*. Elsewhere this person is known as the *Angel of the Lord* (Hebrew: *ebed Yahweh*). The identity is drawn between the second and third strophes, where the *Angel of His Presence* is grammatically equivalent to *His love* and *His pity* – both are said to save/redeem His people. One ancient writer commented thus on the passage: “...not an intercessor, nor an angel, but the Lord himself has saved us, and not by the death of someone else nor by the intervention of an ordinary man, but by his own blood.”⁸⁷ Another passage of identity, this time from the New Testament, is found in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,

*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, **Christ** came, who is over all, **the eternally blessed God**. Amen.* (Romans 9:1-5)

Passages such as these establish *identity* between the Father and the Son, or between Yahweh and the Messiah which, in the Old Testament language,

⁸⁷ Pelikan, 182.

amounts to the same thing. The extent of that identity is not always clarified, yet nor is it limited, so that one is perfectly justified in making the identification to be *essential*. In other words, when Paul speaks of Christ as being “*the eternally blessed God,*” he speaks in terms of an identity of essence: the divinity of Christ being identical with the divinity of the Father, God. Orthodoxy has long utilized such passages to illustrate and defend the essential divine unity of the Father and of the Son.

Yet heterodoxy has used the same passages, coupled with a fervent adherence to monotheism, to make the *identity* pass beyond all real *distinction*. In the early church this error was known as Monarchianism, which in turn was divided into two main branches: Modalistic Monarchianism (Modalism) and Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism). The parent genre derives its name from the view that God, being one and only one, is Monarch of all Creation. His unity is emphasized to the detriment of any diversity of persons, in spite of the apparent distinctions made in Scripture in regard to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. In modalistic monarchianism, the one God ‘appears’ to work in the midst of His creation through three different ‘modes’ – as the Father, as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. The chief proponent of this view was Sabellius, and the view is often referred to as Sabellianism.

...there exists one and the same Being, called Father and Son, not one derived from the other, but himself from himself, nominally called Father and Son according to the changing of times; and that this One is he that appeared (to the patriarchs), and submitted to birth from a virgin, and conversed as man among men. On account of his birth that had taken place he confessed himself to be the Son to those who saw him, while to those who could receive it he did not hide the fact that he was the Father.⁸⁸

When confronted with passages in which one ‘mode’ of God (the Son) is clearly communicating with another ‘mode’ of God (the Father), modalists are

⁸⁸ Pelikan, 178; quoting Hippolytus.

Church History

forced either to deny the true divinity of the one (Jesus Christ) or to admit to some sort of divine schizophrenia.

Dynamic monarchianism, or adoptionism, seeks to solve this dilemma by owning up to the problem of the Son mode. In other words, adoptionists deny true divinity to Christ, saying instead that the Christ was 'adopted' by the Father and thus derives his divinity not through eternal being but rather through divine adoption. This is a view that illustrates the manner in which false teaching eventually implodes, for an 'identity' passage such as Jesus' "*I and the Father are one*" ultimately destroys any hypothesis of an adopted Christ.

Passages of Adoption:

Of course, the concept of adoption is not without support in Scripture and some of the passages that refer to the relationship between the Father and the Son seem to support an adoptionist point of view. The most common of these passages is from the second Psalm,

I will declare the decree:

The LORD has said to Me,

'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. (Psalm 2:8)

The reiteration of this verse in the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism seems to place a specific 'time' at which this adoption of the Son by the Father took place. And Peter's comment regarding the elevation of the crucified Jesus to "*both Lord and Christ*" has been utilized in defense of an adoptionist view. Taken alongside the passages of identity, however, these passages of adoption merely illustrate the paternal and filial aspects of the relationship between the first and second Persons of the Godhead. They establish the theological foundations for the biblical use of such terms as 'Father' and 'Son.' Later Arius, the chief antagonist in the Nicæan controversy, would attempt to use such passages to prove that Christ must have been begotten at some point in time (though he actually maintained that the adoption of Christ was before time). Limiting

Church History

oneself to a purely human analogy, it is evident that one *becomes* a father by *begetting* a son, and that this event must have an instance before which the terms 'father' and 'son' cannot properly apply. But if the fatherhood of God is eternal, then so is the sonship of Christ.

Passages of Distinction:

Passages of adoption are, perhaps, a subset of this third category, passages of distinction. The former are treated separately primarily due to the influence the concept of adoption has both in the Bible and in the growing debate in the early Church with regard to the relationship between the Father and the Son. Passages of distinction are more general, encompassing all passages wherein titles of divinity are used within the same context but clearly referring to two different persons. The *locus classicus* is Psalm 110:1 which also happens to be the most frequently quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament,

*The LORD said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."* (Psalm 110:1)

Jesus himself challenged the scribes and learned Pharisees of His day on the basis of the underlying meaning of this verse,

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying:

*'The LORD said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?'*

If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

(Matthew 22:41-45)

Such passages of distinction became the crux of the Arian controversy, even as the passages of derivation (to be viewed next) became the ground of the

Church History

Athanasian solution. On the Arian side, it was evident from passages such as Psalm 110:1 that the two 'Lords' mentioned could not reasonably be the same 'one' Lord. In other words, modalism was crushed upon the rock of Psalm 110:1. This distinctive character of one 'Lord' from the other fit in neatly with the Greek philosophical concept of the Logos as an emanation or aeon, proceeding from the Divine Being. Hence the Arians could accept a form or degree of divinity in Christ, but not one that was co-equal to the Father in heaven. The essence of Arianism is in *subordination* - one Lord was on the throne; the other sat at His right hand. The only way Arius could find to accommodate this relationship while still maintaining the unity, the 'oneness,' of God was to posit levels of divinity with God the Father being the only unbegotten, truly eternal, truly divine Being. Another passage that was frequently used in defense of the subordination of Christ to the Father in *essence* and not merely *economy*, is Proverbs 8:22-31.

*The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting,
From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
When there were no fountains abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills, I was brought forth; While as yet He had not made the earth or
the fields, or the primal dust of the world.
When He prepared the heavens, I was there,
When He drew a circle on the face of the deep, When He established the clouds
above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep,
When He assigned to the sea its limit,
So that the waters would not transgress His command,
When He marked out the foundations of the earth,
Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman;
And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him,
Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.*

Here is a lengthy passage that speaks not only of two distinct beings, but of their intimate relationship *in the beginning of His way*. Such a passage may be

interpreted in support of the orthodox, Trinitarian view or that of the Arian, subordinationist view. It depends partly on the philosophical presuppositions of the interpreter, which in turn influence the use and interrelationship of passages of distinction like this one, with passages of identity, adoption, and derivation elsewhere. The orthodox theologians of the second and third centuries began the work of solving the riddle by integrating Logos passages with 'Son of God' passages which together shed a great deal of light on less clear 'wisdom' passages like Proverbs 8. Pelikan properly assigns credit to the forerunners of Athanasius, men as diverse as Origen and Tertullian who laid the groundwork upon which Athanasius would build.

The use of the titles Logos and Son of God to interpret and correlate the passages of adoption, passages of identity, passages of distinction, and passages of derivation was a theological tour de force accomplished by the theologians of the second and third centuries, including Tertullian and Novatian in the West, and above all Origen in the East.⁸⁹

Passages of Derivation:

The first three categories of biblical passages regarding the relationship of Christ to the Father are sufficient to establish a form of identity that nonetheless incorporates clear distinctions, specified even further by the relationship of adoption. Coupled with a stringent, unyielding and 'unitarian' devotion to the monotheism of God, these passages were interpreted by some theologians in the early Church as teaching a subordination of Christ to the Father in *essence*. Christ was somehow possessive of divinity, but not of the same nature or degree as the divinity of the Father. This subordinationism also implied *origination* - or as the Arian motto so clearly expresses the falsehood: "There was when Christ was not."

The primary passages of derivation that entered into the burgeoning debate over the nature of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, are the

⁸⁹ Pelikan, 191.

numerous appearances in the Old Testament of the “Angel of the Lord.” The passage previously referenced in Genesis 19, the famous Sodom & Gomorrah narrative. That section of Scripture serves multiple purposes as a passage of identity and of distinction, as well as of derivation. The latter stems from the common, essentially universal, interpretation by both Jewish and Christian scholars, of the Angel of the Lord as one *send* or *proceeding* from Yahweh. The nature of this derivation forms the heart and soul of the Athanasian settlement concerning the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.

As a brief preview of that settlement, we may state here that the identity of Christ as the Logos and Son of God translates in orthodox theology to the derivation of Christ from the Father as Word from Mind, and Act from Will. Athenagoras proclaimed “The Son of God is the Logos of the Father in thought and in power.”⁹⁰ Christ is the identity of the Father communicating, revealing, proclaiming Himself and His will. Christ is distinct from the Father as Word is from Thought, and Power from Will. It was this Christ – identical yet distinct, adopted from all eternity – who derives His being eternally from the Father. Again from the second century theologian Athenagoras, “God, being eternally endowed with reason, had the Logos within himself eternally, and that therefore the Son, as Logos, did not come into existence but was eternal.”⁹¹ Athenagoras (ca. 133-190) was one of the forerunners of orthodoxy, establishing the parameters and terminology of the debate, setting the stage for the champion, Athanasius, to appear a century later.

⁹⁰ Quoted by Pelikan, 189.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

Session 10: The Council of Nicæa

Text Reading: Romans 9:1 - 5

*“There was a great middle party, constituting a majority,
who were far from being agreed among themselves
on the question in debate.”
(George Park Fisher)*

Modern Christians are taught to believe that the Emperor Constantine the Great, who ruled the Roman Empire from his new capital in Byzantium, almost single-handedly ruined Christianity by making it the official religion of his empire. Never mind the misrepresentation of history that this pervasive view represents, no one seems to give any thought to the incredible trouble



Statue of Constantine in York, England

Constantine laid upon himself by legalizing this once-forbidden religion of the Christ. While it is popular in some Christian circles to imagine that the pre-Constantinian Christian Church was pure as the driven snow, washed clean in the blood of martyrs, and filled only with devout and Spirit-lead believers, the actual history is quite different. Unfortunately the Church has never been without sin, for it has never been without sinners. But when one considers the turmoil boiling just beneath the surface at the turn of the 4th Century, it is easy to imagine Constantine regretting his decision in favor of Christianity. It was not long into his imperial rule that he had to intervene in theological matters (for which he was singularly unqualified) in an attempt to preserve peace within his domain.

Another popular modern belief is that Constantine was a pragmatic pagan who used Christianity when it suited him, fabricating a vision allegedly granted to him on the eve of a crucial battle against his arch-rival Maxentius.

Church History

Outnumbered two to one, Constantine's army arrived on the battlefield at Milvian Bridge, in Italy, with strange hand-drawn crosses on their shields. This new battle crest was apparently the result of a vision or dream that Constantine had prior to the battle, in which he saw a form of the Cross (or possibly the Greek letters Chi & Rho, the first letters of the name *Christos*) in the sky. Along with the symbol were the words (again, the exact words differ greatly among historical records) *En Signo Vinces* - "In this Sign, Conquer." The rest is history, or legend; Constantine was victorious in another of his many routs, Maxentius himself fell into the Tiber River while trying to cross the Milvian Bridge in retreat, and drowned. Constantine rode unhindered into Rome and claimed the imperial crown.

But this was hardly Constantine's first encounter with Christianity. His father, Constantius, was favorably disposed to the members of this banned religious sect while he was Caesar of the West in charge of the Roman provinces of Gaul and Britannia. During several imperial persecutions under Diocletian and Galerius, believers were relatively safe in Constantius' area of command, which is also where Constantine grew up in the midst of the Roman legions. Perhaps Constantius' kindness toward Christians was due to his consort Helena, Constantine's mother. Helena is a famous person in the annals of the ancient Church: a professing Christian in the most intimate proximity to a Caesar, an unashamed believer who undoubtedly tried to convince her son of the wisdom and truth of her beliefs, and a matriarch of the Constantinian era, who richly endowed numerous churches, convents, and monasteries as the mother of the Emperor.

Whether by pragmatism or by true faith, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in AD 313 finally lifting the ban that had been upon Christianity for two centuries. He did not outlaw paganism, and the edict itself is an edict of toleration rather than of establishment. But Constantine, once he had consolidated his hold on imperial power, did promote Christianity actively, and

at the expense of the ancient pagan religions of Europe and the Middle East. He granted Helena free access to the imperial treasury so that she might strengthen the Christian Church through endowments to monastic orders and the construction of churches. Helena is credited with funding the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and the Church of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The chapel at the Monastery of St. Catherine (located in the desert of Egypt, supposedly upon the site of the burning bush), is called the Chapel of St. Helena.

Yet in spite of the protest of the 2nd Century Christian apologists that theirs was a religion of peaceful and honest citizenry, Constantine presided over a cauldron of theological turmoil ready to boil over and disrupt the tranquility of his empire. The problem: the deity of Christ, a source of controversy among Christian theologians for over a hundred years by the time the emperor came to power. Constantine was to learn the meaning of the proverb, "He who would ride a tiger cannot dismount." The Trinitarian Controversy would dominate Constantine's reign and overflow into the reigns of his successors for another 70 years. Pelikan writes, "the political history of these decades is in many ways more important - and in most ways more interesting - than the doctrinal history."⁹² Unfortunately it is the boring doctrinal history that is the scope of this study!

The epicenter of conflict was the established and venerable theological school at Alexandria in Egypt. Made famous by Origen, the Alexandrian school continued to represent the cutting edge of Christian scholarship - much of it good, but not all. Even two or three generations after his death, Origen's teachings and philosophy still pervaded the school, and his perspective on the deity of Jesus Christ was considered orthodoxy in that area of the Church. Origen's doctrine of the Logos was speculative, but well within the bounds of orthodoxy. "The Mediator between God and the world, through whom the world is made, is the Logos...The Logos is personal and without beginning. He

⁹² Pelikan, 207.

is generated of the Father, but this generation is eternal.”⁹³ Origen focused on the designation given regarding the Son of God as ‘only begotten’ and emphasized the difference between this phrase and creation. Christ was not a created, but a ‘begotten,’ being. The nature of Christ in relationship to God the Father is *ab intra* – from within – and not *ad extra* – outside. Creation of the universe is an act of God outside (if such spatial terms may be used) of God; the generation of the Son or Logos is an act of God from within. The external acts are acts of Divine Will; the internal acts are of Divine Being. Thus the biblical distinction made of the Son of God as ‘only begotten’ indicates that while He is generated from the Father as an internal act, it is an act of Being and thus eternal.

In the latter half of the 3rd Century a presbyter by the name of Arius, trained at Alexandria in Origenist Logos theology, began to question the implications of eternal generation on the fundamental monotheistic essence of God. Arius attempted to formulate a Christology that preserved the traditional worship of Jesus Christ within the Church, while denying to Him an equivalent deity to that of the Father. “The rank assigned to Christ in the Arian theology is really that of a demi-god.”⁹⁴ Ultimately this effort was doomed to fail, for in acquiescing to, even advocating, the worship of Jesus Christ – an act appropriate only to a god – the Arians traded a paper monotheism for a practical polytheism.

Arius struggled to exalt Christ as high as he could, without granting Him that most supreme of designations: of the same essence as the Father. In this effort Arius laid his theological foundation on the ‘unbegotten-ness’ of God, “We know only one God unbegotten.”⁹⁵ Consider the following excerpt from a letter written by Arius, and notice the attempt he makes to justify the worship of Jesus Christ ‘as unchangeable God’ while in the same breath claiming that ‘there was when he was not.’

⁹³ Fisher, George Park; 107.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁹⁵ Seeburg, 202.

Church History

The Son is not unbegotten, nor a part of the unbegotten One...nor from something previously existing, but he existed with will and design before time and ages, the complete, only-begotten, unchangeable God; and before he began to be, or was either created or founded, he was not. The Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning.⁹⁶

The correlate to this view that Christ had a beginning, is that God was not always 'Father.' Arius held that "God has not always been Father; there was a moment when he was alone, and was not yet Father: later he became so. The Son is not from eternity; he came from nothing."⁹⁷ From a lexical standpoint, Arius made 'only-begotten' equivalent to 'created' and thus rejected the Origenist eternal generation of the Son from the Father. To Arius, the procession of the Son from the Father was an act of divine will, an act that had a commencement (though not 'in time,' for he recognized that time had not yet been created). Fatherhood was not of the essence of God, said Arius, unlike omniscience or omnipotence, but was rather a means through which God willed to create all other things. Arius' philosophical machinations drove him further, to the separation of the Logos into two separate *Logoi* - one being the wisdom and power of the Father inherent in the Son, and the second being the eternal, essential Logos of the Father.

Arius' Christology verged toward Adoptionism at times, Subordinationism at others, but always away from the traditional orthodoxy which assigned the fullness of deity to Christ without limitation or distinction. Having taught his errors publically, Arius was bound to arouse the opposition of the defenders of Origen's Logos Christology. The first to come to this defense was Arius' own bishop, Alexander. Alexander, who was "devotedly attached to the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, and of His equality with the Father,"⁹⁸ convened a synod in Alexandria in AD 321 to deal with the Arian

⁹⁶ Seeburg, 203

⁹⁷ Carroll, Warren H. *A History of Christendom, Volume II*. p. 10.

⁹⁸ Kurtz, J. H., *History of the Christian Church; Volume 1*, 188.

Church History

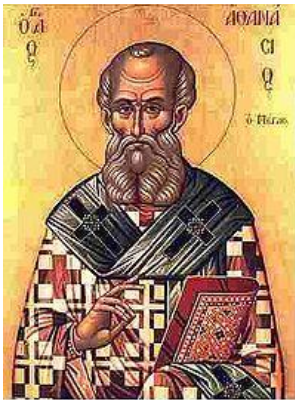
teaching. This synod condemned both Arius and his doctrine, and stripped him of his presbyter rank. However, Arius' personal piety and asceticism appealed to the masses and to many other presbyters and deacons, making him a popular 'victim' of an overbearing episcopate. Alexander's synod may have settled the theological question, for the time being, but the controversy was stoked into popular flame as supporters of Arius publically denounced the bishop's heavy handedness. The upheaval threatened the stability of the Egyptian segment of Constantine's realms, and he was forced to deputize Hosius, the bishop of Cordova and advisor to the emperor, to travel to Alexandria in an effort to calm the situation.

This embassy reflects Constantine's ignorance both of theological matters and of their deeply-rooted importance to the theologians of the Church. Hosius, however, soon realized that the problem was much deeper than a personality conflict between a presbyter and a bishop and, on his return to Constantinople, began to advise the emperor toward taking a more active role. This culminated in the First Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church - convened by imperial order in the city of Nicæa. While there had been regional synods of Christian bishops for over a century, this was the first 'universal' call to the bishops of the Church to gather in one place in order to address pressing theological issues. Constantine presided over the council, and even attempted to contribute to the disputations (he was by no means an uneducated or unintelligent man), finally giving his imperial weight to the side of orthodoxy resulting in its triumph over Arianism.

The Council of Nicæa took place in AD 325, a fact that reflects the difficulty in communication and travel in the ancient world, and the slow spread of the controversy throughout the empire which finally necessitated the imperial convocation. Over three hundred bishops were in attendance, many who had suffered bodily injury and disfigurement in the Diocletian and Galerian persecutions of recent memory. Constantine emotionally greeted the bishops,

even kissing the burnt-out eye sockets of those who had lost their sight during the pogroms. The gathered bishops did not represent two equally divided camps, and those who ardently supported Arius as well as those who ardently opposed him were both distinct minorities. Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the author of *Ecclesiastical History*, the first history of the Christian Church, represented the vast middle ground of devoted Origenists, who nevertheless were sympathetic to Arius and his attempt to guard monotheism. This middle party was willing to compromise, to find theological language that would accommodate the other two views into one ‘universal’ confession. Initially, and with good reason, this was the party that Constantine supported.

As has often been the case in theological disputes, the orthodox party was



Icon of Athanasius

the smaller of the two ‘combatants.’ But this deficiency in numbers was more than compensated by the presence of the Alexandrian archdeacon Athanasius, long considered one of the truly great theologians and defenders of the faith. What is perhaps the most significant aspect of the Athanasian defense of the eternal generation of the Son, and His true and essential equality with the Father, is that Athanasius

did not address the controversy from the orientation of speculative thought concerning the nature of God. Rather, the Alexandrian archdeacon approached the issue from the perspective of *soteriology* – the doctrine of salvation. While he thoroughly understood and accurately taught the more speculative, philosophical theology of the eternal generation of the Son, Athanasius also clearly comprehended the necessity of Christ’s true divinity to the doctrine of salvation.

Fisher offers an excellent summary of Athanasius’ thought: “Unless Christ is truly God, is divine in the literal sense, He is a creature. In this case, in fellowship with Him we are brought no nearer to God; the vital truth of

redemption, union to God in virtue of our union, through faith, to Christ, is lost.”⁹⁹ By taking his point of departure as that which is necessary for man’s salvation, Athanasius established an *a priori* decision in favor of the true deity of Christ. “He felt that to regard Christ as a creature was to deny that faith in Him brings man into saving union with God.”¹⁰⁰

The manner of Athanasius’ defense of the orthodox view in regard to Christ’s eternal divinity illustrates a timeless lesson in theological debate. Often a theological issue which presents itself from one perspective as incapable of a clear solution, from another perspective is easily comprehended. Very often the first perspective is the most ‘front on,’ the one which deals with the issue in its own content and context, while the clarifying perspective is ‘tangential.’ In the case of the Trinitarian Controversy, the content and context of the debate was the essence of God – monotheistic – and the apparent divinity of Christ. It was a *theological* issue that would not be solved to the satisfaction of all involved. Athanasius, however, saw that it was also a *soteriological* issue, a perspective that presented a much easier solution. And it was the solution to the ‘tangential’ matter than required only one possible solution to the main issue.

Ultimately the language of the debate came down to one letter, the Greek *iota*. At the heart of the theological controversy was the matter of *ousia*, a Greek philosophical term that denoted ‘essence’ or ‘nature.’ It did not take long for the assembled bishops at Nicæa (nor for the Emperor) to see that the Arian view that Christ was of a different essence or nature from the Father was profoundly detrimental to the doctrine of Christian salvation. Athanasius’ eloquence and his profound reasoning quickly won the middle majority around to see that they must maintain at least some measure of divinity in Christ if they were to hold fast the doctrine of salvation – union with God – through faith in Him. But there were still many who wished to find a solution that did not alienate Arius and his

⁹⁹ Fisher, 136.

¹⁰⁰ Berkhof, Louis, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 85.

Church History

followers entirely. These were the Homoiousians – those who advocated a ‘similar’ – Greek *homoi* – divinity between the Son and the Father, but not an absolutely identical one. They maintained that Christ’s deity was derivative, proceeding from the Father and therefore not ultimately equivalent to the divinity of the Father. Passages of Distinction and of Derivation formed an important part of the Scriptural defense of the Homoiousians. Athanasius championed the Homoousians – those who held fast to the absolute divinity of Christ, equivalent – Greek *homo*, or ‘same’ – in essence to that of the Father. Athanasius’ argument swayed Constantine, and this imperial support was enough to convince the majority of the assembled bishops to approve what is now known as the Nicæan Creed. This Creed was a modification of the ancient Apostles Creed, and the pertinent changes had to do with the confessional statement with regard to Jesus Christ,

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being *of one substance with the Father*...

There is the *homoousios* clause: ‘of one substance,’ or of the same essence, co-essentially God, without diminution or distinction from the Father. The Council of Nicæa had successfully upheld biblical orthodoxy and officially defeated an erroneous teaching that verged on heresy. Constantine was, or so he thought, successful in his first venture into ecclesiastical intervention. But the conflict was far from over, and many of the bishops went to their dioceses thoroughly unconvinced by the new formulation of the faith. William Cunningham writes, in his inimitable run-on style,

The more bold and honest Arians said that the Son was *heteroousios*, of a different substance from the Father; others said that He was *anomoios*, unlike the Father; and some, who were usually reckoned semi-Arians, admitted that He was *homoiousios*, of a like substance with the Father; but they all unanimously refused to admit the Nicene phraseology, because they were opposed to the Nicene

doctrine of the true and proper divinity of the Son and saw and felt that that phraseology accurately and unequivocally expressed it.¹⁰¹

When the theology ended at Nicæa, the politics of Constantinople began. Arius was condemned at Nicæa and exiled by Constantine. But the former presbyter had friends in high places, who ultimately turned the emperor's ear and won his recall from exile. Arius, then an old man of about 80 years, was to be re-ordained to his office, but he died the night before the ordination service, in AD 336.

Constantine died the following year, but not before turning on Athanasius and banishing him from his church in AD 335. Constantine's successors alternated their support between Arians and Athanasians. Athanasius himself served as bishop of Alexandria for a total of forty-five years, though for his ardent and unwavering support of the *homoousios* doctrine, twenty of those years were spent in exile from his episcopal see. He was banished once by the Emperor Constantine, twice by Constantius, once by the apostate Julian, and once by Valens. He was, however, at home in Alexandria when he died in AD 373.

Athanasius found his firmest supporters in the Western, or Latin branch of the Church, and spent some of his exile in Rome. This is not surprising, considering that much of the language that would eventually be employed by Athanasius in defense of the true, eternal divinity of Christ came from the pen of the Latin theologian Tertullian. In his trials, and in spite of the claim by some of his compatriots that 'the whole world was against him,' Athanasius did have powerful theological support. Most notably among these were the 'three Cappadocians' - Basil the Great, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and their mutual friend Gregory of Nazianzus - younger contemporaries of Athanasius who carried on his great work of orthodoxy. Their story follows.

¹⁰¹ Cunningham, William, *Historical Theology; Volume 1*, 290.

Session 11: The Doctrine of the Trinity

Text Reading: Matthew 28:19

*“For one and the same person of the Father,
from whom the Son was born and the Holy Spirit proceeded.
Wherefore also certainly the one who is the cause of the things
caused by him you call One God, since he is also in them.”*
(Gregory of Nyssa)

Dorothy Sayers, in her book *The Mind of the Maker*, writes of a commonplace view among theologians in regard to controversies surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity, that all such conversations are bound to cause blindness – either from an excess of darkness or from an excess of light. Sayers is not disparaging the effort necessary to anyone who wishes to understand better the doctrine of the Trinity; she is merely highlighting the complexity that naturally surrounds the matter, a complexity that has often led to controversy. Historically the point is well made, as treatises on the doctrine of the Trinity are frequently characterized by simplistic ignorance on the one hand, and erudite and incomprehensible brilliance on the other. The greatest minds of the Christian Church have been applied to the concept of a Triune God, from Augustine’s *de Trinitate* in the early 5th Century to Jonathan Edwards’ *Discourse on the Trinity* in the 18th. A modern commentator on the latter work entitled his summary article “Helm’s Deep” – an allusion to the dark and impenetrable fortress in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It is indicative of the difficult nature of the subject that Edwards himself wrote early in the discourse, “I do not intend to explain the Trinity.”

Yet while the Trinity may not be susceptible of explanation, it does not follow that it is also beyond understanding. There are many facets of life in this universe that are understood far better than they are explained. And the nature of the Godhead – the profound relationship of one divine essence in three

Church History

persons – is too central to the Christian Gospel to lie beyond even the most basic comprehension of believers. The very formula with which Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples to baptize disciples throughout the world (and, by extension, throughout time) contains the germ of Trinitarian theology.

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.* (Matthew 28:18-20)

This passage represents the earliest 'baptismal formula,' one that has remained in use to the present day. Alongside of this formula, and especially in the early church, a simpler formula was used whereby converts were baptized in Jesus' name alone. This practice probably arose from the teachings of the Apostle Paul with regard to being 'in Christ' (see particularly his own protest with regard to baptism in I Corinthians 1:13) and was also most likely an uncritical acknowledgement of the deity of Jesus Christ long before the theological language was worked out at Nicæa. The dominical formula from Matthew 28, however, presents us almost immediately in the Church's history with a Trinitarian statement regarding the three Persons in whom new converts were to be baptized.

The wording is quite careful, so careful that the wonder is that anyone ever doubted the Trinity's reality. First, disciples are to be baptized *in the Name* – singular, 'name' not 'names.' Being the 'Jewish' gospel account, that of Matthew is replete with Hebraisms and phrases that would have been most significant to Jewish converts to Christianity. This is one such instance, for it was forbidden among the Jews to speak the word 'YHWH' – 'Yahweh' – or even to say 'God.' That name was so supremely sacred that to speak it was to defile it, at least that is what the hyper-religious Pharisees taught. Even today orthodox Jews will not so much as write the full three letters (in English, of course) of God but instead

use a hyphen or understroke: G-d or G_d. Kind of silly, really, but pharisaical Jews and converts from this sect to Christianity were in deadly earnest in their jealousy over God's name. Hence whenever God was referred to, it was by the phrase *H^aShem* - 'the Name.' Though the most ancient manuscripts we have of Matthew's gospel are in Greek, one can easily envision him writing this passage in the Hebrew: "*baptizing them in H^aShem - the Name*" which would immediately be recognized by Jewish believers as the sacred name of God.

Here is the affirmation of monotheism, for the God of Matthew 28:19 is the same God of Deuteronomy 4:6, the *Shema*. "*Hear! O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One.*" The use of the singular 'Name' in Matthew 28:19 reinforces this interpretation, making it the only possible way to read the phrase coming from Matthew's pen. But then he writes *three names* - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One Name, but three Names. This syntax was thoroughly analyzed



Granville Sharp (1735-1813)

by an 18th Century grammarian and classicist (and partner with William Wilberforce in the effort to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain), Granville Sharp. In what came to be known as the 'Granville Sharp Rule,' it is maintained that whenever a series of nouns are each preceded by a definite article (i.e., 'the') then each noun stands in reference to a unique and separate object, person, or concept. Therefore, in Matthew 28:19 where we find "*the name of **the** Father and of **the** son and of **the** Holy Spirit*" the author must be referring to *three* distinct persons who together comprise but *one* Name of God. Subsequent analysis of the Granville Sharp Rule has proven that it is not without exceptions in the New Testament; nonetheless when applied to Matthew 28:19 it not only fits but makes quite reasonable sense.

A modern example of this rule as it might be used in our own language may be illustrated by a company stockholders' meeting. If the master of ceremony were to introduce "*the Chairman and CEO of our company,*" the

Church History

audience would reasonably expect only one person to ascend the platform and take the microphone. But if the introduction were for “the Chairman and the CEO of our company,” it would be natural for the audience to anticipate two people to arise, either for applause or to be pelted with rotten tomatoes, depending on the stock’s performance that year.

In any event, and long before Mr. Sharp took up the grammatical side of things, the early Church possessed a Trinitarian liturgy before it possessed a Trinitarian theology. We have already seen that almost three hundred years were to pass before a technical statement would be promulgated with regard to the deity of Christ as it related to the unity of God. The Council of Nicæa provided that theological formulation of the essential unity between the Father and the Son, between God and the Logos. The confessional portions of that Creed are noticeable in their expansive description of the Church’s faith with regard to the Father and to the Son, and the incredible paucity of words with regard to the Holy Spirit.

We believe...

*...in one God,
the Father, the
Almighty,
maker of heaven and
earth,
of all that is, seen
and unseen.*

*...in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the*

*...and in the
Holy Ghost*

*dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

This very short phrase relating to the Holy Spirit truly reflected the ambivalence that pervaded the Christian theological world through the first three centuries. Pelikan writes, "At Nicea the doctrine of the Holy Spirit had been disposed of in lapidary brevity...Nor does there seem to have been a single treatise dealing specifically with the person of the Spirit composed before the second half of the fourth century."¹⁰² But the presence of the Holy Spirit in the original baptismal formula, the prevalence of the Spirit in the Book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, and His position alongside the Father and the Son in many of the apostolic benedictions demanded consideration. This consideration would occupy the Christian theological forum throughout the fourth century, from the close of the Nicæan assembly to the convocation of the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (in AD 381) to the writing of *de Trinitate* by Augustine published around AD 417.

The theological fault lines fell along the same Arian/Athanasian boundary that manifested itself in the controversy over the divine nature of Christ Jesus. "Arius held that the Holy Spirit is the first created nature produced by the Son. Athanasius and the Alexandrian Synod of 362 had predicated the Homousian of the Spirit."¹⁰³ The solution of this divide was basically the same formulation by which the essential oneness of the deity of the Son and the deity of the Father was promulgated by Athanasius at Nicæa and beyond. Athanasius had built his doctrine of Christ's essential divinity upon the irreducible necessities of salvation; he subsequently built his doctrine of the essential divinity of the Holy Spirit on the irreducible necessities of sanctification. Scripture teaches that the process of sanctification is nothing less than the internal revelation of the mind of God to the believer through the work of the indwelling Spirit. Hilary of Poitiers succinctly represented Athanasian

¹⁰² Pelikan, 211.

¹⁰³ Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 144.

orthodoxy when he wrote, “nothing could be foreign to God’s essence which searches the deep things of God.”¹⁰⁴

In a sense, then, the victory of the Athanasian party in establishing (at least officially) the *homoousios* of the Son was tantamount to a victory in establishing the *homoousios* of the Holy Spirit. All that remained to solidify this view as the biblically correct one was to establish the unique *personality* of the Holy Spirit. This was not difficult to do. In the Old Testament we find the Spirit of God *hovering* over the deep at Creation, and *striving* with man in the latter’s increasing sinfulness (Genesis 6:3). In the New Testament we find it possible to *blaspheme* the Holy Spirit, to *sin against* the Holy Spirit, and to *grieve* the Holy Spirit. He is called the *Comforter* and is promised to be a divine teacher leading the disciples *into all truth*. One has to be working from a very strong contrary prejudice to fail to see the unique and distinct personality of the Holy Spirit in the pages of Scripture. Thus the ebb and flow of practical doctrine within the Church of the fourth century generally followed the rise and fall of Arianism vis-à-vis Athanasianism, without any particular controversy surrounding the personhood of the Spirit.

Still, the formulation of Athanasius, while strong biblically, did not sit well philosophically and rationally with a large portion of professing Christendom. Indeed, it has been a persistent bone of contention between orthodox Christianity and any number of pseudo-Christian sects throughout the ages. Muslims, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, etc. all stumble on the concept of one undivided and eternal God subsisting in three equally divine Persons – the doctrine of the Trinity. The ‘*homoousios*’ wording of Nicæa was insufficient to serve as a technical description of the Trinity, simply because it emphasizes the *oneness* and *unity* of God. In a word, too much *homoousios* will lead to modalism, the view that there is but one God who manifests Himself at different times in different modes. With Nicæa under their sash, it was time for

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Fisher, 145.

Church History

the orthodox theologians of the Church to put their minds and words to work on the tri-unity of God.



Providentially this task fell upon the shoulders of the three Cappadocians – Basil the Great (329-379), Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390), and Gregory of Nyssa (335-395). Younger contemporaries of Athanasius, each of these men were staunch defenders

and theological developers of the views set forth by the hero of Nicæa. These three did not coin the term 'trinity'; indeed, that word seems to date all the way back to Tertullian, but they did work out the philosophical and technical terminology of a Tri-une Godhead in much the same way that Athanasius worked out the essential deity of Christ.

Hypostasis and Ousia:

The problem with the words being used at that time was that they were not always uniformly understood and were not always properly differentiated. "What was needed was a term for the One and another for the Three. A term at hand for the latter was hypostasis, which had been used this way at least since Origen; an obvious term for the former, hallowed not only by long usage but by its association with the Christian exegesis of Exodus 3:14, was ousia."¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately these two words were often used interchangeably within Greek philosophical writings, and even frequently within Christian theological literature. *Hypostasis* is, technically, 'substance' whereas *ousia* is 'essence.' The difference between the two is about as subtle as language can get, often more one of degree than of kind.

There is little argument that *ousia* represents the very basic essential nature of anything. One cannot cut deeper than *ousia*, which is why 'nature' or

¹⁰⁵ Pelikan, 219.

'essence' are typically the words used to translate this Greek term. On the other side of the spectrum there are *accidents* – characteristics of something that are not necessary to its being. A 'tree,' for instance, describes the essential nature of a particular class of plants; whereas 'oak' describes a characteristic of a particular sub-class of trees. A plant must be a tree to be an oak; but it need not be an oak in order to be a tree. Somewhere in between *essence* and *accident* we find *substance – hypostasis*.

Another distinction that must be made at the beginning of any discussion on *hypostasis* in the Godhead is to distinguish between *substance*, *accident*, and *attribute*. An attribute of God is not a 'characteristic' of God in the sense that having a sense of humor is a characteristic of a man. The attributes of God are humanly-derived statements regarding the *essential nature* of God – to be God is to be omnipotent; and to be omnipotent is to be God, for instance. It is an attribute of Man to be an immortal soul; it is a characteristic of Man to be male. *Substance* is something different entirely from characteristic (accident) and different subtly from *attribute*. All of the attributes of God pertain to each of the Persons (*hypostases*) of the Godhead, for the attributes are necessary to the essential nature of God, and each of the Persons is essentially God.

Perhaps the differentiation between *ousia* and *hypostasis* is man-made, and perhaps it does not apply in all philosophical treatises and with regard to all subjects. Yet distinguishing the two words is how the Cappadocians set forth the dogma of the Trinity, and within a Trinitarian context this setting apart of one word from the other became critical to an orthodox understanding of the nature of the Godhead. Basil offers this assessment of the problem in his day,

Many persons, in their treatment of the mystical dogmas, fail to distinguish that which is common to the *ousia* from the meaning of the *hypostases*. They think that it makes no difference whether one says *ousia* or *hypostasis*. Therefore to some of those who accept ideas about this subject uncritically, it seems just as appropriate to say one *hypostasis* as one *ousia*. On the other hand, those who

assert three hypostases suppose that it is necessary...to assert a division of ousias into the same number.¹⁰⁶

The operative word in this tongue-twisting quote is 'uncritically.' To fail to make the important distinction between ousia and hypostasis is to endanger one's theology of becoming unitarian or modalistic. It is to abandon the distinctive divinity of the Son and of the Spirit in favor of the common divinity of God. Basil, and the two Gregorys with him, did not seem to think this error to be heretical, or even fatal to one's faith, though it was indeed wrong. It was possible for a believer to acknowledge the deity of the Father, and that of the Son, and that of the Holy Spirit, while at the same time using language that sounded very much like the three were indistinguishable from each other; were, in fact, just one. We must admit to the same uncritical use of terminology in the modern Church, as evidenced by many believers in their prayers.

In the fourth century, "The only way to dispel the confusion was to come up with a definition of hypostasis that set it apart from ousia and made it a fit instrument for the specification of what was distinctive in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁷ Thus Gregory of Nyssa writes, "We acknowledge three hypostases and recognize there is no difference in nature between them."¹⁰⁸ And Gregory of Nazianzus adds, "The nature in the three is one: God; but the union is the Father, from whom and to whom they are in their turn referred."¹⁰⁹

This last statement shows that the Cappadocians tended to find the locus of the unity of God in the Father, a fact that leads to one other technical phrase utilized to describe that which is unique in relation to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: 'mode of origin.' Drawing from the language of the Bible, these theologians stated with regard to the Father that He alone is 'unbegotten' and 'without origin or source.' The Son, though eternal with the Father, is

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by Pelikan, 219.

¹⁰⁷ Pelikan, 220.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Pelikan, 221.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by Seeburg, 233.

spoken of as 'begotten' and thus as generated; while the Holy Spirit is referred to as 'proceeding,' first from the Father and elsewhere from the Son. Thus Basil held that the Father was "a certain power subsisting without being begotten or having an origin, in whom both the Son and the Spirit, each in his way, had their origin."¹¹⁰ In this sense, and no other, may it be said that the ultimate unity of the Godhead rests in the hypostasis of the Father without impinging in any way upon the essential unity of nature of the three Persons.

One of the most notable and commendable features of the theological writings of these three men is the humility with which they approach so complex a problem as the description of the unified nature of God subsisting in three distinct yet essentially divine Persons. While using those words that were to hand, the Cappadocian Fathers did not pretend that human words could be sufficient to fully encompass the truth of the Godhead. Again Gregory of Nyssa writes,

Following the instructions of Holy Scripture, we have been taught that the nature of God is beyond names or human speech. We say that every [divine] name, be it invented by human custom or handed on to us by the tradition of the Scriptures, represents our conceptions of the divine nature, but does not convey the meaning of that nature in itself.¹¹¹

Thus the subtle differentiation of the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* were little more than technical necessities of language, in order to preserve both the unity of the monotheistic God (Deut. 6:4) and the tri-personality of the Godhead as revealed in Scripture (Matt. 28:19). The words describe a reality, but they do not explain it. "What was common to the Three and what was distinctive among them lay beyond speech and comprehension and therefore beyond either analysis or conceptualization."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Pelikan, 222.

¹¹¹ Quoted by Pelikan, 222.

¹¹² Pelikan, 223.

Session 12: The God-Man Jesus Christ

Text Reading: Philippians 2:5 - 11

*“The Father is that which is invisible about the Son,
the Son is that which is visible about the Father.”*
(Irenæus)

It is common to assign the doctrine of the Trinity to that branch of study known particularly as ‘theology’ – the study of God. But it is important to an understanding both of the history and the dogmatics of the issue that the Trinitarian controversies and settlements were not at all *theological*; they were, rather, *Christological*. Indeed, the settled agreement of the early church theologians regarding the theology of the matter is what instigated and exacerbated the disagreements concerning the Christology. By common confession God was One and unchanging, uncreated and eternal, who created all things and the Time in which they dwell. The Christian Church adopted wholeheartedly the *Shema* of the synagogue: “*Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, He is One.*” (Deut. 6:4) This was the *theology* of the early Church without dissent.

Controversy entered only when the early Church fathers began to consider and write upon the nature of the Christ, the Logos of God, the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. Was He divine? And if divine, was His divinity of the same essential nature as that of the Father? And if so, what then of the unity of God? What then of monotheism? Thus the doctrine of the trinity was hammered upon the forge of Christ’s deity, and theology was furthered by Christology. But this stands to reason when one considers that the last and greatest self-disclosure of God is in and through His Son “*in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells.*” It makes sense that we should learn more about God by studying the Person of Christ Jesus. And in the early centuries of the Church, the development of theology was driven by Christology, as the leading lights of that

era struggled to comprehend the magnitude of divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

J. L. Neve helpfully traces three stages of this Christological development that resulted in so comprehensive a statement on the nature and work of the Godhead as to have lasted for fifteen centuries since.¹¹³ “The *first stage* of real Christological development began with the attempt to solve the Trinitarian problem...The *second stage* of the Christological development was reached, when men turned their attention to the *humanity* of Christ...The *third stage* of the development came when men, satisfied as to the divinity and humanity of Christ, were compelled to ask the next question: What is the *relation* between the divine and the human in Christ?” The second of these three stages was reached and traversed relatively quickly and quietly – it is extremely difficult to minimize the humanity of Christ without drifting into Gnostic docetism, a heresy already soundly refuted and condemned by orthodox Christianity by the close of the second century. Yet even this short stage is illustrative of how easily one may slip into error, and how all too often the Church is quick to pronounce anathemas.

Apollinaris & the Humanity of Christ:

All who remained within the pale of orthodoxy accepted the humanity of Jesus Christ, though few prior to the fourth century attempted to explain it in terms relative to Christ’s deity. One of the first to do so was the brilliant (by all historical assessments) bishop of Laodicea, Apollinaris. Apollinaris was a self-proclaimed adherent of the Athanasian solution to the issue of the deity of Christ, and a staunch opponent of Arianism and any other teaching that in any way minimized or mitigated the true and eternal divinity of the Savior. Following Athanasius, and Origen before him, Apollinaris focused on the Logos in Christ as the central and prominent feature of deity and from this point attempted to coordinate the true deity of Christ with the true humanity of Jesus.

¹¹³ Neve, 125.

Church History

With regard to human nature, Apollinaris was a 'trichotomist' – believing man to be made up of a fleshly body, a living soul, and a reasonable mind. This was the teaching of the Greek philosopher Aristotle and had (and has) gained wide adherence among anthropologists of many different religions, Christianity not the least among them. Scriptural support for the trichotomist viewpoint is found in the Pauline benediction of I Thessalonians 5:23,

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Apollinaris reasoned that Jesus Christ, being fully human, possessed all three attributed of true humanity. But it was his body and soul, only, that derived from his mother Mary; the reasonable aspect of His mind was the Logos of God. This, in Apollinaris' view, prevented the possibility of sin in the life of Christ Jesus, and assured complete adherence to the divine will. "Arguing from the trichotomic view...Apollinaris taught that the humanity of Christ consisted of body and animal soul, the mind being taken by the Logos."¹¹⁴ The worship of Jesus was permissible to Apollinaris not on the basis of His fleshly body, but on the basis of that body being the vehicle – the temple, so to speak – of the divine Logos. This was the Apollinarian meaning given to the Incarnation, that the Logos took upon himself the flesh of a man, taking the place of the reason or 'reasonable soul' as some theologians refer to it, of that man. Support for this concept does come from Scripture, if taken apart from the fuller counsel of what the New Testament writers said about Jesus Christ. The prologue of John's gospel was a favorite locale for Apollinaris,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:1-4; 14)

¹¹⁴ Neve, 126.

Romans 8:3 and Philippians 2:6-8 also allude to the Incarnation, using terminology of similitude (i.e., 'likeness,' 'form'),

*For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the **likeness** of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,* (Romans 8:3)

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the **form** of a bondservant, and coming in the **likeness** of men. And being found in **appearance** as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* (Philippians 2:6-8)

On the basis of these passages, and the necessity that Jesus Christ be human in order to bring about the salvation of humans, Apollinaris propounded a doctrine of true humanity in terms that sounded orthodox. "We declare that the Logos of God became man for the purpose of our salvation, so that we might receive the likeness of the heavenly One and be made God after the likeness of the true Son of God according to nature and the Son of man according to the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ."¹¹⁵ The tricky part lies in Apollinaris' distinction between 'according to nature' and 'according to the flesh,' and it is here that his doctrine fails utterly.

In fact, Apollinaris' Christ is not a true man but only one 'after the flesh.' Jesus received body and animal soul (life) from His human mother Mary, but was absent a true human mind – that part being taken by the Logos of God. This is not conception, but rather possession. The Seed of Woman was, therefore, not fully descendant from Adam, and therefore could not be the Savior of Adam's race. "This meant that Christ was human according to the body only, and that the Son of God had assumed the flesh of Mary's son and absorbed it into His

¹¹⁵ Apollinaris, quote by Pelikan, 233.

divinity. Although this exalted the divinity of Christ, it did so only by denying His real humanity."¹¹⁶

Apollinaris' error was seized upon by the Cappadocians, and the two Gregories especially exhibited how this mutated and diminished humanity in Jesus Christ would necessarily lead to Docetism – the view that Christ only 'appeared' or 'seemed' to be human. At best, Apollinaris' anthropology of Christ was a 'tertium quid' – a third thing, neither divine nor human but rather an amalgamation of the two natures, or rather the divine nature possessing and inhabiting a human body. In any event, it was not human and therefore could not be the Redeemer of Man. Gregory of Nyssa wrote, "Hence a complete and perfect redemption demands a *human* as well as *divine* Redeemer whose body redeems our bodies, whose soul redeems our souls, and whose mind redeems our minds. Only by becoming what we are in all the parts of our being could Christ bring humanity into communion with God."¹¹⁷

It appears in all other aspects of his teaching that Apollinaris was orthodox and was, inasmuch as can be known, a true believer. Yet such was the era in which he lived that the least tinge of error in one's teaching justified the harshest of responses by the Church as a whole. Apollinaris, his teachings, and his followers were condemned at a synod in Rome in AD 377, again in Antioch in AD 378, once more in Rome (as if the first condemnation would not hold) in AD 382. This last Roman anathema actually followed a firm and final (!) condemnation of Apollinaris' teaching at the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in AD 381. Sadly, excluded from the communion of the Church, the followers of Apollinaris drifted into the heretical ranks of the Monophysites (who denied the real humanity of Christ in any form) after their leader's death in AD 390. This is one of those historical examples in which the reaction of the

¹¹⁶ Neve, 126.

¹¹⁷ Quoted by Neve, 127.

Church may have done more harm than good, the error being, perhaps, remedial and not one that justified condemnation and excommunication.

The nails were driven home in the coffin of Apollinarianism by the Decree of Chalcedon in AD 451 where it was declared that Christ is “true God and true man of a reasonable soul and body...of the same substance with us according to his manhood.” This last phrase is significant, for the Athanasian *homoousios* used to declare Christ’s true and eternal deity is here used to declare His true and temporal humanity. But declaring something to be so is not the same as explaining it. And the explanations that were attempted during this time often contained only portions of the truth.

Alexandria versus Antioch:

By the turn of the fifth century the two oldest and most renowned dioceses for theological study in Christendom were Alexandria and Antioch, each being diametrically opposite the other in methodology. Alexandria embraced the allegorical hermeneutic of Origen; Antioch repudiated it entirely. Human nature being what it is in its fallen state, these two theological schools refused to see the validity, even in part, to their opponent’s dogma and therefore handicapped themselves from attaining the true comprehension of the matter. “Each of these schools presented one aspect of the truth; satisfactorily to exhibit the truth in its *entirety*, it was necessary to combine them. But instead of uniting them, these views were carried out in the most one-sided manner, till they issued in positive error.”¹¹⁸ Add to this the intrigue of court politics (whence the adjective ‘byzantine’ as applied to the complexities of political infighting) in Constantinople, multiple synods and councils, excommunications and anathemas hurled across the miles, verbal abuse and even physical violence, and the ensuing struggle is self-evidently not one of Christianity’s finer hours.

¹¹⁸ Kurtz, 199.

The Antiochene school was led by led by Diodorus of Tarsus (d. 378), Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) and Theodoret (d. 457). As previously mentioned, these biblical scholars abjured the allegorical methodology of Origen and the Alexandrian school, in favor of a historical-grammatical exegesis that would be very familiar to Reformed scholars today. "These men whom we have named were diligent exegetes who studied the life of the historical Christ, especially His human and moral development."¹¹⁹ Thus they were hermeneutically jealous of Christ's true humanity, and rejected all views that minimized this in any way. In advocating strenuously the true humanity of Christ, however, the Antiochenes did not yield ground as to His true divinity – they, too, were Athanasian in their view of the essential and eternal deity of Christ. Jesus Christ was 100% human and 100% divine; so far so good. But how did these two natures reside in the person of the Messiah?

True humanity in Christ demanded that Jesus have the power of self-determination, what is now termed 'free will.' To be truly man meant to be "*tempted in all ways such as we, yet without sin.*" "Christ assumed a complete human nature with all its sinful affections and tendencies; but He fought these down and raised His human nature by constant conflict and victory to that absolute perfection to which by the same way He leads us through the communication of His Spirit."¹²⁰ This sounds good, but the backdrop against which this moral struggle against the temptations of sin was fought soon shows the error of the Antiochene solution.

According to the teachers of this school, Jesus overcame all temptations to sin by His complete obedience to the Logos which indwelt Him. On this point the *union* of divine and human in Christ Jesus falls to the floor, for it is not an *essential* union of two natures, but rather a moral union of one nature (human) in voluntary obedience and submission to another (divine). Instead of truly taking

¹¹⁹ Neve, 128.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

on the humanity of Jesus, the Logos “entered into an intimate relation with the humanity of Jesus because He was pleased with it.”¹²¹ This results not in two natures dwelling in one person, but two persons living in one body. “This unity meant no more than the harmonious adjustment of the will of Jesus to the will of the *Logos*, so that Jesus became the perfect organ of the willing and acting *Logos*.”¹²² Seeburg summarizes the Antiochene view as another example of theologians attempting to preserve seemingly disparate truths with an untenable solution,

Since, therefore, the integrity of the two natures, especially that of the actual and developing human nature, must be preserved, the conclusion was reached that the Son of God dwelt within the son of David.¹²³

The Antiochenes, in spite of their aversion to allegorical hermeneutic, were forced themselves to fall back on metaphor to defend their view. They utilized the biblical metaphor of marriage: the two becoming ‘one flesh.’ The persons of the man and the woman remain personally distinct in themselves, yet in view of their union in marriage are viewed as ‘one flesh.’ But no one ever considered the ‘one flesh’ union of marriage tantamount to two natures becoming one person, and so the metaphor does not help our comprehension of the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. While it does stand firm on the true and unmitigated humanity of Christ, and refuses to yield one grain of earth on the absolute and eternal deity of Christ, it fails to bring the two natures together in a meaningful, redemptive way.

The Alexandrian school approached the matter from the perspective of the divinity of Christ, a viewpoint understandable from the theological center of Athanasius’ influence. The allegorical and metaphorical bent of Alexandrian hermeneutics perhaps enabled their teachers greater flexibility in dealing with

¹²¹ Neve, 129.

¹²² *Idem*.

¹²³ Seeburg, 248.

such a conundrum as the union of the divine and the human in one person. Yet even at this, the Alexandrians were incapable of attaining such a union without the sacrifice of the true humanity – exhibited through the unique personality – of Jesus. “The *Logos* really became ‘flesh’ by taking upon Himself flesh and soul from the Virgin Mary and making them His own. As a result, the two natures became one person in an abiding union of divinity and humanity.”¹²⁴

The Alexandrian position provided a Christological defense for the practice, apparently older than the current controversy, of calling Mary *theotokos* – the Mother of God. This was permitted theologically on the basis of maintaining that the *Logos* was truly conceived and born of Mary; not in such a way as to claim that Mary somehow became the origin of the uncreated God. It is indeterminate when and where this title originated within early Christianity, but it appears to have been in common liturgical usage by this phase in the Christological controversies. It was, however, most commonly used in the Alexandrian circles – those churches most influenced by the teachings of Athanasius and his followers. And it was opposed in relative degree by adherents of the Antiochene school.

Cyril versus Nestorius:

Thus far the Alexandrian solution, like the Antiochene and Apollinarian, sounds reasonable. The error is subtle but real, and lies in the *personality* of Jesus Christ, in whom the union of the divine and human was affected by the incarnation of the *Logos*. Cyril of Alexandria, who was Patriarch of Alexandria from AD 412 until his death in 444, was the leading proponent of that school’s contributions to the Christological debate. His chief opponent was Nestorius, himself the Archbishop of Constantinople from AD 428 to 431. There was not a little political component to this debate, as Alexandria (an old and established diocese of the Christian Church) deeply resented the growing influence of the

¹²⁴ Neve, 130.

upstart See of Constantinople. Still, there was substance to the Christological side of the debate as well.

Nestorius was apparently an intemperate man who spread his anathemas far and wide. He opposed Arianism, Apollinarianism, other heretical 'isms,' and - in a very impolitic move - the use of the term *theotokos* in reference to the Virgin Mary. "His position, which was perfectly correct, was that a human mother could not give the divine nature to the *Logos*, and hence the divinity of Christ had not originated from Mary."¹²⁵ Nestorius proposed the use of the term *Christotokos* - Mother of Christ - as a substitute, but the usage of *theotokos* was so firmly implanted in much of the liturgy of the church that that time, that his attempts were viewed as unforgivably petulant and hostile.

Nestorius held to the Antiochene view of the two natures of Christ - that the *Logos* adopted the body and soul of the son of Mary - and this is probably why his opposition to the term *theotokos* was so virulent. Nonetheless it earned him few friends, and the perceived offense he committed against the dignity of Mary (Mariolatry was already developing in the church) stimulated a vigorous opposition to his Christology in general. Nestorius was condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus (AD 431) for teaching that Christ was divided into two persons, something that he did not teach. But the union of the two natures in one person, as taught by the Antiochene theologians, was not *real* but only *moral*. "Beginning with the conception in the womb of Mary, the *Logos* enters into a relation with a complete man; this relation becomes so intimate that it results in one person. Yet the *Logos* only resides in the man Jesus as in a shrine...This, then, made Christ appear to be not a real God-Man, but a *God-bearing man*."¹²⁶

Motivated as much by political ambition as by a desire for truth, Cyril of Alexandria became the chief antagonist in the life of Nestorius, and successfully

¹²⁵ Neve, 132.

¹²⁶ *Idem*.

arranged for the latter's condemnation, excommunication, and banishment. Cyril's view on the relation of the divine to the human in Christ, however, did move the Church closer to a final statement of orthodoxy, though in itself it was still lacking. He held firm to the Alexandrian and Athanasian perspective that the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ was *real* and not just apparent or moral, while avoiding the Apollinarian error of diminishing the reality of Christ's humanity to make room for this union. But Cyril's formula turned out to be only slightly better than Apollinaris'.

The Alexandrian patriarch taught that the *Logos* of God entered into true and essential union with the son of Mary at conception; that two natures then fused into one person, growing and developing into manhood. Cyril did not excise the rational part of Jesus and replace it with the *Logos*, as Apollinaris had done. But he did posit an *impersonal* man conceived in Mary's womb, whose personality was then assumed by the *Logos* of God. "This *Logos-God*, who is unchangeable, assumed the impersonal human nature including the mind, without Himself sacrificing anything to the same."¹²⁷ Thus the *Logos* "dyed the soul of man with the stability and unchangeability of his own nature."¹²⁸

Cyril's Christology was similar, in a sense, to that of the Antichene school in that the resultant man, Jesus Christ, was powerfully aided in his struggle against temptation by the presence of the *Logos* within him. The difference was that Cyril's union was physiological and essential; the Antiochene model was simply a moral union of purpose and will. Cyril taught that "the Only-Begotten had delivered the earthly body from corruption by making his own soul more powerful than sin and endowing the human soul with his own stability and immutability as wool is imbued with a dye."¹²⁹

The problem with Cyril's Christology is that the resultant Jesus is not the historical Jesus of the gospel narratives. This latter Jesus was a man of distinct

¹²⁷ Neve, 134.

¹²⁸ Cyril of Alexandria; quoted by Pelikan, 233.

¹²⁹ *Idem*.

personality, heritage and family, whose neighbors recognized (and rejected) Him as someone quite familiar to them from His childhood. Furthermore, Cyril theorized a human nature unknown to any philosophical viewpoint to date: an impersonal human being. Philosophers and scientists have argued throughout the ages where to locate the personality of man – in the mind, in the soul, in the neuro-chemical reactions of the brain – but none has ever set forth an impersonal human. Cyril granted Jesus a completely human composition: body, soul, and mind in the Aristotelian view; so where did the *Logos-personality* come into play?

Still, Cyril perhaps came closest to a solution that answered to the biblical teaching with regard to the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. The problem was to find the locus of unity between two vastly different (and seemingly incompatible) natures as divinity and humanity. Moving from the same *Logos* perspective that formed the foundation of Trinitarian orthodoxy, Cyril theorized that the union of divine and human in Jesus Christ could only be the *Logos* of God in Him. “The two natures are, indeed, after their union the same as they were before, but they are combined in indissoluble unity by means of the unity in the person – the *Logos*, as also by means of the consequent mutual communication of their respective attributes.”¹³⁰ Cyril arrived at the proper destination: two natures in one person; but he, too, did so by the use of some unwarranted and unsupported short cuts.

The Tome of Leo the Great:

Cyril’s overwhelming defeat of Nestorius brought a measure of stability to the controversy, but did not affect a permanent solution. Another rather minor heresy arose through a disciple of the Alexandrian school, the abbot Eutyches, who pressed the teachings of Cyril to their logical conclusion. That was, that after the union of the *Logos* with the child in Mary’s womb, there was but one nature in Christ: that of the *Logos*. This was going too far for the general

¹³⁰ Seeburg, 252.

orthodoxy of the Church, and Eutyches was condemned and deposed by a synod at Constantinople in AD 448. The significance of Eutyches heresy, however, lies in the ascendant influence of the Roman bishop and the theology of the Western Church within the Christological controversy, an influence that would continue to rise at the expense of both Alexandria and Constantinople and of the Eastern Church in general, for generations to come.

The Roman bishop of that time was a remarkable man: Leo (the first of that papal name) who was later to be granted the designation *Magnus*: Leo the Great. A very Roman man and a very Roman bishop, Leo fused a practical intellect with a courageous nature. We will have occasion to look more closely at



Leo I Magnus (391-461)

his life in the next lesson devoted to the rise of the papacy. Here, however, it is his contribution to the Christological controversy regarding the two natures of Jesus Christ that is most pertinent. Leo supported the Patriarch of Constantinople, Flavian, in his efforts to silence the heretical teachings of Eutyches. Thus the Roman bishop penned a lengthy letter – a *tome* – to be used by Flavian in bringing about the condemnation of Eutychian error. The *Tome of St. Leo* thus became the foundation of Christian orthodoxy regarding the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, from that day to this.

The *Tome* is written as a polemic against the false teachings of Eutyches, but it is penned in a beautiful and timeless style that has had a far greater impact upon the understanding of subsequent generations of the Church than the numerous technical pronouncements and anathemas of the ecumenical councils. Here is an excerpt of Leo's letter to illustrate the loftiness of both his thought and his writing style.

So the proper character of both natures was maintained and came together in a single person. Lowliness was taken up by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity. To pay off the debt of our state, invulnerable nature was united to a nature that could suffer; so that in a way that corresponded to the remedies we needed, one and the same mediator between God and humanity the man Christ Jesus, could both on the one hand die and on the other be incapable of death. Thus was true God born in the undiminished and perfect nature of a true man, complete in what is his and complete in what is ours. By "ours" we mean what the Creator established in us from the beginning and what he took upon himself to restore. There was in the Saviour no trace of the things which the Deceiver brought upon us, and to which deceived humanity gave admittance. His subjection to human weaknesses in common with us did not mean that he shared our sins. He took on the form of a servant without the defilement of sin, thereby enhancing the human and not diminishing the divine. For that self-emptying whereby the Invisible rendered himself visible, and the Creator and Lord of all things chose to join the ranks of mortals, spelled no failure of power: it was an act of merciful favour. So the one who retained the form of God when he made humanity, was made man in the form of a servant. Each nature kept its proper character without loss; and just as the form of God does not take away the form of a servant, so the form of a servant does not detract from the form of God.

On the basis of Leo's analysis and comprehensive exegesis of Scripture, the Church finally arrived at a formulation of orthodox belief at the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in AD 451. The theologians gathered there at the behest of the Emperor Marcian delivered this confessional statement, setting the imprimatur of the Church upon the orthodoxy of Leo:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not

Church History

parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

A careful reading of this confession brings us once again to the realization that the limitations of human understanding often allow only for *descriptions* rather than *explanations*. Christian orthodoxy may not always be able to explain why things are the way they are; but must always properly describe them to be so. All attempts to explain the union of the divine and human in Jesus Christ led by some tortuous path to error; Leo humbly refrained from explanation and offered a majestic description of the biblical truth.

Session 13: The Rise of the Papacy

Text Reading: Matthew 23:8 - 10

*“The Romans expressed their highest ideals
in the state with its organization, its rights,
its authorities, its offices,
and its laws.”
(J. L. Neve)*

The controversies of the first four centuries of the post-apostolic era raised the spectre of a constantly divided and bickering Church. Four ecumenical councils convened – Nicæa in AD 325, Constantinople in AD 381, Ephesus in AD 431, and Chalcedon in AD 451 – attempted to unite the Church in its orthodoxy as in its faith. But none of them were successful at silencing the dissenters, nor were the many lesser councils and synods that attempted the same uniformity of doctrine on a more regional basis. Men were going to teach what they believed, and it seemed that no assemblage of bishops or emperors would be powerful enough to make all men believe alike. Anathemas, excommunications, and banishments were added to the canons of these councils and synods, and were no more effective in stemming the tide of heterodoxy than the councils themselves. With the passing of decades and centuries – and the associated accumulations of divergent teachings – the task only grew more difficult and the goal of a uniform Christian doctrine more elusive.

Emperor Constantine’s successors, for the most part, sought to employ the executive and legislative powers of their imperial office to achieve the doctrinal unity that evaded the grasp of the assembled bishops. The most draconian means, of course, was banishment of those who were deemed heretics by the councils – but this was transitory, and the banished ‘false’ teachers were often reinstated when their own political sponsors gained ascendance over their

Church History

political foes. There was, in fact, no greater doctrinal uniformity within the imperial family than there was among the bishops. But unity within the Church was viewed by the emperor as necessary for peace and stability in the realm. Thus imperial power and influence were brought to bear upon the ecclesiastical establishment by more subtle means than banishments, though these still happened with disturbing regularity.

A thoughtful proverb holds that “when all you have is a hammer, all problems will look like nails.” Governments – imperial or republican – are usually only equipped with hammers, and so no matter in what sphere of the governed realm the problem appears, it appears to the government to be a nail. So it was in the Church of the fourth and fifth centuries, as the descendants of Constantine the Great sought to exercise control over the life of the Church (and church leaders sought to exercise control over the mind of the Emperor). It was at this time that the accepted distinction between presbyters and bishops took on a new form – that of the ‘patriarch’ or ‘metropolitan.’ Just as the successive emperors maintained control over the civil population through the appointment of proconsuls, procurators, and prefects they also sought to maintain control over the ecclesiastical population via the elevation of certain bishops to a higher rank and authority. Larger towns would see their bishop (if, of course, he was in favor with the Emperor) elevated to the status of ‘metropolitan,’ while a handful of Episcopal sees were granted the status of ‘patriarchate.’

In the East the diocese of Alexandria and Antioch were accorded patriarchal status and their bishops elevated to a rank higher than that of all other bishops. To this club was added Constantinople not on the basis of its antiquity within Christianity, but rather for its proximity to the imperial court. Conversely, the Council of Chalcedon recognized the antiquity of the diocese of Jerusalem and elevated her bishop to the rank of ‘patriarch,’ notwithstanding the diminished influence of that city since the first century. There were thus four

Church History

patriarchates in the East: Antioch and Alexandria as centers of doctrinal study, Constantinople as a center of political power, and Jerusalem for nostalgia's sake.

The added authority of the patriarch was intended to provide a stabilizing force within the region of his jurisdiction, lending the imperial power to the role of ecclesiastical leader. This was to become a trend over



Map of the Eastern Byzantine Empire circa AD 480

the course of the history of the Church in Europe, and one with very negative effects upon the spiritual life of both the Church and the continent.

But the ultimate power center would not be one of the four Eastern patriarchates. It would be, ironically, the diocese that in the early years of imperial interference actually refused the rank and title of Patriarchate – Rome. The four Eastern patriarchates were united, and thus divided, by a common Greek heritage and language. Their fundamental worldview was Oriental, and thus it seems that every difference of opinion among them took on cataclysmic proportions, leading to flurries of anathemas and excommunications and appeals to the Emperor for executive assistance. “while there were four patriarchates in the East, no one of which could long dominate the other three, there was but one in the West, and that one, even at the beginning of this period, the most important of them all.”¹³¹

The internecine struggle between the Eastern/Greek patriarchs would have perpetually limited the overall influence of any one of them alone. Their relative proximity to the imperial court, and the attendant temptation to curry favor with the Emperor in order to strengthen the position of an individual See, would most likely have prevented these four patriarchates from binding together

¹³¹ Fisher, George Park; 105.

Church History

in concerted effort to assert the 'Greek' theological point of view in contrast (and sometimes conflict) with the Latin. But historical forces arose that made the whole analysis moot: the advent of Islam and the spread of the Islamic Caliphate in the 7th Century. The map below, showing the various dominant political/religious groups in the Mediterranean world around the middle of the 7th Century, places three of the four Eastern patriarchates firmly within the Islamic world.



Changes in the Mediterranean World - Circa AD 650

Another century of Islamic onslaught would extend the Caliphate into Asia Minor in the East, and overrun all of North Africa - including Carthage - in the West. Constantinople alone would remain in the East, and it would often be no more than a Christian island in a sea of Islam. She would hold out for another 800 years, until 1453 when the imperial city was finally breached and captured by Islamic forces.

Christianity was not eradicated in the East by the Muslims; both it and Judaism were allowed to coexist alongside the Muslim religion, though in a much diminished role both ecclesiastically and politically. The suddenness of the Islamic flood, taking place in the remarkably short span of less than a century, seemed to freeze Eastern orthodoxy in time. This is, of course, a simplification of

Church History

the truth – there were changes and developments in the Eastern Church through the centuries subsequent to the Islamic subjugation. But relative to the tempest that occurred in the West – from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Reformation and beyond – Eastern orthodoxy remained as unmoved as stone. The pronouncements of the first four ecumenical councils remained, and remain to this day, the fundamental doctrinal position of the Greek branches of Christianity, with little or no further development on the many other theological issues that would challenge Latin theologians for centuries to come.

Greek orthodoxy was satisfied in its development with the settlement achieved concerning the Person of Jesus Christ as the God-Man. His eternal deity, His true humanity, and the inseparable but inscrutable union of the two natures within the one Person – these determinations were sufficient, from a broad historical sense, to set the Eastern Church at rest (again, relatively speaking). The Eastern Church's diminished role in both society and government due to the Islamic invasion turned her focus inward toward survival within society at large, and toward mystical contemplation and monasticism within the Church itself. The development of doctrine would now shift to the Latin wing of the Church and, at its center, to Rome.

The *Filioque* Clause:

Before the separation between East and West would be made politically final by the conquests of the Muslim armies, there was one last stage in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity that would sow the seed of ultimate schism between the Latin and Greek churches – a schism that would not occur officially until the 11th Century. We have noted that throughout the years of controversy concerning the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, doctrinal consideration of the Holy Spirit was incidental at best. In general what was pronounced by the Church Fathers concerning the Person of the Holy Spirit was conditioned by and founded upon their determinations concerning the Person of Jesus Christ. The first ecumenical councils consistently reaffirmed and

strengthened the orthodox stance regarding the unity of the Godhead existing in Three Persons: the Father only unbegotten, the Son eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit eternally *proceeding*. But upon this last point the two branches of Christianity stuck, and broke apart.

The Nicene formulation of the creed has the Spirit eternally proceeding *from the Father*, at least as the creed was delivered in the Greek language. The Latin texts of the early creed adds a single word – *filioque* – meaning ‘*and from the Son.*’ In both languages the statement regarding the Holy Spirit remains remarkably sparse considering the multitude of words used to define and describe the Church’s faith with regard to the Son:

Greek Text

Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, τὸ
ζωοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον

*And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,
Who is from the Father proceeding.*

Latin Text

Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum, et vivificantem:
qui ex Patre **Filioque** procedit

*And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,
who is from the Father **and the Son** proceeding*

One might consider that the theologians of the Church were making progress. Whereas an earlier controversy hinged upon a single letter, this one managed to find offense in an entire word. Greek fathers were jealous to guard the ultimate foundation of divine unity within the Father and, while they were willing to admit the procession of the Spirit from the Father *through the Son*, they could not agree to what came to be known as ‘double procession.’ The point is well made from a theo-philosophical perspective, but it remains hard to understand how this single word could have been so divisive. Yet it remains so to the present day, and all Catholic attempts to effect a reunion between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic branches of Christianity have foundered on this point...and one other.

That other point is the one thing that might have united the perennially squabbling patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria: the

Church History

rising influence of the Bishop of Rome; ultimately, the Papacy. Eastern Orthodoxy, even in its diminished form under the expanding Islamic caliphates, rejected the growing claims of precedence being made by successive Roman bishops. Finally, in AD 1054, Rome again demanded that the remaining Eastern patriarchs acknowledge the supremacy of the Roman church as the mother of all churches, and of the Roman Bishop as the supreme leader of the Church on Earth. This the Eastern patriarchs could not and would not do, and the 'Great Schism' occurred severing the ancient Greek-speaking wing of Christianity from the Latin-speaking wing. Recent attempts at reconciliation under Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have seen the Roman pontiffs reciting the Nicene Creed alongside Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs, without the *filioque* clause so offensive to the Greeks. But this diplomacy has not been sufficient to bring about reunion between the two most ancient branches of professing Christianity, as the Roman bishop continues to assert his dominion over the whole church and the eastern patriarchs continue their refusal to accept that arrogation of power.

The Rise of the Roman Papacy:

The Church of Rome had two things going for it in the eyes of Christendom at large, with regard to its progressive claims to supremacy over catholic Christianity. The first was her status as the church of the ancient imperial city of Rome, the city to which all roads proverbially led, the Eternal City. Rome had been a dominant political and military city for over five centuries by the time of Christ's birth. During Christianity's infancy Roman legions spread that city's power and influence across all of North Africa, all of Southern Europe, Gaul (modern France), Britannia (modern England), and to the borders of the Parthian Empire (modern Iraq and Iran). Even though Constantine shifted the seat of imperial power to his new city on the Bosphorus, Rome still loomed large in the hearts of the populace throughout the Empire.

The Byzantine emperors appointed close associates as 'emperors' of the Western realms, to be headquartered in Rome. But events and personalities would conspire to progressively weaken the real power of these western rulers, and to shift that power into the hands of the Roman Bishop. The most famous example of this abrogation of responsibility by the appointed civil ruler, and the consequent assumption of civil authority by the leader of the Roman Church, occurred during the pontificate of Leo I, the Great.

In AD 452 the infamous Attila the Hun invaded Italy (one of a series of invasions of that land by Germanic and Asiatic hordes throughout the fifth century) and laid waste to numerous towns and villages on his way inexorably to Rome. As ransom for his sparing the Eternal City, Attila demanded the Byzantine emperor's sister Honoria in marriage, with a very sizeable dowry to boot. Emperor Valentinian III sent an embassy of three men, one of whom was the Roman bishop Leo, to 'negotiate' with Attila at his camp outside Rome. Secular historians are dubious regarding the effectiveness of this embassy, and predictably reluctant to attribute much influence to the presence of Leo, but they cannot deny that shortly after the meeting Attila broke camp and left Italy – without Honoria, without a dowry, and without having sacked Rome. Some historians attribute Attila's rapid retreat to malaria or typhus, both common to that region. But whatever the actual reason for Attila's departure, the populace of Rome, Italy, and eventually all of Western Europe attributed this temporal salvation to the influence and eloquence of Leo. The Roman bishop had another opportunity to save the city in 455 when the Vandals under their king Genseric laid siege. Church historians claim that Leo interceded with Genseric, asking the Vandal leader to satisfy himself with pillage and to spare the city from rape, murder, and fire. Again, whether because of Leo's intercession or not, Genseric did in fact abstain from the baser aspects of a usual Vandal conquest of an enemy city – his troops plundered Rome for three days and then departed.

These stories, legends though they may be, galvanized the position of the Roman Bishop not only in the ecclesiastical world – where he was already revered as ‘first among equals’ or higher – but also within the civil and political realm as well. Leo’s actions – or at least the reputation of Leo’s actions – solidified the ascendancy of Roman ecclesiastical power that was infamously granted to the Roman bishop by Emperor Valentinian III by decree dated June 6, 445. *The New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* reports,

When appealed to by Leo I in the dispute with St. Hilary of Poitiers concerning the latter's metropolitan rights, he addressed a constitution to Ætius, Governor of Gaul, strongly supporting Leo. In it he emphasized the papal supremacy, founded on the position of St. Peter as head of the episcopacy, and pointed out the necessity of one supreme head for the spiritual kingdom, and ordered the civil authorities to bring to Rome any bishop who refused to come there when called by the pope.¹³²

This edict points out the second characteristic of the Roman bishop that tended toward his accumulation of influence and power: the universal belief that the Roman Church had been founded by the Apostle Peter and that he had been the church’s first ‘pope.’ Tradition held that the Roman church was founded by Peter, and was ministered to by both this Apostle to the Jews and by Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Both of these twin pillars of the apostolic church were, it is said, martyred in Rome, and both lie interred somewhere under her streets. To read the legends of Peter and Paul with regard to Rome is almost like reading of another Romulus and Remus founding the religious city upon the ashes of the political one. But of the two Peter would be Romulus, on account of the Church’s traditional interpretation of Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 16.

*Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that **you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and***

¹³² <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15255b.htm>

Church History

whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:17-19)

Never mind the fact that Jesus later said almost exactly the same words regarding 'the keys of the kingdom' to all of the disciples, what can be said with regard to the Roman Church having been founded by Peter? Was Peter indeed that church's first bishop? Was the authority vested in Peter by the Lord to be transferred to the subsequent bishops of the Roman Church? Perhaps more pointed yet is the question: "Would God have chosen *Rome* to be the headquarters of His Church?" He who chooses the base things of the world, and the weak and foolish, in order to confound the powerful and wise - would He have ordained that His Church should emanate from that city which is the example *par excellence* of worldly power and lust? The whore of Revelation becomes as the Mother of the Church? The thought stretches credulity to the breaking point.

But beyond such conjecture, we can analyze the claim that is still held by the Roman Catholic Church today, and sadly by many Protestant scholars as well, that Peter both founded the Church at Rome and served as its first bishop. From the testimony of Scripture it does not appear that Peter did travel to Rome, much less found or lead the church there. The Book of Acts is silent with regard to Peter's presence in Rome, and this silence is actually quite convincing that the Apostle was not the founder of the Roman Church. Luke writes of Paul's entourage, of which he was a member, traveling to Rome upon Paul's civil appeal to be tried at Caesar's court. Paul's arrival at Rome is recorded in Acts 28,

*After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. **And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns.** When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.*

(Acts 28:11-15)

No mention is made of Peter among 'the brethren' who went out to meet Paul on the Appian Way, nor is any mention made of an audience between the captive Apostle and the alleged Roman Bishop. Tradition places Peter's advent in Rome and the founding of the church there in the middle of the fifth decade (circa AD 45); Paul's arrival at Rome was in the early 60s. Since Peter's martyrdom is traditionally dated either in AD 64 or 68, he should have been on hand to greet Paul upon the latter's arrival to the city.

Furthermore, it becomes apparent that if Peter was in Rome during the two decades prior to Paul's arrival, he was very negligent in his duties. The closing verses of Acts 28 recount Paul's initial meetings with the Jews of Rome. It is clear from Luke's narrative that the Jewish leaders of the city were not fully aware of the Christian teaching concerning Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

(Acts 28:23-24)

Considering that Peter was particularly recognized as the Apostle to the Jews, does it not seem remarkable that the Jewish leaders of the city supposedly under his care were only first made aware of the doctrine of Christ by Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles? The conclusion can only be that Peter had not been to Rome, was not the founder of the church there, and never served as its bishop. This conclusion is confirmed by the lack of any mention of Peter by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. This letter, traditionally dated in the mid-50s, would most certainly have arrived in Rome during Peter's watch, yet Paul refers to the church there as having its foundation laid 'by another' - a very evasive way to credit his brother apostle, indeed. Paul closes his letter to the Roman believers with a list of greetings by name, and again Peter's name is

Church History

conspicuously absent from the list. One might conclude that Peter and Paul were no longer on speaking terms since the tiff in Antioch (*cp.* Galatians 2:10-12), but it seems more reasonable – and more gracious – to conclude that Paul did not greet Peter simply because Peter was not in Rome at the time.

Yet tradition is early and strong concerning Peter's martyrdom in Rome. Regarding the apostle's death we are as much at a loss for historical data as we are for the movements of his life and ministry. There are no contemporary accounts of the deaths of either Peter or Paul, though letters written within fifty years of their demise place both in Rome at the time of their end. Peter does allude to his near departure in his second general epistle (as does Paul in his second letter to Timothy).

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. (II Peter 1:12-14)

One may add to this the closing greeting and benediction from the apostle's first letter and conclude that Peter spent his last days in Rome, metaphorically called 'Babylon.'

She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son. Greet one another with a kiss of love. (I Peter 5:13)

But dying in Rome does not necessarily imply ministry in Rome. It was the practice of the Romans for centuries to bring the leaders of their enemies to the imperial city, there to be paraded in triumph and, usually, executed. Whatever else one may conclude from the Lord's words to Peter in Matthew 16, it must be that Peter was a leader among the disciples, a 'pillar of the Church' as the Apostle Paul calls him. It is quite reasonable to suppose that a Roman procurator or governor in some district of Palestine, Asia Minor, or Achaia arrested Peter as the leader of a 'secret society' – these 'Christians' – and sent him

to Rome for punishment as an example to the rest of the Church. There, having no native Roman citizenship on which to appeal, Peter most certainly would have been put to death, probably in a very public manner. Yet it is another instance of that curious fact, that God has faithfully kept the tombs of His servants secreted away from the survivors lest they become places of worship and of stumbling.

History notwithstanding, Peter's residency and ministry in Rome was accepted as fact by the turn of the second century. The theory of 'apostolic succession' founded on Matthew 16 would progressively become firm doctrine, and the spiritual heritage of the Roman Bishop as the heir of Peter would be commonplace among Christian writers throughout the Mediterranean world by the turn of the third century. The political upheavals of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries almost guaranteed that Rome's star would rise, as those of Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and eventually even Constantinople, would fall from the sky.

But the growing power and influence of the Church at Rome and its Bishop did not necessarily forebode evil for the rest of Christendom. It was conceivable, though perhaps unlikely, that the succession of popes in Rome would be godly men, courageous both for the faith and for the people, as Leo apparently was. He would be termed 'the Great,' as were a number of his successors. 'Great' theologians would also arise from the Roman/Latin Church - not the least of whom was Augustine - and 'great' missionary activity would be initiated from that church - the sending of another Augustine as missionary to the island of Britain, for instance. We turn in the next lesson, therefore, to these 'great' popes, theologians, and missionaries of the Western Church.

Session 14: The Rise of the Papacy – Part II

Text Reading: Matthew 23:8 - 10

*“The apostles can have no successors in a literal sense.
The role of the original witness or receiver of revelation
cannot be transferred.”
(Carl E. Braaten)*

Popes have not always been popular men (indeed, according to some versions of the history of the Roman Church, they have not always been *men* at all). Popes have been feared, despised, respected, venerated, lampooned, but rarely admired, even within the Roman Catholic Church itself. One would think



Pope John Paul II
(1920-2005)

that the admiration of an autocratic religious authority would decrease in proportion to society’s increase in independence and enlightenment. In other words, if ever a pope was to be admired it would not be in the modern world. Yet according to a recent Gallup poll, the eighth most admired person of the century just past is the late Pope John Paul II. John Paul II was the second-longest

reigning pope in the history (and prehistory) of the Roman Church, the most traveled, and the most ecumenical. He was also the first non-Italian pope since 1523, but one cannot believe that this fact contributed to his popularity (!). Ironically, his popularity grew during his tenure and was highest at his death – he has already been beatified by his successor, Benedict XVI, far ahead of the normal time table for eventual canonization. This popularity was in spite of the fact that John Paul continued to hold staunchly conservative views on abortion, birth control, and the ordination of women and during a time when the scandal of child molestation by priests was coming to light.

Much of John Paul’s popularity stems, no doubt, from his personality and the length of his pontificate. He was seen as a diplomatic man, willing to mend

Church History

ecclesiastical fences long broken – with Islam, Judaism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism. Yet his irenic demeanor masked an unyielding adherence to Catholic orthodoxy and, while he opened communication with these other faiths (and had numerous dialogues with the Dalai Lama), he yielded absolutely nothing in the way of Catholic dogma or practice. There were iron teeth behind that pleasant smile.

Shortly after John Paul's death priests and theologians in the Roman Catholic Church began to refer to him as 'the Great' – only the fourth pope in the history of that church to be so designated. Benedict XVI, in his first official address as Pope, spoke of 'the great Pope John Paul II.' It is apparent that John Paul will be canonized ('sainted') within the next few years, accelerating a process that normally takes several generations and sometimes hundreds of years. Could it be that popes are nice people after all? Perhaps it is true, as some modern Protestant scholars are maintaining, that the Reformation was all a trivial matter of semantics and all Christians may now, with good conscience, unite under one earthly shepherd, the Pope. Is there anything *inherently* wrong with the idea of one man representing the visible unity of Christianity upon the earth?

Carl Braaten, an influential Lutheran pastor and theologian for the past fifty years, answers in the negative. There is nothing *inherently* evil in the concept of either the episcopacy or the papacy as expressions of visible Christian unity in the world. In a hopeful article entitled *The Episcopate and the Petrine Office as Expressions of Unity*, Braaten sets forth his earnest desire and expectation that there will come a time when the Papacy will divest itself of its authoritarian structure and its worldly power and truly become "the service of a *papa angelica*, an angelic pope, who would represent the present of the Spirit in a theonomous way."¹³³ Braaten is convinced, as are many in the Lutheran and Anglican

¹³³ Braaten, Carl E., *Spirit, Faith, and Church* with Wolfhart Pannenburg & Avery Dulles, S. J. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; 1970), 101.

Church History

denominations, that all that separates Protestants from Rome is the perversion of the papacy into a political and worldly principedom. He views the declension of the good and necessary shepherding office of the Bishop of Rome as an accident of history, in his own words both understandable and perhaps even inevitable given the decline and fall of the Roman Empire during the early years of the Church.

It was not anachronistic but historically understandable that the Petrine office would – chameleon-like – take on characteristics of Roman law and politics, that the Western church would develop along juridical lines, that the power of the pope would increase immeasurably with the collapse of the empire, that notions about hierarchy, succession, centralism, and absolutism would be transferred from the secular imperium to the ecclesiastic magisterium, and that the magisterium would itself become mainly a power structure.¹³⁴

This was all bound to happen, considers Braaten, but that it did happen should not be taken as an indictment of the papacy *per se* – the Petrine office still has historical validity and present value.

Still, however, our new society will need the ministry of Christ and the ministries of the church. And among these ministries we can imagine that certain traditional forms, like episcopacy and the Petrine office, will be manifest and function in new ways. When they get rid of their authoritarian and triumphalist habits from the past, and take on the form of the servant, they will become a ‘cool medium.’¹³⁵

Braaten’s hopes for this chameleon-like change of the current authoritarian pope into a meek and humble shepherd of God’s sheep is eschatological, and even apocalyptic, in nature.

They [i.e., the episcopacy and the Pope] will have the authority of the parable, spoken from participation in the everyday situation into which the power of God’s Kingdom breaks from the future. This is a dream of the future. The

¹³⁴ Braaten, 101.

¹³⁵ Braaten, 103; a ‘cool medium’ describes a leadership style that is cooperative and ‘coaching’ rather than authoritarian and dogmatic.

Church History

realization of this dream will coincide with the reunion of the divided churches; it will signal the recovery of prophecy in the church, a new outpouring of the Spirit, a new zeal for world mission, a deeper experience of unifying love.¹³⁶

Braaten's utopian ruminations are representative of a growing trend among mainline Protestant theologians, and a burgeoning trend among evangelicals, toward reunification between Protestant Christianity and Rome. In the view of this segment of modern Protestantism, the papacy was a good idea gone bad. But in the view of the Reformers of the 15th and 16th centuries, the papacy was a bad idea gone worse. The assembled theologians of Westminster had no kind words to give to the 'Petrine office,' labeling it with the harshest denomination of all: Antichrist. In the section 'On the Church' we read,

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God. (WCF XXV:VI)

The Particular (Reformed) Baptists, writing their own version of the confession some forty years later, did not soften the language of this section,

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, all power for the calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

[1689 London Baptist Confession; 26:4]

As we consider the historical development of the papacy from our vantage point of modern Christianity, we must recognize the tremendous chasm that separates much of Protestantism today from the views of its forebears. Carl Braaten represents a sizeable portion of professing Christianity today that

¹³⁶ Braaten, 105-6.

anticipates the 'softening' of the Pope from authoritarian ruler to foot-washing servant. To the Reformers and their immediate heirs this hope is tantamount to the conversion of the antichrist himself. Suffice it to say that both views of the papacy cannot be correct.

Braaten is probably correct in his assessment of the development of the papacy, the monarchical episcopate, as an accident of history. We have seen that legend and politics conspired to accord increasing influence and authority upon the Roman bishop. It would have taken a series of very humble, almost angelic, men to have withstood the temptations that accompanied the veneration that was given to the Bishop of Rome. And it would have verged upon insensitive negligence for the Bishop of Rome not to have assumed to himself some political and civil role when once the Western Roman emperors effectively abdicated their responsibilities. All this to say that one can find fault with the Petrine office in general without denigrating all of the men who held the office. But this is far from an endorsement of the hierarchical system, for the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy itself have more serious doctrinal and practical issues in light of which no evangelical can safely countenance reunion. All professing Christians uniting under the banner of the Pope might indeed represent a remarkable show of visible unity, but the price paid in doctrinal truth would be far too great.

Perhaps the most damaging testimony against the legitimacy of the Petrine office is the fact that Rome itself felt compelled to fabricate a legendary history for it, tracing it back to the Apostle Peter and claiming for it the full apostolic authority of the chief of the apostles. Even Braaten, who presents a favorable view of the papacy as one might hear from a Protestant, acknowledges the fallacy of Rome's claim to Petrine descent and recognizes it for what it was and is, an arrogation of illegitimate power to the Episcopal office of Rome.

We have praised the early church for exercising her freedom to innovate, to make changes, to try new things. But the trend set in to legitimate the new things by fictitiously deriving them from the past. The church became afraid of

her own freedom, and for this reason her new orders had to be made constitutive of the church from the very beginning. And this was done by historical retrojection and by creating historical fictions.¹³⁷

Some of the men who occupied the Episcopal throne in Rome were capable of handling the tremendous power that had accrued, and continued to accumulate, to that See; but they were very few and very far in between. As we have already noted, only three popes prior to John Paul II have been given the designation 'magnus' – *the Great*. Leo I, Gregory I, and Nicholas I have each been granted that honor within the Roman Church, and each used their Episcopal influence to increase the power of Rome over the rest of Christendom and, to the extent possible, over the secular rulers as well. But many other popes were powerful and influential, many aggrandized the political and ecclesiastical influence of the Roman See, and many granted to themselves civil as well as religious authority. The occasion of the utter collapse of the Western Roman Empire may have started the ball of papal authority rolling, but the succession of men who occupied that office took up that ball and ran with it full court.

Sylvester I – *The Donation of Constantine*

Sylvester was the Bishop of Rome during the advent of Constantine I to the imperial throne and the latter's shift of the imperial court to his new city on the Bosphorus. Sylvester's name does not figure prominently in the controversies that occurred during that time, nor does he appear to have been much involved in the First Ecumenical Council at Nicæa. In fact, his name would not bear mentioning at all except for the example he unwittingly and posthumously played of the gross historical fabrications that have surrounded and bolstered the authority of the Roman Bishop. In Sylvester's case the historical fiction took the form of the *Donation of Constantine* – a document allegedly written by the

¹³⁷ Braaten, 94.

Church History

Emperor to the Roman pope, giving imperial sanction to the supreme authority of the Roman bishop over all other great patriarchates and granting temporal authority to the pope over Rome, Italy, and the western provinces of the empire. The document hales from the fifth century, several generations after Sylvester's death, yet it was accepted as genuine and used as political and ecclesiastical leverage by his successors for many, many years. This grant was apparently in return for many blessings that had accrued to Constantine from Sylvester's hand - including the emperor's conversion, baptism, and healing from leprosy. Giving the pope so much power over both the church and the political realm must have seemed to Constantine the very least he could do!



13th Century Fresco showing Pope Sylvester I (l) receiving the Donation from Constantine the Great

Alas, it was but a fraud. The famous Italian priest, humanist, and patron saint of the Renaissance, Lorenzo Valla (1407-57), made somewhat of a career in exposing historical fictions. He was in the employ of Alfonso, the king of Aragon, who was himself embroiled in a territorial dispute with the pope. Alfonso commissioned Valla to study the *Donation* and determine its validity - undoubtedly indicating to his scholarly servant his own preference as to the outcome of the research. Yet in spite of the political bias underlying the investigation, Valla's treatise was tightly reasoned and based upon the style and obvious date of the Latin used in the *Donation*. His refutation of that fictitious grant has stood the test of time and is now accepted as valid even by the Roman Catholic Church.

Pope Innocent I

There is a great deal of debate among church historians as to which occupant of the episcopacy of Rome should be the first 'pope' in the later, authoritative sense of the title. Innocent I, who reigned from AD 401-17, certainly

deserves some votes. Although he held little sway with the imperial court in Constantinople, his exerted papal authority vigorously from Thessalonica westward into the provinces of Gaul and Spain. One historian refers to Innocent's literary tone as 'imperious' and 'peremptory.'¹³⁸ It was during Innocent's tenure that the Visigoth Alaric laid siege to and eventually sacked Rome in AD 410. The pope was out of town at the time on a deputation to the western Roman Emperor in Ravenna seeking imperial relief for Rome, so he did not have the opportunity that would later fall to Leo to intervene with the pagan rulers for the deliverance of the Eternal City.

Pope Leo I Magnus - *The Shield of God*

We have already had occasion to meet Leo I, the author of the famous Tome that ostensibly settled one phase of the Christological controversy in the fifth century. His fame was elevated both by his scholarly and eloquent *Tome* and by his courageous defense of the City of Rome against the barbarian invaders taking their turns at sacking the ancient city. In both respects, then, he earned the additional designation *Shield of God* - as a shepherd who protected the flock from doctrinal heresy and from physical harm. By all accounts Leo was a forceful and impressive man, a leader to be respected by both Catholic and Protestant alike. Yet in the end he was the Bishop of *Rome*, and his success in that role furthered the accumulation of power to that See.

An energetic and purposeful pontiff, Leo infused all his policies and pronouncements...with his conviction that supreme and universal authority in the church, bestowed originally by Christ on Peter, had been transmitted to each subsequent bishop of Rome as the Apostle's heir. As such, he assumed Peter's functions, full authority, and privileges; and just as the Lord bestowed more power on Peter than on the other apostles, so the pope was 'the primate of all the bishops,' the Apostle's mystical embodiment.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Kelly, R. N. D., *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1986); 37.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 43.

Gelasius I - *The Two Swords*

About a generation after Leo I, Pope Gelasius (AD 492-96) entered the political/ecclesiastical fray by publishing his now-famous treatise on the Two Swords of Romans 13 and Ephesians 6. The doctrine arose within a letter written in AD 494 to the Emperor Anastasius, and was intended to defend the supreme authority of the ecclesiastical power over that of the civil power (one can only imagine the reception this letter received from Anastasius). Gelasius' reasoning, however, is biblical as far as it goes - that the spiritual sword of the Word of God is of eternal importance, whereas the temporal sword of the magistrate is merely for this life.

There are two powers, august Emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled, namely, the sacred authority of the priests and the royal power. Of these that of the priests is the more weighty, since they have to render an account for even the kings of men in the divine judgment. You are also aware, dear son, that while you are permitted honorably to rule over human kind, yet in things divine you bow your head humbly before the leaders of the clergy and await from their hands the means of your salvation. In the reception and proper disposition of the heavenly mysteries you recognize that you should be subordinate rather than superior to the religious order, and that in these matters you depend on their judgment rather than wish to force them to follow your will.¹⁴⁰

Gelasius' tenure in office was brief, and other than this letter his contribution to the history of the papacy was minor. Nonetheless, the letter would serve as perpetual ammunition for future popes who were more vigorous in their political and ecclesiastical assertions than its author was. And future emperors and kings were no more willing to acquiesce to papal hegemony than Anastasius was in Gelasius' time. The conflict between Church and State would intensify in the coming years, ultimately making a mockery of the shepherdic status of the Roman Bishop.

¹⁴⁰ Gelasius, *Duo Sunt*; Internet History Sourcebook: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/gelasius1.asp>

Gregory I Magnus - *The Servant of the Servants of God*

The papacy reached a pinnacle of both potentiality and power with the ascension of Gregory I in AD 590. Gregory was the scion of a wealthy patrician family, but abandoned his claims to wealth and influence, becoming a monk and converting the family palace on the Caelian Hill into a monastery. He was appointed to the pontificate against his ardent opposition, and was ordained as pope under protest. “His early letters as pope graphically portray his unhappiness at being dragged from the contemplative life to shoulder his heavy burden.”¹⁴¹

Yet Gregory eventually acclimated to the papacy, and threw the entirety of his considerable store of talent into his role as the Bishop of Rome. Though he referred to himself in humble terms, “the servant of the servants of God,” he maintained and extended the supreme authority of the Roman pope over all other authorities both ecclesiastical and civil. He turned out to be an exceedingly able administrator, and brought centralized order to the doctrine and practice of the churches in the western provinces of the empire. His activities ranged far and wide – finding him dealing with famine and disease in Rome, then organizing the musical liturgy of the western churches (the Gregorian chant is attributed to him); now dispatching Augustine (not the great theologian of the same name) as the first missionary to Britannia, later elevating Augustine to become the first archbishop of England (the forerunner of the Archbishop of Canterbury). “Gregory was a man of immense ability, determination, and energy.”¹⁴² Unfortunately his excessive fasting as part of his monkish asceticism wore him down physically, causing his pontificate to be relatively short. Gregory died while Rome was again under siege and in the grip of famine, in AD 604.

¹⁴¹ Kelly; 66.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 67.

Although he thoroughly imbibed the Petrine origins of the Roman papacy, and energetically promoted the supreme authority of the Roman See over all others, Gregory I also represented perhaps the closest any pontiff has come to that idealistic shepherd envisioned by Carl Braaten. Gregory's greatest work was his letter to John, Bishop of Ravenna, later entitled *The Rule of the Pastor*. In this treatise Gregory outlines the role of the bishop as the shepherd of the flock, a fearless and tireless example to the sheep of piety and devotion, and a stalwart defender of his people against all dangers temporal and spiritual. An excerpt of the letter beats with the pastoral heart of this great pope,

So much, then, have we briefly said, to shew how great is the weight of government, lest whosoever is unequal to sacred offices of government should dare to profane them, and through lust of pre-eminence undertake a leadership of perdition. For hence it is that James affectionately deters us, saying, Be not made many masters, my brethren (James iii. 1). Hence the Mediator between God and man Himself—He who, transcending the knowledge and understanding even of supernal spirits, reigns in heaven from eternity—on earth fled from receiving a kingdom. For it is written, *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into the mountain Himself alone* (Joh. vi. 15). For who could so blamelessly have had principality over men as He who would in fact have reigned over those whom He had Himself created? But, because He had come in the flesh to this end, that He might not only redeem us by His passion but also teach us by His conversation, offering Himself as an example to His followers, He would not be made a king; but He went of His own accord to the gibbet of the cross. He fled from the offered glory of pre-eminence, but desired the pain of an ignominious death; that so His members might learn to fly from the favours of the world, to be afraid of no terrors, to love adversity for the truth's sake, and to shrink in fear from prosperity; because this often defiles the heart through vain glory, while that purges it through sorrow; in this the mind exalts itself, but in that, even though it had once exalted itself, it brings itself low; in this man forgets himself, but in that, even perforce and against his will, he is recalled to memory of what he is; in this even good things done aforetime often come to nothing, but in that faults even of long standing are wiped away. For commonly in the school of adversity the heart is subdued under discipline, while, on sudden attainment of

Church History

supreme rule, it is forthwith changed and becomes elated through familiarity with glory.¹⁴³

The Rule of the Pastor was famously translated into Old English by the West Saxon king, Alfred the Great, in an attempt to foster both Christianity and



Alfred the Great (r. 871-99)

education within his realms. It remains an excellent treatise on the proper role of ecclesiastical leaders, as shepherds rather than as lords, and stands as a timeless witness against the worldly powers accumulated by Roman popes before and after Gregory. Although he does not mention Gregory in his utopian essay, Carl Braaten may very well have been hoping for the coming of another such pope to unite Christianity again under one visible head on

earth. It is a vain hope and, as we shall see, would not address the deep doctrinal errors that have infected that Church.

¹⁴³ Schaff, Philip; *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers*.

Session 15: Augustine & the Sovereignty of Grace

Text Reading: Romans 9:6 - 24

*"In the conflict between Augustine and the Pelagians
two fundamentally different conceptions of Christianity
clashed with each other.*

It is a conflict that will never be entirely settled."

(J. L. Neve)

In any study of the development of a science, be it theology or atomic theory, it is very difficult to assess the contributions of any single individual among the myriad of scholars who, over time, have tackled and wrestled with the difficult issues to be solved. Albert Einstein seems to tower over Niels Bohr, Max Plank, and John Dalton in the development of atomic theory; likewise the subject of this lesson – Augustine – seems to tower over all theologians of the Christian Church both before his time and since. But the critical historian will realize that any individual participant in the overall development of any doctrine or branch of study must be seen and analyzed within a broader context. On the one hand, we realize that even the greatest contributors to any theory or theology were men who stood upon the shoulders of those who went before him. And on the other hand, we realize as well that every man's teaching is interpreted, valued, and applied by those who follow and in the light of further learning. Albert Einstein would probably have stood tall in any generation, but it would be not only an injustice to his colleagues of the first half of the 20th Century, but also to the integrity of the objective historian, not to admit that the data that he so amazingly computed in his head was provided by others before him in the field of atomic study.

Augustine the theologian is analogous to Einstein the physicist. In the class photograph of theologians from the first Christian millennium (and the later class reunion picture including theologians from the second millennium),

there is this incredibly tall character standing head and shoulders above all others. That is Augustine. Captain of the Varsity Theology Team (and the Debate Team too, of course), voted most likely to dominate Christian theology for a thousand years (or until Thomas Aquinas shows up, whichever comes first), and claimed by every theological fraternity (including the Protestants *and* the Catholics) to be their own charter member – that is Augustine. His time of life was recent enough that the record of his travels, thoughts, and meditations – and of those who were his contemporaries – is voluminous enough to prevent the introduction of legend into the telling of his story. No, in truth, Augustine was a great thinker and, by all accounts, a great man. His life is worthy of a far more lengthy treatment than it can get as part of a study in the history of the Church. In spite of the notable contributions later by Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, Augustine remains the Mt. Everest of Christian theology.

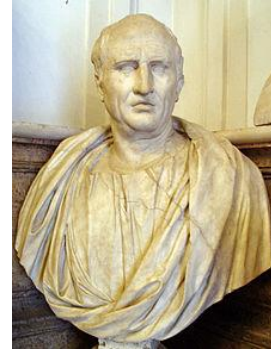
But, to return to the earlier thoughts, even Mt. Everest does not stand alone in the middle of a desert. Everest is the highest peak in the Himalayan Mountains, but it is very hard to determine just where Everest's base sits. The same is true of Augustine – his mind and his pen soar above all others, yet the foundation of his thought and theology is intermingled with the writings of Athanasius and Tertullian, Ambrose and the Cappadocians, and, most importantly, the Apostle Paul. But unlike the latter, Augustine was not inspired, and, to continue the word picture of Mt. Everest, to follow him too close to the edge is to risk tumbling into a fatal abyss.

Aurelius Augustinus was born in AD 354 in the Northern African town of Thagaste, then part of the Roman Empire as it was ruled from Constantinople and administered from Rome. His mother, Monica, is one of the famous women of Christianity – reputed to be devout and humble, and doting upon her son with tender love and earnest prayers for his salvation. Augustine's father, Patricius, was not a Christian and, from Augustine's autobiographical writings, continued to observe the pagan rites of his ancestors. The family was, however, Roman for

Church History

several generations prior to Augustine's birth, and so he was eligible for the best schooling money could buy. Apparently his intellect was such that gained notice outside the family, since that money did not always – and perhaps not often – come from his own family, but took the form of gifts and sponsorships from others. Another indication of Augustine's academic prowess is seen in his initial choice of a career: rhetoric.

Since the time of Cicero, perhaps Rome's greatest orator, the field of rhetoric presented young men with the opportunity both to make a name for themselves and to garner a substantial salary. Rhetoricians were, essentially, paid speakers – men who could pontificate upon any subject, for a price. They were 'hired tongues.' The rhetorician of the ancient Roman world could serve as an



Cicero (106-43 BC)

advocate in a court case, or as a political haranguer hired to promote either a law or a politician (or oppose a law or a politician), or as a verbal sandwich board, paid to advertise a product or service offered by a merchant. It was, as Augustine came to realize not long into his career, a form of intellectual prostitution – the rhetorician was never expected to actually support or believe in the cause he was espousing, he was simply to out-speak and out-argue the opposition. His study for this field and his time in its practice did serve Augustine well in later years, but in his youth he found himself deeply challenged by the absence of truth content in much of what he learned and proclaimed.

Augustine left the rhetorician's trade and became the classical philosophical prodigal – wandering through various philosophical schools and sects, some for years at a time – before returning home to the faith, and Church, of his mother Monica. His conversion story is, like his whole life, classic – the famous afternoon on the veranda, struggling within himself and lamenting the waywardness of his thoughts and life; hearing the children playing on the other

Church History

side of a hedgerow, singing *Tolle Lege* – “take up and read” (which has always seemed to be a strange thing for a group of playing children to be singing). Augustine took this to be a sign from heaven, turned to the first passage that his eyes came upon when he opened the Bible, and read Romans 13:13-14,

Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.



Hippo Regius in North Africa – Episcopal See of Augustine (395-430)

This event took place in AD 386, when Augustine was in his 32nd year. His response was to abandon a public life altogether, sell his inheritance and establish a monastery near his hometown in Northern Africa. But as with Gregory later, Augustine’s time in quiet contemplation and reclusion was to be short. By AD 395 he had been proclaimed bishop of Hippo Regius, a position he held for the rest of his life and from which his influence spread across the whole of Christendom both in his day and ever since. Even Augustine’s death was the scene of momentous events, as the city of Hippo Regius lay under siege by the Germanic Vandals throughout his final illness. After he died, the city was taken, sacked, and burned – all but Augustine’s cathedral and library perished in the fire.

Augustine’s contributions to Christian theology spanned almost every conceivable topic, but his greatest fame arose from two particular controversies,

each presenting him with a venue in which to profoundly articulate a solid, biblical Christian response. The first had to do with the metaphysical causes behind the Sack of Rome in AD 410 by the Gothic king Alaric; the second was the famous controversy between Augustine and Pelagius over the nature of sin and salvation. In both instances, as with the vast majority of his writings, Augustine articulated orthodoxy in a manner that has stood the test of time. His views on a wide range of topics were recognized as sound, biblical theology and philosophy in his own day, they were recognized as such again by the Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries, and they are claimed by both Protestant and Catholic conservative theologians today.

Against Pelagius: The Sovereignty of Grace

Although it arose later in Augustine's life than the controversy surrounding the Sack of Rome, that with Pelagius and his followers follows more logically on the development of doctrine traced thus far in our study. The evolving understanding of the Church concerning the deity and humanity of Christ leads naturally into a deeper consideration of the nature of sinful man and of salvation. Up to the beginning of the 5th Century it was generally taken as solid orthodox soteriology simply to put down salvation as a matter of faith/belief in the identity of Jesus Christ as both God and Man, and in His sacrificial work for sinners both in life and in death and in life again. The theological nature of conversion – the moment of regeneration, the beginning of faith – was not a topic much discussed and seemingly never controverted. If there was any extant thought on the matter, it tended to lean toward a defense of the freedom of the will of the sinner in opposition to the moral helplessness of the flesh in the teaching of the Gnostics.

Indeed, in his early Christian writings (those he later disavowed in his *Retractions*), Augustine was himself a staunch advocate of the 'freedom of the will' in fallen man. In his case this view was a reaction to the teachings of Mani,

the heretical founder of the Manichaeans, to which sect Augustine was attached for nine years until he realized the emptiness of its doctrine and the hopelessness of its 'salvation.' Still, as Manichaeism was Gnostic in essential philosophy, it espoused a dualistic view of human nature, one that denigrated the temporal, physical life of man in favor of a transcendent spirituality in the life to come. Manichaeism had no doctrine of sin, and no means for dealing with it, and this is what Augustine most needed in his own life (for he was a great sinner).

Perhaps Augustine would have eventually come to the same place in his views on divine grace vis-à-vis human freedom of will, but the advent of Pelagianism brought the matter to a head and forced Augustine to solidify his thoughts, not only for himself but for the benefit of the whole Church.

Pelagius was a British monk who was essentially a moralist; it is not even certain that he can be called a 'Christian' in the proper, biblical sense of the term. He was devout and pious, an ascetic as to his own lifestyle and prophetic in his vigor against the sins of the world and of the Church. On a visit to Rome in AD 409, Pelagius was perhaps as vexed by the moral laxity that prevailed in this citadel of Christianity, as the apostle Paul was by the pagan idolatry of Athens. Pelagius attributed the lack of religious devotion and of godly living to the teaching that God graciously and powerfully saves only His elect through their association in the Church. Apparently the British monk was especially offended by Augustine's now-famous maxim from his *Confessions*: "Lord, grant what Thou commandest; and command what Thou wilt."

To be fair to Pelagius, he was troubled by a problem that has been not merely chronic, but persistent in the Christian Church – the moral security that many derive from their association with the Church rather than any dedication to holiness derived from an association with Christ. Pelagius' solution has been repeated with variations throughout the centuries since his time: preach moral rules and strict religious dress, behavior, and speech; emphasize the role of the man in his own salvation, thereby avoiding complacency and false security. It all

Church History

sounds good, and is often effective as regards outward changes in people's behavior; but it is a dangerously false Gospel – a syncretistic gospel that combines the works of man with the grace of God. Augustine rightly proclaimed that this is no gospel at all.

Pelagius believed that man could not be held responsible to obey God's summons to believe in Jesus Christ unless man had the ability to do so. He held to the maxim, "*ought implies can*" or, as it is sometimes phrased, "*responsibility implies ability*." If man *ought* to obey God's laws and live a holy life before Him, then it must follow that man *can* obey God and live a holy life before Him. To Pelagius, therefore, it would be unjust for God to hold man responsible for his sins if in fact man was incapable of living otherwise. God could not judge man as a law-breaker if man was inherently incapable of keeping the law. What is remarkable about the historical fact that this issue ever (and has ever since) flared into controversy, is that Pelagius' argument was already posited hypothetically by the apostle Paul in his monumental treatise on divine grace – Romans 9,

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

(Romans 9:19-21)

The nay-sayer's "*Why does God find fault?*" is no less than Pelagius' contention that God is unjust to find fault with a sinner who cannot possibly obey God's will and law. Pelagius argued, as did this hypothetical objector to Paul's teaching, that "since God has enjoined His law upon man, therefore man must have the power to fulfill it."¹⁴⁴ Now there have been multitudes throughout the history of the Church, and are multitudes today, who will find this to be a perfectly reasonable statement. It is the basic premise of Arminianism, though 'obey God's law' is taken out and 'believe in Jesus'

¹⁴⁴ Neve, 141.

inserted. The bottom line in all such teaching is an *ability* within fallen man to somehow effect, or connect, or complete his salvation in conjunction or cooperation with divine grace. Augustine would have none of it.

But what makes Pelagius so important to history is the fact that he, and even more so his disciple Caelestius, developed a thorough-going anthropology (doctrine of man) and hamartology (doctrine of sin) to go with their basic premise of the freedom of man's will. This full-blown theo-philosophical system has often been masked behind mutations of Pelagianism (called semi-Pelagianism historically), but a close look will find the remnants of Pelagius' view in all of them. The brilliance and comprehensiveness of Augustine's response can only be appreciated once the fullness of Pelagian teaching is understood, so we begin with the error before proceeding to the truth.

Once again J. L. Neve furnishes us with a helpful point-by-point summary of Pelagian heterodoxy, analyzed under four heads: first, *the freedom of man's will*; second, *the nature of sin in man*; third, *the cause of sin's universal spread throughout humanity*; and fourth, *the nature of divine grace*.

The first category is the ground and foundation of all the others. Pelagianism and all of its children - Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, Wesleyanism, etc. - are none of them theologies in the strict sense. They are anthropologies - doctrines of human nature - and their fundamental premise, their *sine qua non*, is the preservation of freedom in the will of man. To the Pelagian this freedom of will is sacred, and represents not merely the freedom to choose without external coercion, but rather *the freedom of contrary choice*. In other words, for man to be responsible for his choices and actions he must at all times be free to choose otherwise than he actually chooses. It is up to man to consistently choose rightly: to obey God and to live a holy life before Him; and Pelagius vigorously defended man's ability to do just that.

But in order for man to have this innate ability to choose to obey God, his very nature must be different than it appears from Scripture. Most importantly,

the teaching of Paul in Romans 5 with regard to the effects of Adam's sin upon his posterity, must be recast entirely lest they render man wholly impotent before God's commands. "This led the Pelagians to reject the doctrine of an original sin or of a sinful inclination as transmitted from parents to children; the position was taken that not the soul but only the flesh is traceable to Adam."¹⁴⁵ Thus, in spite of what Paul writes concerning the advent of death into the world as a consequence and result of Adam's sin, Pelagius taught that man was created mortal and that Adam would have died eventually even if he had not sinned. Adam's sin affected no one else but Adam, and no inherent sin was passed from him to his children. "The fall of Adam had not caused any change in the moral nature of man, nor did its influence extend to the posterity of Adam. Every man came into the world exactly as God had created our first father, *i.e.*, without either sin or virtue."¹⁴⁶ Pelagius strikes the doctrine of Original Sin out of the Christian faith with one blow: children are born in the very same condition as in which Adam was created, and each individual human stands his own probation before God. Pelagians "proceed from a purely empirical view of human nature, which, instead of going to the source of moral life, stops with its manifestations, and regards every person, and every act of the will, as standing by itself, in no organic connection to a great whole."¹⁴⁷

Why then, one might ask Pelagius, are there so few godly men in the world? Really, if we are honest with ourselves and faithful to the holy nature of God, there are none. How does a Pelagian explain the universality of sin? How does a moralist justify his doctrine that exalts the moral ability of man against the ever-present reality that there are no moral men? Pelagius was challenged with questions such as these, and his answers form the third plank of his 'theology.' He reasoned that man was created with a sensual nature – a nature that desired, though the nature of those desires was not necessarily evil. Yet desire itself

¹⁴⁵ Neve; 142.

¹⁴⁶ Kurtz; 210.

¹⁴⁷ Schaff; 802.

breeds temptation, and temptation yielded produces sin. Appealing to the biblical testimony with regard to men such as Enoch, Noah, and Job, Pelagius argues for the *possibility* of a man living righteous before God – though the fact that only three men were ever described in such terms seems to argue for the rule by way of the exceptions. “The universal prevalence of sin depended on the power of seduction, of evil example, and of custom.”¹⁴⁸

To his credit, Pelagius did not claim sinlessness for himself – much like John Wesley, who never claimed to have attained the perfectionism he preached. Pelagian further reasoned that the passing of so many generations has compounded the prevalence of sin into an environment in which it is almost (‘almost,’ he says) impossible for a man not to succumb to temptation and to sin. Thus the universality of sin is due to the prevalence of sin, which is to answer a question with itself, or to ‘beg the question’ entirely. Man sins because men sin, and the example of their sin leads man to sin. What? How does this in any way explain how it came to be that man sins so universally? If man is such a reasonable fellow, whose will is fully under his own control, how can it be that man has so unreasonably exercised that will in favor of sin – and to such an extent that it is now all but inevitable that man should sin? It should become clear to any honest assessment, that such ‘logic’ as this can only stand when one has already devoted oneself, body and soul, to the preservation of the freedom of man’s will. “Freedom is the supreme good, the honor and glory of man, the *bonum natura*, that cannot be lost.”¹⁴⁹ Thus the conclusion dictates the premises.

But what part does God play in all of this? And what of divine grace? What role does Pelagius find for the work of Jesus Christ? The answer to the third question illustrates the best logic one will ever find in the Pelagian system – though it is a logic that is already false because of the system in which it is found. Jesus Christ lived and died *as an example* to all men of what man can do if he only

¹⁴⁸ Kurtz; 210.

¹⁴⁹ Schaff; 802.

chooses to. "Christ had become incarnate in order, by His perfect doctrine and example, to give us the most powerful incentive to amend our ways, and thus to redeem us. As by sin we *imitate* Adam, so ought be by virtue to imitate Christ."¹⁵⁰ The grace of God displayed in Jesus Christ "was first of all an enlightenment of man's reason, enabling him to see the will of God so that he in his own power can choose and act accordingly."¹⁵¹ Ultimately, there is no necessity of divine grace in the salvation of any man - man is capable of attaining salvation through the exercise of his own will.

Pelagius, however, could not so thoroughly discredit divine grace without completely abandoning his own Christian profession. Grace, therefore, becomes a gift from God of inestimable assistance, though not of any ultimate importance, toward the salvation of any man. "Grace consists in the revelations of the divine will through the Law, especially as given in the New Testament by Christ Himself in precept and example, and also in promises, discipline, warnings, trials, etc. But all this is merely for the purpose of assisting man, who chooses and acts in perfect independence."¹⁵² Furthermore, this grace has been extended by God to all men and not only the 'elect.' But man must act in a manner deserving of God's grace: "The heathen are liable to judgment and damnation, because they, notwithstanding their free will, by which they are able to attain unto faith and to deserve God's grace, make an evil use of the freedom bestowed upon them; Christians, on the other hand, are worthy of reward, because they through good use of freedom deserve the grace of God, and keep his commandments."¹⁵³

This is not biblical Christianity. George Fisher writes, "Augustine and Pelagius were the representatives of two opposite systems. They differed in their idea of the relation of God to the creation, and especially to man. The one

¹⁵⁰ Kurtz; 210.

¹⁵¹ Neve; 142.

¹⁵² Neve; 142.

¹⁵³ Pelagius, quoted by Augustine in *De Gratia*.

conceived of the divine energy as perpetually needed and forever exerted. The other regarded the world and man as furnished, at the start, with inherent power sufficient for self-movement and self-guidance.”¹⁵⁴

In all frankness, Pelagius and his teachings were light work for Augustine. In fact, the British monk and his teaching had already been condemned as heretical by several regional synods even before Augustine entered the fray. Nonetheless, the whole controversy – which spread rapidly throughout the Christian world due to its appeal to moralists – was answered by the Bishop of Hippo Regius in a major treatise and numerous letters, providing the Church with a powerful statement and defense of divine sovereignty and of the bondage of human will to sin. Neve helpfully presents Augustine’s doctrine under the same four headings as Pelagius’ errors, so we will follow his example.

Augustine taught, with Scripture, that man was created in Adam innocent – without sin – but not without the possibility or potentiality to sin. He was, in the famous Latin phrase Augustine coined, *posse non peccare et non mori* – “able not to sin and not to die” – but not *non posse non peccare et mori* – “not able not to sin and die.” Pelikan summarizes, “Man had been created with the ability not to sin and not to die, although not with the inability to sin and to die.”¹⁵⁵ In other words, Adam was on probation; he alone of all mankind had ‘the power of contrary choice’ – freedom of the will as Pelagians and semi-Pelagians define it. “The grace given to him did not include a confirmed perseverance in good, but the choice between good and evil was left to the decision of his free will.”¹⁵⁶ Adam, theoretically, would have been confirmed in righteousness had he successfully resisted sin during his probation. For this concept Augustine utilized the example of the holy angels, who have been confirmed in holiness and righteousness consequent, it is assumed, upon a period of probation during which a third of the angels fell.

¹⁵⁴ Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*; 136.

¹⁵⁵ Pelikan; 298.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; 299.

The point regarding what might have happened had Adam sustained his obedience through probation is moot; Adam fell. In that fall, that exercise of Adam's power of contrary choice, much was lost, including the latitude of will to choose between obedience and disobedience. Man was confirmed in sin, losing the ability not to sin. He was, in Augustine's words, *non posse non peccare et non mori* – "not able not to sin and not to die." Augustine did not accept Pelagius' view that man was created mortal, for that would completely eviscerate Paul's teaching in Romans 5:12-17,

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned – (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) (Romans 5:12-17)

Furthermore, as the apostle teaches, Adam's sin brought condemnation and death upon the entire human race – for all of humanity was in Adam when he sinned. "Augustine taught that human nature in its totality was present seminally in the first man."¹⁵⁷ This participation of the entire race representatively in Adam, the first of the race, thus upholds the biblical and orthodox doctrine of Original Sin – that all men are conceived and born in sin, entering the world not only with the propensity to sin ('concupiscence') but with the necessity to sin as the natural exercise of man's fallen will. "But that sin, according to Augustine, brought upon Adam and equally on the race that was to proceed from him, physical death, guilt, and a bondage of the will, or an

¹⁵⁷ Neve; 144.

inherited dominion of sin in the soul. Humanity, before it was individualized, was really in Adam, and in him acted and was corrupted.”¹⁵⁸ This alone explains the prevalence – nay, the universality – of sin throughout human history, and this alone answers to the biblical view of fallen human nature.

Augustine here imbibed some of the spirit of his age, and its fondness for celibacy and virginity. Knowing that the sin of Adam must have passed from parent to child, generation by generation, through the course of human history, Augustine theorized that the carnal act of intercourse was itself the vehicle for the transmission of sin. Perhaps because of his own struggle with illicit sexual desire (Augustine had an illegitimate son, Adeodatus, of whom he was both ashamed and devoted)¹⁵⁹, Augustine viewed any form of sexual desire or expression to be inseparable from sin. He was wrong, but his error is one that has been made repeatedly throughout history both by Catholics and Protestants. It is less offensive to err on the means by which sin is transmitted down the lineage of Adam, as Augustine did, than to deny the reality of Original Sin altogether, as Pelagius did.

Pelagius viewed man as full of hope and ability; Augustine saw man as utterly corrupt in mind and will. Both could not be correct in their anthropology and, consequently, both could not be correct in their soteriology. To the one divine grace is optional and helpful; to the other it is indispensable. Augustine taught that man’s ability to receive divine grace did not rest in his ability to accept it, but rather in the vestige of the *Imago Dei* in which he was created. “Grace attaches itself to the remnant of the divine image in man, in his need of redemption and in the capacity for salvation.”¹⁶⁰ Hence there is no merit involved on the part of man, no free exercise of man’s will toward God in faith

¹⁵⁸ Fisher; 136.

¹⁵⁹ It was during this stage of his life that he allegedly uttered the famous prayer: “God grant me chastity...but not yet.”

¹⁶⁰ Neve; 145.

and obedience. No synergism whatsoever. Rather the whole act of redemption is *monergistic* – all energy proceeding from one side, that of God.

Augustine's view of man in sin, and of the overarching and overpowering sovereignty of God in salvation, had repercussions throughout his theology. He saw that if salvation were to be predicated to any extent upon the will of fallen man, then salvation would be forever beyond the reach of any man. If it was to be, it was to be by God's will and act and not by man's. But all of God's acts are manifestations of His will, and are inexorable – He will certainly accomplish what He wills to accomplish. This leads to the doctrine of *irresistible grace*, alluded to in Augustine and made explicit in the teachings of the Calvinistic reformers eleven centuries later. "If grace lays hold of man, there can be no resistance, for God carries out His will in the human heart no less than in nature."¹⁶¹ This is a doctrine very offensive to those whose aim is to defend human free will at any hazard. This is the 'dragging man into heaven kicking and screaming' strawman so often set up against Calvinistic/Augustinian teaching concerning the omnipotence of divine grace. But Augustine never taught that God violated man's will in the act of gracious redemption (nor, for that matter, did Calvin). "He does not do this against man's will but through this will, by restoring the same to freedom from the old servitude so that he now chooses the gospel."¹⁶² Pelagius taught that man simply needed better examples, better incentives, better motivations to obedience – he needed only to be born once, and to make the best of that with which he was endowed at birth. Augustine taught that man needed a fundamental change in nature – he must be born again. Augustine taught that "the will make its choice always with freedom. But it depends upon the inclination of the heart what it will choose. As

¹⁶¹ Neve; 147.

¹⁶² *Idem*.

long as the inclination is toward the natural it *cannot*, but it also *will* not choose the spiritual.”¹⁶³

If God exerts His omnipotent grace of salvation, then all upon whom He exerts it are omnipotently saved. This leads to either one of two conclusions. Either all are saved because God’s grace extends to all, or God’s grace extends only to those who are ultimately saved. The first option is contrary to both Scripture and experience. Thus Augustine’s thought interweaves sovereign grace with election/predestination. God “*has mercy upon whom He will have mercy.*” Augustine wrote in his *City of God*, “According to that will of his which is as eternal as his prescience [i.e., foreknowledge], certainly he has already done in heaven and on earth all the things that he has willed – not only things past and present, but even things still future.” Augustine acknowledges that the outworking of God’s eternal, sovereign, and omnipotent will within history remains an unfathomable mystery – why, for instance, God should choose to have mercy upon one man and not upon another, when neither are deserving of it and both equally deserving of divine wrath. Yet he taught what Paul taught, and if he erred he did so in the defense of omnipotent grace rather than in defense of fickle human will. He wrote, with humble brilliance, “if this answer displeases someone, let him seek more learned theologians, but let him beware lest he find more presumptuous ones.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁴ Quoted by Pelikan; 298.

Session 16: Augustine & *The City of God*

Text Reading: I Corinthians 7:29 - 35

*"It was because man forsook God by pleasing himself
that he was handed over to himself,
and because he did not obey God he could not obey himself."
(Augustine; De Civitate Dei XIV:24)*

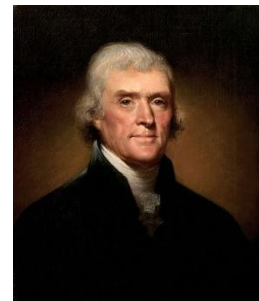
*"Rome believed Romulus to be a god because she loved him;
the Heavenly City loved Christ
because she believed him to be God."
(Augustine; De Civitate Dei XXII:5)*

The presidential election of 1800 was one of the most rancorous and vindictive races in the history of this country. In spite of the constant refrain in



John Adams

modern times, that the current election (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, or 2012) is witnessing the lowest, most personal manifestation of political mudslinging in history, no election in recent or distant memory contained the deep-seated angst and pervasive fear that was felt by each side against the other, and engendered by each side toward the other. The Federalists, whose candidate was the incumbent John Adams, portrayed the challenger Thomas Jefferson as an infidel, an unbelieving Deist whose support of the bloody French Revolution foretold chaos, beheadings, and the complete overthrow of the ordered society Americans had fought so hard to create. The Republicans, in support of and goaded on by their candidate Jefferson, accused Adams of being what was to them worse than an unbeliever – a *royalist*. Adams, in their way of thinking, favored Great Britain to such an extent as to desire the return of the United States to England as loyal colonies, or to establish a new



Thomas Jefferson

monarchy here, thus destroying the Republic. The scene was apocalyptic, but American politics has always tended to the apocalyptic. The world 'ends' every four years, or at least stands on the verge of utter obliteration should such-and-such a candidate be elected. Christianity is chronically in danger of suffering bloody persecution, prison without *habeus corpus*, and a return to the catacombs. Yet somehow the country and the world muddle on for another general election cycle, with the opposition usually picking up legislative ground in Congress during the mid-term elections.

This is not to say that the world is not coming to an end if a certain incumbent is re-elected in the upcoming General Election. As it has been noted, just because a person is paranoid does not mean that everyone is not out to get him. One of these cycles the prognosticators will get it right...and the world as we know it will indeed collapse beyond repair. But this is nothing more than the Apostle Paul told us would happen, and happen, as long as human society and human cultures rise and fall.

But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.
(I Corinthians 7:30-31)

What exactly Paul meant by "*the form of this world*" is hard to divine from the context of the passage. The admonition has often been taken as an apostolic command for believers to shun the world and to live apart from human society. But it is also quite possible that the apostle had been made aware through prophecy that the relative peace and safety enjoyed by the young Church was soon to pass away, and to be followed by oppression, persecution, loss of employment and property, and death. Historically we know that this did indeed happen, when it became apparent to the not-so-quick-on-the-uptake Romans that Christianity was not simply a sub-sect of Judaism. Out from under the

Church History

protective umbrella of Rome's tolerant attitude toward the Jewish religion, Christianity found itself officially proscribed as a secret society, and one that refused to pay homage to the emperor as divine, to boot. Persecution and martyrdom followed, edicts of expulsion and exile, and for the next 250 years the Church would experience chronic and violent oppression interrupted by short spans of relative calm and growth. The 'form' of the world that the Corinthians knew was 'passing away.' But all forms pass away; that is the nature of the world - it is transient due to its own corruption, and it is bounded by the will and word of Almighty God.

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings...

(Acts 17:26)

Just as it has not been given to us to know the time of Christ's return, so also it has not been given to us to know the future developments of the world. We *know* that the forms are passing away, but we do not know when or how, or what forms will take their place. The upcoming election is a part of the whole process - either an acceleration of the passing of the form of this country, or perhaps a temporary delay in the ultimate and inevitable fact. There is no reversal; that is certain.

Modern Christians, at least those who live in the United States, have for the most part never experienced a *bona fide* danger of utter catastrophe and socio-political upheaval. Believers (true believers, that is, not mere professors) who lived in France in the 1790s witnessed a 'form' passing, and the one that took its place was anything but friendly to evangelical Christianity (hence the visceral fear held by many Americans at the prospect of a Jefferson Presidency). When young Edward VI died and the abortive effort to put Lady Jane Grey on the English throne failed, evangelical Protestants hoped and prayed that Edward's half-sister Mary would prove to be a moderate and tolerant ruler. But Mary was

Church History

bitterly opposed to Protestantism, bitterly resentful of those who put her younger half-brother on the throne and, well, just bitter. The Marian persecutions followed, and England was bereft of some of her greatest theologians and pastors. To paraphrase the Preacher in Hebrews,



"Be of good comfort, and play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

time would fail us to mention the Waldensians, the Anabaptists, the Hussites, and so many others for whom a change of king or the conquering of a country meant not only the passing away of forms, but also of their own lives.

Honestly, we must sound silly to some who comprise the 'great cloud of witnesses' apparently watching us. They must scratch their heads as the apocalyptic horror with which modern evangelicals contemplate the possible election, or re-election, of this man or that man. Of course, they probably do not know the times and seasons any better than we do. And they might gaze wide-eyed and slack-jawed at whatever may befall this country (and the Church) when once the current 'form' passes away.

Such an event did occur during the lifetime of the great Augustine. The 'form' of the world at the turn of the fifth century was Roman, and had been Roman for more than 500 years. Even though the center of political power had shifted east to Byzantium/Constantinople, the overarching worldview that pervaded the Mediterranean Basin was Roman. All roads still led to Rome, and the Roman culture was considered to be the glue that held society together. Few could imagine a world without Rome, and fewer still could envision themselves living in such a world. The event justifies the worst fears, for in the wake of the Roman Era came what moderns refer to as 'the Dark Ages. But in AD 400 all was still well with the world, for Rome was still the Eternal City.

It is an interesting case study in human nature, to observe just how much turmoil and distress man can withstand so long as one particular, cherished idol of stability remains intact. The famed *Pax Romana* – the ‘peace of Rome’ – was hardly peaceful, as there were wars and civil strife throughout the empire, throughout its life. But even Christians can fall into the idolatry of making some place, some institution, or some person (other than Jesus Christ, of course) the foundation of their security. For believers in the 5th Century the ancient and seemingly inviolable city of Rome was the beacon of stability no matter how chaotic the world might get. The empire had already experienced several decades of invasion from the northern Germanic tribes – the Goths, the Vandals, the Huns – rolled across the imperial borders, sacked and pillaged with impunity. But the world order stood so long as Rome stood, and even many of the barbarians (at least those who stayed) adopted some form of Christianity and assimilated into the ‘glory that was Rome.’ But all forms pass away; what is remarkable is that man is still shocked when one does.

By divine Providence the momentous event that shook the confidence of the entire Roman world occurred in AD 410 and at the hand of an Arian Christian convert, Alaric the king of the Visigoths. On August 24th of that year, Alaric’s forces breached the walls of Rome – the first enemy to do so in almost 800 years.¹⁶⁵ Even the great Carthaginian general Hannibal never made it to Rome, though he inflicted far greater losses on the Romans than did Alaric. Again, the amazing capacity of man to absorb innumerable calamities, to a point. For the Mediterranean world of AD 410 that point had come: the loss of Rome meant the fall of the world as they knew it.

This response was widespread and not limited to pagans (of which there were still many, though mostly in secret) or mere nominal Christians. Augustine’s contemporary in renown, Jerome, was so disturbed by the Sack of

¹⁶⁵ Rome was previously sacked by the Gaul Brennus in 387 BC, almost 200 years before the birth of Julius Caesar.

Rome that he was incapable of working on his commentary on the Book of Ezekiel due to his trembling emotions at the event...and this was two years later! Jerome famously said "The city which has taken the whole world has been taken."

It is further remarkable that the Sack of Rome was, as sacks go, relatively mild. As previously mentioned, Alaric had earlier converted to an Arian form of Christianity (old heresies never die), and he and the Western Roman Emperor Honorius were but recently in discussions of a truce. It was actually another Gothic warrior who precipitated the final siege and sack of Rome, angering Alaric to the point that no negotiations would turn him away. Yet even then the sack itself only lasted three days, and was apparently limited to plunder.

It was the *principle* of the event that mattered. It was a form passing away, and it is sad to see how many Christians clung to the old form then and sobering to contemplate how many are clinging to the old forms now. In the end many blamed Christianity for the fall of Rome: the abandonment of the pagan gods who had made Rome a great city and empire being the cause of her demise. The actual Sack of Rome was momentous in and of itself, but its larger significance was found in the evidence of decay and dissolution of the empire, which its fall represented. The process of this decay, according to the now-vocal opponents of Christianity, began a generation earlier when imperial edicts against pagan worship started to flow from Constantinople across the Roman world.

Julian the Apostate:

To properly set the stage for the attitudes that conflicted throughout the Mediterranean world at the event of Rome's fall, we must turn back the clock to the sixth decade of the fourth century. In AD 355 Flavius Claudius Julianus ascended the imperial throne as Augustus. Julian, as he was commonly known, spent the better part of his young life in the study of Greek



Julian the Apostate

Church History

Philosophy and in nurturing vindictive plans against his relatives, the direct descendants of Constantine I, the Great. By events that do not directly concern us here, Julian succeeded to the imperial throne upon the death of his cousin Constantius II, who had incidentally ordered the murder of most of Julian's own family. Thus came to power a man devoted to old Greek pagan philosophy on the one hand, and on the other embittered against the family that had legalized and fostered the religion that was inexorably replacing it, Christianity. A volatile mix, to be sure.

Julian set out to revive paganism in the empire and was not opposed universally in so doing. There were still many thousands who wished to see the old ways restored, and whose profession of the new order - Christianity - was politically motivated. Julian's engaging nature and his military successes served to endear him to much of the empire, and to make opposition to his 'reforms' difficult. He did not persecute Christians, as this violated his philosophical underpinnings, but he did restore temples to the old pagan priesthood and channeled state funds to the promotion of the old gods. This was a challenge that Christianity had not experienced in over fifty years, and the Church was already sadly out of shape. Two religions vying on the public stage, rather than state support of Christianity; it was already a novel and abhorrent concept to Church leaders by the middle of the fourth century. Hence Julian's appellation both during and after his life - Julian the *Apostate*. His early death in AD 363 brought a return to the domination of Christianity and to the suppression of paganism, with a vengeance.

This retrenchment reached its fullest strength under the Emperor Theodosius, who was the emperor (not Constantine) who made Christianity the only legal religion in the realm. "Theodosius in his time was relentless in his enforcement of the edicts against polytheism throughout the Empire, and

particularly those against sacrifices to the gods."¹⁶⁶ As it turned out, there were many, many people in Theodosius' kingdom who continued to practice the day-to-day rituals of paganism – divination and the reading of entrails, for instance – in spite of their nominal profession of Christianity and attendance upon Christian services on Sunday. The imperial edicts came one after another for thirty years, attempting to eradicate this practice from home as well as temple.

Even though paganism predates the rise of Rome to prominence, the Imperial City was still considered by most to be the center of pagan worship. The fact that Rome had stood inviolable for so many centuries, while her legions conquered the known world and beyond, was attributed to the favor of the gods. But when Rome fell, many placed the root cause as the offense taken by these same gods when Rome ceased to offer up sacrifice to them; Rome's apostasy from the pagan gods abrogated their patron status over her, and it was only a matter of time until Rome's enemies would triumph. When this triumph came at the hands of Alaric's Gothic army, closet pagans throughout the empire began to voice their anger (not very publicly, mind you) at Christianity for causing such an offense to the gods who once guarded Rome.

Enter Augustine. At first he seems to have been reticent to enter the fray, and only went so far as to recommend a response be made by a colleague. But the questions and claims persisted: did Christianity's supplanting of paganism bring about the Sack of Rome and the resultant destabilization of the world? In AD 417, seven years after the event, Augustine started his answer. Twelve years later, in AD 429, he published what is perhaps his greatest work, *De Civitate Dei* – "Of the City of God." Not a moment too soon, as it turns out; Augustine died in AD 430.

¹⁶⁶ O'Meara, John; *Introduction to the City of God* (London: Penguin Books; 1984), xii.

Two Cities in One World:

Augustine's work is the most monumental apologetic treatise in Christian history, and laid the foundation for what would be considered a 'Christian Worldview' ever since by Catholic and Protestant alike. The great theologian himself claimed motivation for the title from the Psalms,

*His foundation is in the holy mountains.
The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God! Selah* (Psalm 87:1-3)

Fueled by the allegorical portions of Scripture that deal with the spiritual reality corresponding to the earthly city of Zion, Jerusalem, Augustine established upon a solid foundation the view that there are two cities within which mankind dwells – the City of Man and the City of God. "In one city love of God has been given first place, in the other, love of self."¹⁶⁷

We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self.¹⁶⁸

The Sack of Rome may have precipitated Augustine's *magnum opus*, but it was not the only focus of the treatise. "It was also a positive and comprehensive philosophy of history, an interpretation of the entire human drama."¹⁶⁹ Up until Augustine's time the dominant philosophy of history was the Greek view that held to the cyclical nature of events. All of history, according to the ancient Greeks, was the tracing and retracing of the same circle of time: events are played out again and again with new actors on the same stage. The idea of progress or purpose is absent – and inimical – to this view; there is no beginning or end of a circle. Augustine posited a linear view of history, but not merely a

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*; XIV:13.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; XIV:28.

¹⁶⁹ Latourette, Kenneth Scott; *A History of Christianity: Volume I* (San Francisco: Harper & Row; 1975); 176.

string of consecutive events. Rather *The City of God* proclaimed God's power in Creation and purpose in Providence. The world's history had both a beginning and will have an end, the ultimate meaning of each determined by the God who created the world and all it contains and who governs it with complete sovereignty to reach the ends that He has willed. "According to that will of his which is as eternal as his prescience, certainly he has already done in heaven and on earth all the things that he has willed – not only things past and present, but even things still future."¹⁷⁰ The knowledge that believers have of this sovereign, divine purpose and of the One who will bring it to pass without fail, ought to be of great comfort in times of ignorance and distress.

Evil men do many things contrary to the will of God; but so great is his wisdom, and so great his power, that all things which seem to oppose his will tend towards those results or ends which he himself has foreknown as good and just.¹⁷¹

The City of God stands as the greatest Christian apologetical work of all time, but not because it is without error or exaggeration; it has its fair share of both. Rather because it is the first work by a Christian author that comprehensively sets the biblical view of history and the future against the view of the world, and shows the wisdom and triumph of the former over the latter. Augustine brings sense to the madness of human society, and hope in the midst of the constant fading and passing of "*the form of this world.*" He powerfully shows the folly of setting one's hope in any institution of man, no matter how glorious, powerful, or long-standing. Man is corrupt by fallen nature, and thus doomed to self-deception and self-destruction. "Human nature has refused to keep that peace with God in happiness; and so in its unhappiness it is at war with itself."¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ *The City of God*; XXII:2.

¹⁷¹ *Idem.*

¹⁷² *Ibid*; XXI:15.

Session 17: The Travail of Grace: Semi-Pelagianism

Text Reading: Ephesians 2:8-10

*"The capacity to have faith, as the capacity to have love,
belongs to men's nature;
but to have faith, even as to have love,
belongs to the grace of believers."
(Augustine; On Predestination V:10)*

Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* was the first serious attempt at developing a thorough-going Christian philosophy of history. But it was not the first, nor the last, attempt of philosophers in general to build a theoretical framework into which all of history moves. The Greeks had their cyclical view of events, with all occurrences of history being repetitions of previous events with merely a change



G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831)

in participants and locale. Augustine's view was, by contrast, decidedly linear - history moving purposefully from the motivating will of God in the beginning to its final consummation at the end. But even as Christianity - and for a very long time *Augustinian Christianity* - spread throughout the Western world, Augustine's philosophy of history was constantly challenged, modified, and replaced in varying degrees by later philosophers and theologians. One of the most successful of the contenders for the crown was developed by the 18th Century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. The Hegelian dialectic, as it has come to be known, has been frequently used in the two centuries since, to explain the course of significant events in human history and to predict the manner in which things will turn out as time goes on. Hegel's formulation, very simply summarized, consists of the following rubric:

Thesis

Antithesis

Synthesis

The concept is simple and provocative: A proposition is presented (*thesis*) which arouses strong opposition and the presentation of a counter-thesis (*antithesis*), generating a dialectic of conflict until the two opposing views mold each other into a composite proposition, neither thesis nor antithesis (*synthesis*). In Hegel's own time this formulation could have been applied to the events in France. The French Revolution brought an unprecedented political power to the lower classes of French society, who understandably did not know what to do with it. In response to the lofty ideals of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* came the Reign of Terror, as wanton violence and brutal political murder swept over France like a tidal wave. Neither the thesis (*Liberty for all*) nor the antithesis (*tyrannical brutality*) could survive (nor could France survive either). Thus over the course of the decade (1790s) there arose first the consulate and then the imperial throne of Napoleon Bonaparte, the synthesis.

But each synthesis, in the Hegelian dialectic, is itself a new thesis and thus engenders an opposing antithesis, resulting in a new synthesis and so on as time moves through history. Karl Marx thus derived from this philosophical view of history the assurance that the triumph of Capitalism would result in the triumph of Communism - that the success of the bourgeois merchant would antagonize the oppressed proletariat, eventually synthesizing through many iterations to form the perfect, worker-led society. The triangular dialectic attributed to Hegel has been used by many different branches of the social sciences to explain how things have come to their current state, and where things are headed from that point.

All this to say that something of a Hegelian dialectic occurred in the fifth century in the Western Church with regard to Augustine's controversy with Pelagius, and particularly with the Church's eventual stance with regard to *grace*. Pelagius' teaching on grace was far too anemic for acceptance within the Church, even among those theologians willing to grant to fallen man the greatest possible

scope to the freedom of will. But Pelagian grace was nothing more than education, instruction – from God, to be sure – but lacking both in necessity and in power to bring about any change in the unregenerate sinner. Pelagius and his followers exalted the sufficiency of *unaided human liberty* to bring a man to salvation, through perfect obedience to the law of God. Grace was, to them, an unnecessary but appreciated assistance whereby God makes known His will through His law, shows through promises of reward and threats of punishment the wisdom of obeying that law, and manifests man’s innate ability to do so through the life of Jesus Christ. At no point in the Pelagian system does divine grace actually *touch* man; it remains external to him, beyond him showing and enlightening the path, but never in him.

Augustine responded to this *thesis* with a powerful *antithesis* of his own, and one derived from the clear teachings of Scripture rather than the philosophical ruminations of man. To him divine grace was alone efficacious and powerful, without the operation of which human salvation is impossible. Man, in consequence of the Fall, has been rendered incapable of *acting* graciously through faith toward God, though still bearing the image of God he is capable of *receiving* the grace of faith from God. This is a very important distinction in Augustine’s teaching, for it helps to explain why man at times *appears* to believe, to act in what seems to be an orientation toward God and His glory. Man is created in such a way that, even in his fallen state, he retains the qualitative capacity for grace, though he lacks any quantitative amount of grace within himself devoid of God’s regenerating Spirit. “The capacity to have faith, as the capacity to have love, belongs to men’s nature; but to have faith, even as to have love, belongs to the grace of believers.”¹⁷³

In Augustine’s theological writings we come upon the first fulsome treatment in Church history of the concept of grace. And it must be admitted that the great doctor’s conclusions on the matter were a tough pill for many of

¹⁷³ Quoted in Pelikan, p. 329; from Augustine’s *On the Predestination of the Saints*.

his colleagues to swallow, even though the majority of them gladly adopted the greater part of Augustine's system. The stumbling block for many was Augustine's undiluted teaching on predestination – the sovereign and inexorable election of those who would be saved – and on the irresistibility of divine grace in the heart and mind of an elect sinner. "What was distinctive about his version of [the catholic] creed was his awareness of the sovereignty of divine power and divine grace. This awareness took the form of a doctrine of predestination more thoroughgoing than that of any major orthodox thinker since Paul."¹⁷⁴

It may help to understand Augustine's controversial views on predestination, however, if we first perceive that they derive logically (and for the most part, biblically) from his conception of divine grace. It was not a matter of 'who's out and who's in' as so many modern opponents allege; far from the idea of an arbitrary deity plucking the petals of a flower to determine who gets elected and who reprobated (I love him...I love him not...), Augustine's theology of predestination and the irresistibility of grace flows simply and powerfully from his understanding of just what divine grace *is*. Augustine may rightly be termed a 'theologian of Grace,' for that was his favorite and recurring theme.

The central theme in all Augustine's writings is the sovereign God of grace and the sovereign grace of God. Grace, for Augustine, is God's freedom to act without any external necessity whatsoever – to act in love beyond human understanding or control; to act in creation, judgment, and redemption; to give his Son freely as Mediator and Redeemer...It touches man's inmost heart and will. It guides and impels the pilgrimage of those called to be faithful. It draws and raises the soul to repentance, faith, and praise. It transforms the human will so that it is capable of doing good...It establishes the ground of Christian humility by abolishing the ground of human pride.¹⁷⁵

Augustine's emphasis on the omnipotence of divine grace led logically to his doctrine of absolute predestination (both *election* to salvation and *reprobation*

¹⁷⁴ Pelikan; 297.

¹⁷⁵ Albert C. Outler quoted by Pelikan; 294.

to damnation). Sovereign grace could not be thwarted in the fulfillment of its eternal purpose: “however strong the wills either of angels or men, whether good or evil, whether they will what God wills or will something else, the will of the Omnipotent is always undefeated.”¹⁷⁶ But such teaching draws dangerously close to fatalism and to the complete abrogation of both human will and, consequently, human responsibility. Many of Augustine’s supporters in his controversy with Pelagius responded as did the audience in Galilee four centuries earlier, “*This is a difficult teaching; who can listen to it?*” They wholeheartedly rejected Pelagius’ thesis; but they were not ready to wholeheartedly accept Augustine’s antithesis. Enter the synthesis that has since been called Semi-Pelagianism.

Semi-Pelagians:

Modern historians are justifiably quick to point out that the label ‘Semi-Pelagian’ dates not from the fifth century, but from the sixteenth – the tumultuous days of the Protestant Reformation, when moderate speech was a rarity indeed. Also, and to the credit of modern historians, those who were labeled as Semi-Pelagians by the Reformers ought more justly to have been labeled Semi-Augustinians, for their anthropology and soteriology much more closely matched that of the North African bishop than of the British monk. But labels stick, unfortunately, and Semi-Pelagianism is what we have to work with.

Neve summarizes the dilemma faced by theologians of Augustine’s time, and immediately after his passing, with regard to the teachings of such an acknowledged genius on the one hand, and the heretical ramblings of the Pelagians on the other. “In matters outside the predestination problem they were great admirers of Augustine. They strongly emphasized man’s sinfulness...The sin of Adam was regarded as a hereditary disease. Since the fall

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Pelikan; p. 294.; from Augustine, *Enchiridon* XXVI:102.

there prevails a weakness in the human will...*But they abhorred [Augustine's] doctrine of predestination.*"¹⁷⁷

Herein lies the dilemma: God's grace is indispensable to man's salvation (*contra* Pelagius), yet man's act to believe is necessary to human responsibility. Thus it seemed to many theologians of the Augustinian and post-Augustinian age, that grace must be powerful but not sovereign – it must assist in a manner that cannot be dispensed with, but it cannot be the effectual cause of a man's faith and salvation. "Grace is concomitant (works *with*) and not prevenient (works *before*) to human merits. Grace co-operates with man's free will."¹⁷⁸ Here is the essential synthesis of Semi-Pelagian (and later Arminian) forms of soteriology – the cooperation of human will and divine sovereignty. Every subsequent moderation of Augustinian predestination has laid more or less emphasis on man's innate ability to believe and to respond to God's call in the Gospel, always exercising restraint from moving all the way to Pelagian error, but also never yielding some vestige of human will to the power of sovereign divine grace.

In the years after his death Augustine was not without supporters. Prosper of Aquitania (c. AD 390-455) "waged a stern warfare with all opponents" of Augustine's theological system. "He characterized Semi-Pelagianism as an impossible *tertium quid* arising from Augustinianism and Pelagianism."¹⁷⁹ But the tide was set against strict predestinarian views, and Semi-Pelagian teachings found a very capable exponent in Faustus, Bishop of Reji in Gaul (died c. AD 495). Faustus taught that divine grace "was the illumination of [man's] will, the preaching with its promises and warnings, and God's guiding hand in man's life. It was not, as it was with Augustine, the regenerating power of grace in the heart."¹⁸⁰ But this sounds a lot like what Pelagius taught...

¹⁷⁷ Neve; 148, italics original.

¹⁷⁸ Neve; 149.

¹⁷⁹ *Idem*.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; 150.

Church History

Indeed, Semi-Pelagian systems of soteriology do not bear up well under close scrutiny. When once man's will is factored into the equation, it is very hard to find a place to stop short of man's will becoming determinant to salvation. It is not unreasonable to say that the history of the debate over the past fifteen centuries has been an attempt by the majority of professing Christendom to arrive at this delicate balance between divine grace and human freedom. Furthermore, many of the errors that have crept into the church's teaching and practice - including the Roman Catholic exaltation of the sacraments - derive from the essential impossibility of such a balance.

The official actions of the catholic Church at that time - or at least of the Western, Latin branch of the Church - were sufficient to bring about a general pacification of the controversy without furnishing any firm judgment. Semi-Pelagianism was popular in Gaul (modern France) and was upheld in several regional synods there. A stricter (though not fully) Augustinian view prevailed still in North Africa and in Rome. An

ecumenical council was called to meet in AD 529 in the city of Orange in southeastern Gaul. In general the council affirmed the teachings of Augustine as being both orthodox and catholic, especially as to his contention that man was incapable of affecting his own salvation through the exercise of



his will. The assembled theologians at Orange concluded that faith, though an act of man's will, yet has its beginnings in the grace of God through the enlightenment of the human mind by the preaching of the Gospel. Against any resurgence of Pelagianism, the canons of Orange declared:

Church History

If anyone denies that it is the whole man, that is, both body and soul, that was "changed for the worse" through the offense of Adam's sin, but believes that the freedom of the soul remains unimpaired and that only the body is subject to corruption, he is deceived by the error of Pelagius... (Orange; Canon 1)

If anyone asserts that Adam's sin affected him alone and not his descendants also, or at least if he declares that it is only the death of the body which is the punishment for sin, and not also that sin, which is the death of the soul, passed through one man to the whole human race, he does injustice to God and contradicts the Apostle, who says, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12). (Orange; Canon 2)

If anyone maintains that God awaits our will to be cleansed from sin, but does not confess that even our will to be cleansed comes to us through the infusion and working of the Holy Spirit, he resists the Holy Spirit himself who says through Solomon, "The will is prepared by the Lord" (Prov. 8:35, LXX), and the salutary word of the Apostle, "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). (Orange; Canon 4)

Thus we find the vestiges of Pelagian teaching still feared and abominated by the orthodox theologians of the Church. Yet it is also clear that they were not ready to move completely in line with the teaching of Augustine with regard to the absolute sovereign power of divine grace. The preeminence of grace is hidden in the shadows in favor of an initiating, cooperative grace that encourages and assists human faith. The assembled theologians at Orange come about as close as possible to affirming Augustine's doctrine, in Canons 5 and 6, while holding back from Augustine's doctrine of predestination/election and the irresistibility of divine grace.

If anyone says that not only the increase of faith but also its beginning and the very desire for faith, by which we believe in Him who justifies the ungodly and comes to the regeneration of holy baptism -- if anyone says that this belongs to us by nature and not by a gift of grace, that is, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit amending our will and turning it from unbelief to faith and from godlessness to godliness, it is proof that he is opposed to the teaching of the Apostles, for

Church History

blessed Paul says, "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

(Orange; Canon 5)

If anyone says that God has mercy upon us when, apart from his grace, we believe, will, desire, strive, labor, pray, watch, study, seek, ask, or knock, but does not confess that it is by the infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit within us that we have the faith, the will, or the strength to do all these things as we ought; or if anyone makes the assistance of grace depend on the humility or obedience of man and does not agree that it is a gift of grace itself that we are obedient and humble, he contradicts the Apostle who says, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7), and, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

(Orange; Canon 6)

The canons of the Council of Orange are generally accepted as orthodox by both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches. What the synod determined was good, as far as it went. And to preserve peace and some semblance of unity in the Church, it refused to go farther than where general agreement could be found. Many today see in this restraint a great deal of wisdom, and refuse to discuss – must less to decide – upon the issues that stoked the Semi-Pelagian controversy in the first place. What is it to acknowledge the *necessity* of divine grace without also acknowledging its *sovereignty*? Augustinians throughout the centuries have maintained that it is nothing less than theological sleight of hand, and remains an affront to the dignity and glory of God manifested in the omnipotence of His grace.

The ambivalence of the theologians of Christianity in the centuries between Augustine and Calvin gave rise to a great deal of latitude with regard to the meaning of divine grace, and in the means by which God effectuates that grace to man. The ritual practices of early Christianity – baptism and the Lord's Supper – along with additional 'sacraments' developed and sanctified by the Church – began to take on gracious qualities, conferring grace merely by their performance. Grace became the reserve of the 'Church' to be dispensed to the faithful through the mediation of the priesthood. The redemptive grace

Church History

manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ became a universal offer of salvation to all men, attainable through the intercession of the Church. Man's will remained viable, the choice to believe continued to rest in his own mind and heart. God's grace, therefore, was liberally spread across the entirety of the human race – without any particular application in mind, and no assurance of any successful application at all.

The issue will come up again in the annals of Church History, particularly during the Reformation, though also earlier in the teachings of the medieval scholastics. Throughout the ages, however, the 'hard to accept' doctrine of Augustine would never be the popular view; 4-out-of-5 Christians surveyed would always come down on some level of ability, some strength and freedom of will, within fallen man. Luther would rail against this notion in his treatise *The Bondage of the Will*, and Calvin would systematically dissect it in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*; but semi-Augustinianism (to accord it the benefit of all doubts) would consistently remain the majority opinion, and remains so to this day.

Nonetheless, Augustine – declared by Rome to be a 'Doctor of the Church' – is a continuing force to be reckoned with by any theologian or student of biblical theology. His writings in his own day were recognized as cogent, powerful, and well nigh irrefutable. To some extent the impact he had upon his time stemmed from his oratorical and literary skill,



as Pelikan notes, "although he may not have been the greatest of Latin writers, he was almost certainly the greatest man who ever wrote in Latin."¹⁸¹ Yet the abiding influence of Augustine – and the way in which the Church chronically returns to him when it has lost its way – owes more to his command of Scripture and his unwavering faith in a sovereign omnipotent Redeemer.

¹⁸¹ Pelikan; 292.

Session 18: The Means of Grace

Text Reading: Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 26:26-30

“Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.”

Pelagius and his teaching of a graceless salvation were both soundly defeated, though the catholic church was anything but unified on what role divine grace did play in man’s salvation. There was, however, agreement on two points: first, that fallen man could not obtain salvation apart from some measure – some powerful and effective measure – of God’s grace being involved; second, that this operation of divine grace occurred in – and solely in – the Church. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – “outside the Church there is no salvation” – became the mantra of Christian evangelism from the time of Cyprian in the third century and onward. The Church is the Body of Christ, who is its beloved and worshiped Head; how could salvation be found in any other place or by any other means than through the ministry of Christ’s Body? The notion of ‘anonymous Christians’ – people who are saved through Christ though they do not know it, have never even heard of Jesus Christ, and have no affiliation with the Church – is a theological fiction that had to wait twenty centuries before it could even gain a hearing within professing Christendom.¹⁸²

But agreement that divine grace was in some sense necessary unto salvation, and that divine grace always and only operated in and through the Christian Church, did not lead to agreement on just *how* that grace was mediated to sinners. Throughout the history of Christian theology the mediation of grace to God’s people has been termed ‘the means of grace,’ and to this day there is no universal consensus on just how God dispenses His grace manward. In the early Church there were two obvious vehicles through which divine grace was

¹⁸² The idea of an anonymous Christian was first posited by the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner in the 20th Century.

administered both in conversion and in sanctification – both to the unregenerate sinner and to the born-again saint. These means of grace were, of course, *Baptism* and *the Lord's Supper*.

Lines of theological interpretation concerning these two 'sacraments' – and that is a term that raises the hackles of many fundamentalists, who prefer to call them 'ordinances' – have developed and hardened in the centuries following the Protestant Reformation. But before that time the views regarding Baptism and the Lord's Supper were fluid, and definitions of what was orthodox, what was heterodox, and what was heresy had not yet been formally set down. In one sense this could be attributed to the innocence of a young Church, willing to mix the symbolic with the real, the material with the spiritual, remaining satisfied without a solid understanding of exactly what transpired during baptism or when the elements of the Supper were eaten. In another sense, the lack of formal interpretive creeds being developed and defended did not take place until abuses of the two means of grace became more pronounced – and even the definition of 'abuse' was the prerogative of the majority opinion. For whatever reason, the first six or seven centuries of post-apostolic Christianity seemed content to "*let every man be convinced in his own mind*" and therefore provide us with a unique perspective into a time when the meaning and practice of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not so controversial as they have become.

Baptism:

The *locus classicus* for any teaching on the sacrament of baptism¹⁸³ is that passage known familiarly (though not quite correctly) as the Great Commission,

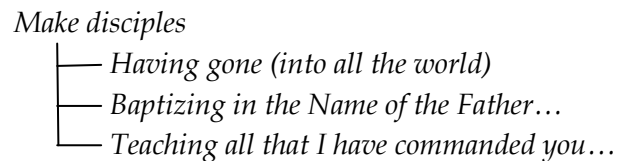
And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to

¹⁸³ We will use the term 'sacrament' in this study due to the simple fact that this was what the early Church called Baptism and the Lord's Supper; to insert 'ordinance' would be anachronistic and misleading.

Church History

observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

The inclusion of the rite of baptism in this passage clearly marked the sacrament as being initiatory – something that occurred at the beginning of a person’s relationship with Jesus Christ and with His Church. *Baptizing* came before *teaching*; the two together forming the means or methodology of *making disciples* (which, we are reminded, is the only imperative in this passage). The verse diagrams as follows:



This diagram highlights the fact that the three subordinated clauses are participles that modify and help define the process and scope of ‘making disciples.’ It was evident to the early Christian apologists, evangelists, preachers, and theologians that Baptism was an integral part of this process. But it was a singular part, in that it occurred once and at the beginning of all else. “Baptism in the Name of the triune God was looked upon as the door of admission into full membership with the Christian family.”¹⁸⁴ Baptism was normally done “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*” though baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was performed and almost universally accepted as valid. Immersion was the most ancient mode of baptism, as has been thoroughly documented and admitted by no less an advocate of sprinkling than Benjamin Warfield.¹⁸⁵ In the East and in most of the West, immersion was thrice – one each as the Persons of the Triune God were pronounced; though in Spain immersion was once only. As far as the historical documents can prove (discounting any arguments from silence), early Christian baptism was *credo-baptism* – performed

¹⁸⁴ Neve; 152.

¹⁸⁵ Cp. Warfield’s essay *The Archaeology of the Mode of Baptism*.

on adults upon a profession of faith in the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. Infant baptism, however, was already in practice by the turn of the fourth century and would gain a legion of staunch defenders before the century was out. Thus far the general practice, agreement, and minor disagreements on Baptism.

The Lord's Supper:

The earliest Scriptural passage regarding the Lord's Supper is not, as it might seem, the various historical narratives of the Lord's last night as we read them in the gospels. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians predates any of the gospels, and so his recounting of the dominical command to observe the bread and the cup of that last paschal meal is the earliest New Testament record, perhaps by several decades,

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." (I Corinthians 11:23-25)

The injunction here recorded to observe the bread and the cup of the Lord's last Passover meal on earth, was followed from a very early date and remained a consistent practice within both Eastern and Western branches of the Church. By the writing of the *Didache* in the first half of the second century, the meal was being called the *Eucharist*, from the Greek noun $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$, which means 'thanksgiving.' The rite was observed in the earliest years of the Church as part of a fellowship meal, called the 'agape.' We read of abuses of this feast in the same letter to the Corinthians referenced above. Later, perhaps because of the tendency to abuse, the Eucharist was separated from the agape, being most often observed afterward in the evening – as being the time of day that the sacrament was first ordained.

It is significant to note – especially in light of the modern tendency to downplay any symbolic or spiritual aspect of the Lord’s Supper – that at no time during the first seven centuries (and perhaps during the first fifteen) did any writer consider the Supper to be strictly a memorial meal of remembrance. The *Didache* itself speaks of the meal as “spiritual food for spiritual life.” Neve summarized the practice and theological view of the Eucharist in the centuries before the Reformation, “Realism and spiritualism as alternatives, or a certain combination of both, were the heritage of the past when the Reformation came in the sixteenth century.”¹⁸⁶

The two rites of Baptism and the Eucharist were indispensable to the life of the early Church. They formed the two pillars of Christian initiation and liturgy and were together viewed as the principle means by which divine grace is mediated from God to His people. The early Fathers’ views on Baptism and the Eucharist were multi-faceted, and there was a remarkable degree of latitude granted for differing opinions. But no one thought, nor would any permit, that these two sacrament were of no account, could be dispensed with, or did not convey grace to the recipient. Augustine records the practice in the North African churches with approbation, in that “they fittingly call baptism nothing else than ‘salvation,’ and the sacrament of the body of Christ nothing else than ‘life.’”¹⁸⁷

But there is that word ‘sacrament’ that causes so much indigestion among Protestants (especially Baptist) these days. It sounds too Roman Catholic, and thus seems too close to the Romish doctrine of *transubstantiation* – the view that holds that the bread literally becomes the body of Christ, and the wine literally His blood. The shift in emphasis from sacrament to ordinance, the term most frequently used today, started during the Reformation and primarily among the Anabaptists. An ‘ordinance’ is something that has been ordained, and thus the

¹⁸⁶ Neve; 159.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted by Pelikan; 304.

Church History

Church practices Baptism and observes the Lord's Supper because she was told to do so by her Lord. This is true, of course; but it leaves so much biblical teaching left unsaid and unstudied, that it really amounts to a grievous falsehood.

In any event, no text on the early Church could use the term 'ordinance' with propriety. Not only is it anachronistic – using a modern word to describe a past issue or event – it conveys a thought that was completely lacking in the minds of early believers: that Baptism and the Lord's Supper were simply memorial rituals with no underlying meaning or power. Such a view would be tantamount to eviscerating both of the divine grace that was contained in them – and robbing the Church of two powerful means by which God blesses His people. It still is they are not ordinances; they are sacraments.

'Sacramentum' is the Latin word frequently used to translate the Greek μυστήριον - 'mystery.' The Greek word is biblical, though not used in direct context with either Baptism or the Lord's Supper. A 'mystery' denotes anything the meaning of which is not immediately evident, something about which further study and meditation is required if one is to come to an understanding. Indeed, a mystery may be something that one will never fully comprehend. "In the patristic usage, the word 'mystery' was applied to whatever was at once mysterious and sacred, and especially to objects or transactions of a symbolical character, where an occult reality was conceived to be hidden beneath their material aspect."¹⁸⁸ Clearly the early Church considered both Baptism and the Eucharist to have something more in them than met the eye. And in this they were supported by at least two passages from the Apostle Paul's writings.

First, with regard to Baptism, there is the enigmatic passage in Chapter 6 of Romans,

¹⁸⁸ Fisher, George Park; *History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; 1896); 167.

Church History

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

(Romans 6:1-4)

And in connection with the Lord's Supper, there is this passage from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians,

I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

(I Corinthians 10:15-16)

To these Pauline statements we may also add the following from Peter,

There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...

(I Peter 3:21)

None of these passages can be distilled to mere ordinances, empty symbols performed simply on the basis of the Lord's command. In each there is that evident 'mystery,' something beneath the surface, reality behind the symbolic. The modern use of the term 'ordinance' is an understandable reaction against error that crept into the Church's views and teachings concerning the nature of that 'something else'; but the reaction has gone too far and has, in the minds and practice of many modern believers, obliterated the spiritual, gracious component present in every baptism and in every observation of the Lord's Supper.

It was Augustine who first laid down a technical, theological definition for the term 'sacrament.' To the North African bishop, a sacrament was 'a visible sign of an invisible grace.' This definition took hold almost immediately, and later became one of universal consensus among the Protestant Reformers, with the noticeable exception of the Anabaptists.

The Development of Doctrine: Baptism over the Centuries

We now turn to the manner in which the theological views concerning Baptism and the Eucharist developed, eventually becoming fixed as Roman Catholic dogma, and eventually becoming abhorrent to many believers such as the Anabaptists of the Reformation era. Neve cautions against trying to find as clear a line of development as was the case in the Christological doctrines, or even in the conflict over the nature of grace between the Augustinians, Pelagians, and later semi-Pelagians/Augustinians.

Regarding the Lord's Supper and Baptism we cannot speak of a gradually developing dogma such as we have concerning the Trinitarian relations, the two natures of Christ, and sin and grace. The history of conceptions on the Lord's Supper in the ancient Church does not present a doctrinally logical development, in which the fathers, one taking up the work of the other, had aimed to create a *dogma*.¹⁸⁹

With regard to Baptism, there were definite variations in the observation of the rite. We have already seen the traditional formula of pronouncing each name of the Triune God while immersing the convert either three times or once. At some point the practice of exorcism – casting out the devil – was introduced, followed by the confession of repentance and faith by the subject. In North Africa salt was placed in the convert's mouth on the basis of Mark 9,

For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another. (Mark 9:49-50)

Early on, the oil of chrism (anointing) was added to the water of cleansing, the sign of the cross being made with oil upon the forehead and breast of the

¹⁸⁹ Neve; 158-159.

convert. And in many churches the practice of touching the ear, nose, eye, and tongue with spittle - pronouncing the words, *Ephphatha*, "be opened" - was practiced on the basis of Mark 7:34. It is hard to see this happening in today's hygienically-sensitive Church! Finally, in Italy a coin was laid into the convert's hand signifying the entrusted talent of the parable (Luke 19:12). Depending on the denomination of the coin, a bishop could potentially record a large number of baptisms in his parish.

Unusual practices aside, the real issue with regard to Baptism as a means of grace has to do with the relationship between the application of the water and the regeneration of the sinner's heart. Simply put, *did Baptism actually save the sinner?* The doctrine that affirms this contention is called Baptismal Regeneration, and is the basic content of baptismal dogma for the Roman Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Anglican Church insofar as its Prayer Book goes.¹⁹⁰ It is hard to escape the conclusion that the early Church Fathers believed, in a non-technical way, in Baptismal Regeneration.

"Baptism was regarded as the Sacrament of Regeneration...More specifically it brings the pardon of sins in the past, and the gift of the Holy Ghost."¹⁹¹ It was the practice of all of the churches that no one could be admitted to their membership who had not been baptized, and it soon became an equally universal practice that no unbaptized person could partake of the Eucharist. The correlation between Baptism as the initiatory rite of the Christian Church, and the identity of that Church as the assembly of regenerate people, made so close a connection between Baptism and Regeneration as to be indistinguishable in most patristic writings. Tertullian, in his polemic against the heretic Marcion, listed four benefits or gifts that derived from Baptism, which could not be gained in any other way.

1. The remission of sins,

¹⁹⁰ The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England deny Baptismal Regeneration, but the formula dictated at baptism by the Edwarian Prayer Book is unmistakably regenerative.

¹⁹¹ Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine*; 167.

Church History

2. Deliverance from death,
3. Regeneration, and
4. The gift of the Holy Spirit.

Through the controversy concerning the nature of man as fallen in Original Sin came an even more settled opinion among the early Church writers that the baptismal waters were necessary to wash away that inherited guilt, and to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit to combat the continued tendency to sin remaining in the body (concupiscence). By the time of Augustine, infants who died un-baptized were considered by most theologians to be prevented from entry into heaven. This view eventually gave rise to the dogma of *Limbus Infantus* – a place of neither reward nor punishment for the souls of un-baptized infants. It is significant to note, in reference to the later controversy between *paedo-* and *credo-*baptists, that any *paedo-*baptist claim to the historicity of infant baptism must also acknowledge the associated belief in baptismal regeneration. In other words, the baptized infant was viewed as *saved*, not merely as a covenant child, whose salvation would (hopefully, presumably) come later on the basis of personal profession.

Augustine summarizes the universal view concerning the power of divine grace in Baptism. “the washing away of ‘absolutely all sins, whether of deeds or words or thoughts, whether original or added, whether committed unconsciously or permitted consciously’ the assurance that ‘one may hope for an unending life when he dies’; a regeneration through ‘the washing of regeneration,’ ...and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹²

With regard to the Lord’s Supper, the obvious point of contention both in the early Church and through the centuries since, has to do with the meaning of Jesus’ words, “*This is My body...this is My blood.*” The two ends of the interpretive spectrum include the Roman Catholic dogma of transubstantiation on the one hand, and the Anabaptist view of symbolism on the other. We can safely summarize the views of the patristic Fathers that none held to the

¹⁹² Pelikan; 304.

Anabaptist view, nor did any clearly espouse the Roman Catholic view. But between the two poles, the general consensus was closer to that of Rome than of the Anabaptists.

This is to say that among the many passages that may be surveyed from the volumes of patristic literature, there was a decidedly greater tendency toward *realism* than toward *symbolism*. Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, “calls the Eucharist a food of immortality, and speaks of a miraculous transformation of the nature of the elements into the glorified body of Christ by virtue of the priestly blessing.”¹⁹³ Yet this is not transubstantiation, for Gregory speaks of the Lord’s *glorified* body, not his physical body. The language was not technical, and was often somewhat contradictory when viewed through the filter of controversy that surrounded the issue during and after the Reformation.

It seems that the tendency was to invoke a similar Logos doctrine as was used during the debate concerning the nature of Jesus Christ, His humanity and His deity. Augustine, for instance, affirmed that the physical body of Jesus Christ was not ubiquitous – it could not be everywhere – and was thus located at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He thus denied the ‘real’ transformation of the bread into Christ’s flesh and of the wine into Christ’s blood as being impossible. Still, Augustine used the same realistic language as did his predecessors – speaking of the bread and wine in terms of body and blood in a manner that could easily be interpreted as literal. An example of this somewhat ‘loose’ terminology can be seen in the Antiochene theologian Theodoret. He affirmed a transformation of the elements by virtue of the priestly blessing, yet also wrote,

The mystical emblems of the body and blood of Christ continue in their original essence and form, they are visible and tangible as they were before the consecration; but the contemplation of the spirit and of faith sees in them that

¹⁹³ Schaff; 494.

which they have become, and they are adored also as that which they are to believers.¹⁹⁴

For a long time this semi-transubstantial view caused little or no controversy. Origen was the progenitor of a more symbolic interpretation of the Eucharist, but even his followers steered clear of a purely memorial meal. "In the day of Tertullian, of Irenæus and their predecessors, it was altogether possible that a symbolical and in a certain sense realistic conception of the gift in the Supper were not exclusive the one of the other."¹⁹⁵ But the trend toward out-and-out transubstantiation began as early as the bishopric of Cyprian, with the subtle shift in perspective of the Lord's Supper from a symbolic meal to a sacrificial offering. Cyprian himself stated in regard to the Eucharist, "The bishop now imitates that which Christ did, and he offers the true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father."¹⁹⁶

Later writers still vacillate between a realistic, literal transforming of the elements into the body and blood of Christ, on the one hand, and a more symbolic yet real spiritual alteration of the elements. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. AD 386) does not go into metaphysical detail when he speaks of the transformation of the elements, but his words would sound perfectly acceptable to later Roman theologians. The words of consecration, "*This is My body...This is My blood*" were considered by him to be spiritually effectual to the transformation of the physical elements of bread and wine into the real body and blood of the Lord. "Now that which seems to be bread is not bread anymore, but body of Christ."¹⁹⁷ Later Cyril of Alexandria (d. AD 444) seems to return to a more symbolic/spiritual realism when he speaks of the transubstantiation of the elements as "what lies on the altar is the real body of the *Logos*, even though it is covered by the form of the bread and wine."¹⁹⁸ Augustine retrenches somewhat, insisting on the physical

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 497.

¹⁹⁵ Neve; 160.

¹⁹⁶ Quoted by Neve; 161, from Cyprian, *I Clement* 44:4

¹⁹⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*; 162.

presence of the body of Christ in heaven. Though he often uses realistic terminology in his sermons, it appears that his theology was still firmly on the symbolic and not the realistic side of the divide.

Transubstantiation in the form that was solidified in Roman Catholic dogma by the Fourth Lateran Council in AD 1215, was first clearly enunciated by Pope Gregory I in his *Canons of the Mass*. In this treatise Gregory speaks of the actual, physical alteration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord. It is no longer a spiritual transformation, and far from the perceptual transformation of the immediate post-apostolic Fathers. The Eucharist has become fully a priestly sacrifice, the table no longer a dinner but an altar. The Lord's Supper itself has been transubstantiated into a perpetual bloodless sacrifice of Jesus Christ to God the Father, for the salvation and cleansing of the Church. In this new form, the Lord's Supper would become a sacerdotal function of the priests, performed without respect to the congregation and most often without the congregation even in attendance. Eventually the wine would be withheld from the communicant, and only the bread given. Such abuses and priestcraft would rouse lonely voices of dissent through the long Middle Ages, but the 'sacrifice of the altar,' as it came to be called, would remain in this perverted form until the Protestant Reformation would restore to it some measure of metaphysical sense and biblical foundation.

Session 19: The Rise of Neo-Judaism

Text Reading: Colossians 2

*“The church was the repository of truth,
the dispenser of grace,
the guarantee of salvation,
the matrix of acceptable worship.”*
(Jaroslav Pelikan)

By the time of Pope Gregory I, the ‘Great,’ the Church of Jesus Christ did not look much like the seemingly pitiful and powerless congregation we read of in the Book of Acts. When Gregory ascended the episcopal throne at Rome in the latter years of the sixth century, emperors had already been excommunicating, exiling, and executing men in the name of Christianity for three hundred years. Christian worship was no longer in the homes of the wealthiest members, much less in the secrecy of the catacombs; cathedrals could be found in all the major cities of the Mediterranean world, their bishops ranking among the mighty of the earth, politically as well as religiously. Paul’s description of the early Christians had become a faint memory of the religion’s quaint beginnings,

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

(I Corinthians 1:26-29)

The Catholic Church was, in both its Eastern and its Western branches, *glorious* and *powerful*, and much of that glory and power was self-derived. It would be another 1,000 years before any serious corrective movement would take place – the Reformation of the 16th Century. In the meantime, the earthly

power and glory of the Church would grow and increasingly interpose between sinful man and the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

We have traced the development of the original leadership of the Christian congregations - the plurality of elders - to the ascent of a single 'bishop' as *primus inter pares* and, before long, as supreme over the churches in a given region. Eventually this progression (or digression, depending on one's perspective) led to the exaltation of the Bishop of Rome as Head over all the churches, the Vicar of Christ on earth, the spiritual heir of Peter in whose hands were held the keys of the kingdom. But the process of 'layering' - the creation of a hierarchy between presbyters and deacons, then bishops and presbyters, then finally one Bishop and all other bishops - was not the only stratifying process taking place in the ancient church. As the bishop moved away from the presbyters, he also moved farther from the people of his congregation. At the same time, the people moved too - in the opposite direction. More and more the professing Christian (and eventually this would include just about everyone born in Europe or North Africa) looked to the Church to mediate all things pertaining to God. As the above quote so ably summarizes, "The church was the repository of truth, the dispenser of grace, the guarantee of salvation, the matrix of acceptable worship."¹⁹⁹

There can be little doubt that the vast majority of Christians during the centuries between Constantine and Gregory were so in name only. In practice they were pagans, and the Church to them became what the ancient pagan temples were to their ancestors, or the Temple in Jerusalem for many faithless Jews. Consequently - though it is hard to determine which came first - there developed within the Catholic Church a level of mediators called 'priests.' It is historically indeterminate whether the advent of a separate priesthood within Christianity was owing to the Levitical priesthood of Judaism, or the pagan priesthood of Rome. There was probably a mixture of both, with more of the

¹⁹⁹ Pelikan, 334.

Church History

latter than the ecclesiastical leaders cared, or did, admit. The process itself – that of establishing a level of mediation between the worshiper and his god – is called *Sacerdotalism*, and the Church as it entered the Middle Ages was nothing if not sacerdotal.

Sacerdotalism (from the Latin *sacerdos* - **priest**) is the belief in a priestly system where the priest has been given the special authority to act as a spiritual mediator between God and mankind. The Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and high Anglican traditions are sacerdotal. Although the priests are not supposed to be seen as better or more godly than others, their role in the sacraments of the church give them a special "mediatorial" role, as representatives of the Church (Christ's body on earth) and thus of Christ. This is especially noticeable in the Roman Catholic confession, mass, and last rites.²⁰⁰

Sadly the Church was ready for the priest. Over the first four centuries there arose a tendency against rational analysis of Scripture and toward a mystical, mysterious theology that focused on the almost magical powers of the elements of Christianity. The Latin word for mystery is *sacramentum*, from which arose the 'sacraments' of the Church. In our last lesson we looked at the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, but in the early history of the Christian Church there were many, many more sacraments than just two. Since a sacrament was anything mysterious pertaining to the Christian faith, sacraments arose from things either performed or prescribed in the Bible, and from many things not found in Scripture at all. "The sign of the cross, the salt that was given to the catechumens, the ordination of priests, marriage, exorcism, the celebration of the Sabbath – they were all called sacraments."²⁰¹ Among theologians the list of sacraments ran from as few as five to as many as thirty.

As there was no unanimity regarding the number of sacraments in the Church, so also there was no agreement as to their meaning and power. Augustine gives us the classic definition of a sacrament: the visible sign of an

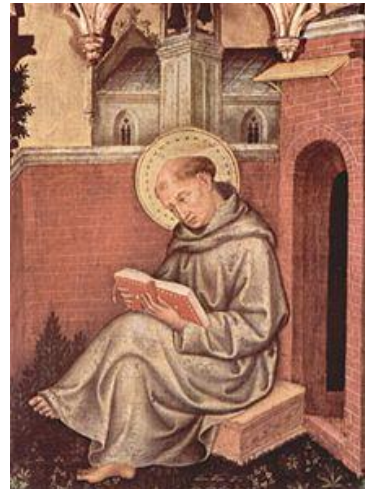
²⁰⁰ Theopedia: An Encyclopedia of Christianity; <http://www.theopedia.com/Sacerdotalism>

²⁰¹ Berkhof, Louis; *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1937), 242.

invisible grace.²⁰² Thereupon was agreement – sacraments were ‘means’ or ‘conduits’ of grace. “What was important about the sacraments was neither their definition nor their number, but their divinely appointed function as conveyers of grace.”²⁰³ But how this grace operated, and what the role was of the priest or the penitent, were matters of perennial dispute. Much of the development of the Roman Catholic Church as it moved into the Middle Ages was the result of the working out of sacerdotalism through sacramentalism. Furthermore, the magical and superstitious nature of the whole system betrays its pagan roots as being far more important than any official claim to Judaistic heritage.

For several centuries the term ‘sacrament’ was part of the general liturgy of the Church without much critical analysis, and certainly no official enumeration. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, *circa* AD 500, was perhaps the first to set forth a listing of sacraments. “He listed the sacraments as consisting of

Baptism, the Eucharist, and Anointing, as well as ordination, monastic consecration, and funerals. This scheme shows up in Christian writers as late as the fourteenth century.”²⁰⁴ But it was the great Thomas Aquinas who pretty much settled the matter with regard to the ‘official’ list of seven sacraments, a list that was established as canon law by the Council of Florence in AD 1439 and affirmed by the anti-Reformation Council of Trent in AD 1545-63. Aquinas



Thomas Aquinas (1225-74)

was not a particularly original thinker, but he was perhaps the greatest systematizer of existing historical doctrine, and his vigorous adherence to the Roman Church and the Roman Bishop prompted him to set as infallible truth whatever was or had been promulgated from Rome throughout history. Thus it

²⁰² Schaff; 475.

²⁰³ Pelikan; 306.

²⁰⁴ <http://www.kencollins.com/sacraments/sacrament-03.htm>

Church History

was his conclusion, based on his masterful knowledge of pretty much everything that had been written on the subject for the preceding 800 years, that there were only seven true sacraments. From our Protestant perspective of both time and cynicism, it does seem a bit convenient that there would be *seven* sacraments, but that was to be expected within the medieval theological system of which Aquinas was so much a part. His seven sacraments remain the same seven in the Roman Catholic Church today:

1. Baptism - By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin. Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte "a new creature," an adopted son of God, who has become a "partaker of the divine nature," member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit. The ordinary ministers of Baptism are the bishop and priest and, in the Latin Church, also the deacon. In case of necessity, anyone, even a non-baptized person, with the required intention, can baptize, by using the Trinitarian (aka In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit) baptismal formula.²⁰⁵

Pope Eugene IV, who presided over the Council of Florence, speaks of the sacrament of Baptism thus, "Holy Baptism holds the first place among the sacraments, because it is the door of the spiritual life; for by it we are made members of Christ and incorporated with the Church. And since through the first man death entered into all, unless we be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, we can not enter into the kingdom of Heaven, as Truth Himself has told us."²⁰⁶

2. Confirmation - A sacrament in which the Holy Ghost is given to those already baptized in order to make them strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ The definitions of the sacraments included here are from a Roman Catholic essay, *The Seven Sacraments*, published online by The Legion of Mary; unless otherwise noted.

<http://www.legionofmarytidewater.com/faith/sacraments.htm#Baptism>

²⁰⁶ New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia; <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm>

²⁰⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia; <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04215b.htm>

Church History

It should be noted that any theological view that results in the baptism of infants, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern/Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican/Episcopal, or Presbyterian, must have some form of 'confirmation' to recognize the actual participation of that person in the life of the Church upon reaching some designated age of maturity. In some denominations the official sacrament of confirmation is merely left unacknowledged, and the person is admitted to the Lord's Supper upon a personal profession of faith. This has, as we shall see in future lessons, caused chronic controversy within many branches of Christianity throughout history.

3. Holy Eucharist - Known to Protestants as the Lord's Supper, the Holy Eucharist is, within the Roman Catholic Church, "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch." These first three sacraments - Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist - are 'the sacraments of Christian initiation' and are inseparably bound by the Church in the life of every parishioner.
4. Reconciliation - This sacrament is more commonly known as Penance, but the term Reconciliation is more accurate in that it encompasses the *whole* sacerdotal work of the Church - the priest as well as the penitent - in the restoration of the sinner to full communion. "After Baptism, "individual confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession. Reconciliation, also called Confession, is the only normal means for mortal sins to be forgiven."

The New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia adds, "Penance is a sacrament of the New Law instituted by Christ in which forgiveness of sins committed after baptism is granted through the priest's absolution to those who with true sorrow confess their sins and promise to satisfy for the same. It is called a sacrament not

simply a function or ceremony, because it is an outward sign instituted by Christ to impart grace to the soul."²⁰⁸

5. Anointing of the Sick/Final Unction -The Anointing of the Sick "is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived." Only priests (bishops and presbyters) are ministers of the Anointing of the Sick

Perhaps no other sacrament captures the sense of fear and of superstitious ritualism like 'Final Unction.' In the Middle Ages it was a matter of terrible concern that a person not die 'unshriven' - without having given confession and received absolution by a priest. The soul's transport to Purgatory, and all hope of eventually making it to heaven, depends on the person having received Final or *Extreme* Unction before death. "...in danger of death, a person should receive Baptism (or confession if already baptized), confirmation (if not confirmed), anointing of the sick, and finally the Eucharist. In some cases, a person with an invalid marriage should have the marriage validated."²⁰⁹

6. Holy Orders - Also known as Ordination, the sacrament of Holy Orders "is used to signify not only the particular rank or general status of the clergy, but also the outward action by which they are raised to that status, and thus stands for ordination. It also indicates what differentiates laity from clergy or the various ranks of the clergy, and thus means spiritual power. The Sacrament of Order is the sacrament by which grace and spiritual power for the discharge of ecclesiastical offices are conferred."²¹⁰

The sacrament of Holy Orders is an example of the *indelible* nature of the sacraments. Two other sacraments - Baptism and Confirmation - are also viewed as indelible, as marking the soul of the recipient with a permanent

²⁰⁸ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618c.htm>

²⁰⁹ <http://www.legionofmarytidewater.com/faith/sacraments.htm#Reconciliation>

²¹⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11279a.htm>

spiritual character. "Three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation and Orders, besides grace, produce in the soul a character, i.e., an indelible spiritual mark by which some are consecrated as servants of God, some as soldiers, some as ministers. Since it is an indelible mark, the sacraments which impress a character cannot be received more than once."²¹¹

7. Marriage – As a institution marriage was highly regarded by the Reformers; as a sacrament it was vehemently denied. But the Council of Florence established Marriage as the seventh sacrament on the basis of Paul's use of the institution metaphorically in Ephesians 5, speaking of a *mystery* – the Latin *sacramentum*. "The seventh sacrament is matrimony, which is a figure of the union of Christ, and the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: This is a great sacrament, but I speak in Christ and in the Church."²¹²

The New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia quotes John Calvin (though not, of course, with approbation) in regard to Marriage as sacramental. "Calvin in his "Institutions", IV, xix, 34, says: "Lastly, there is matrimony, which all admit was instituted by God, though no one before the time of Gregory regarded it as a sacrament. What man in his sober senses could so regard it? God's ordinance is good and holy; so also are agriculture, architecture, shoemaking, hair-cutting legitimate ordinances of God, but they are not sacraments".²¹³

Ex opere operato:

The existence of sacraments, and the various enumerations of them, is a matter of historical interest, though not necessarily one of theological interest. If the definition of a sacrament is left in its Augustinian form, *the visible sign of an invisible grace*, one may make a credible argument for many things being 'signs' of grace. The Bible itself is full of things – fig trees, vines, herds of sheep, for instance – and institutions – marriage, in particular – that are symbolic and point to a deeper, gracious meaning. As such, these signs and symbols have always

²¹¹ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm#V>

²¹² <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09707a.htm>

²¹³ *Idem*.

Church History

presupposed grace already present in the believer for their effectiveness. In other words, only one who has already received regenerative grace will profit from other 'means' of grace, whether symbolic or explicit. The negative of this fact is dramatically set forth in the Proverbs,

*A haughty look, a proud heart,
And the plowing of the wicked are sin.* (Proverbs 21:4)

But the progressive sacerdotalism of the Church would not leave well enough alone. The rise of a mediatorial priesthood carried with it the instrument of mediation in the sacraments themselves. Grace became not merely symbolized by the signs of the sacraments; rather it was considered that "grace truly resides in the visible sacrament."²¹⁴ Hugo of St. Victor (c. 1096 - 1141) was a leading force in establishing the inherent gracious power of the sacraments, regardless both of the faith of the recipient and of the purity of the officiating priest. "Hugo defined a sacrament as a 'physical or material element presented clearly to the senses, by similitude representing, by institution signifying, and by consecration containing an invisible and spiritual grace.' In other words, a sacrament is not only a sign or symbol of a sacred thing but it is the physical medium through which grace operates."²¹⁵

The principle involved here is called *ex opere operato*, Latin for "out of the work, works." The New Catholic Dictionary defines this phrase as

A technical phrase used by theologians since the 13th century to signify that the sacraments produce grace of themselves, apart and distinct from the grace dependent upon the intention of the person conferring the sacrament; the latter effect is designated by the phrase *ex opere operantis*. The phrase is first found in the writings of Peter of Poitiers (c.1130-1215).²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Berkhof; 243.

²¹⁵ Latourette, Kenneth Scott; *A History of Christianity: Volume I*; 505.

²¹⁶ <http://saints.sqpn.com/ncd06116.htm>

To illustrate one effect of this erroneous doctrine, consider the practice of the Holy Eucharist being taken in only one element. In Roman Catholic mass, the parishioner partakes only of the wafer, and that is placed on his or her tongue by the priest (the parishioner dare not touch the consecrated bread). The wine is taken only by the priest, who is painfully careful not to spill any. This attention to such details is from a combination of the doctrine of *transubstantiation* - whereby the bread and wine are believed literally to become the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ - and of *ex opere operato* - whereby the participation of the Lord's body in the Eucharist happens regardless of either the one who partakes or the one who administers. This means that if a crumb or drop of wine were to be eaten by a rat, the rat would have partaken - fellowshiped, *koinonia* in the biblical sense - with the Lord's Body. There is, in fact, a very elaborate ritual observed by the priests should any of the bread or wine drop to the floor during the Eucharist.

But even in the Roman Catholic view, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, or the water of Baptism, or any other element of a sacrament, are not graciously powerful in and of themselves. While the bread and wine remain *unconsecrated*, they remain just bread and wine. The words of consecration, then, are the means whereby power and grace are infused into the elements of the sacrament, recreating the physical material as spiritual material. "The words of the institution effect a spiritual *virtus* (efficacy) in the external sign, which resides in the latter until this *virtus* has accomplished its end."²¹⁷

Thus the sacerdotalism of the Church reaches its supreme form. The sinner need only submit himself to the sacrament - there is no requirement of conversion, repentance, or even inner angst - the priest offers up the words of consecration - he need not be pure, faithful, or even himself a believer - and by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ grace is bestowed. To be sure, there are limitations to this incredible system: the sacrament cannot be administered by

²¹⁷ Berkhof; 243.

Church History

other than one who has received the sacrament of Holy Orders (with the exception of Baptism and, in some cases, Extreme Unction when the recipient is near death). Furthermore, the sacraments cannot be forced upon anyone - no grace is conferred if the person receives the sacrament under duress. Still, for a pagan population 'converting' to Christianity in the centuries after Constantine, the sacerdotal rituals of the Catholic Church (both East and West) was as close to the old paganism as could be hoped for. The long Dark Ages settle in after Gregory, the 'last of the Church Fathers and the first of the Popes.'²¹⁸

How far the ideas and rites which gradually associated themselves in the ancient Church, East and West, with the sacraments or mysteries, were moulded or modified by the heathen mysteries and by other cults with which the converts to Christianity were conversant, is a subject that would require a searching and elaborate investigation. That the Greek theology in process of time became permeated with beliefs and sentiments that gathered about the Christian 'mysteries,' is a fact beyond question.²¹⁹

The Church was in for a long, long wait for an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther.

²¹⁸ Pelikan; 349.

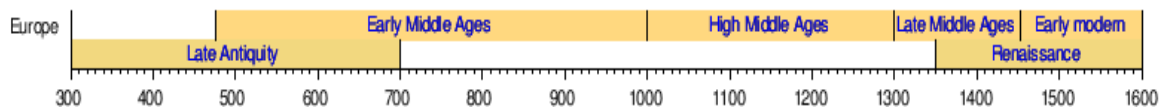
²¹⁹ Fisher, George Park; *History of Christian Doctrine*; 167.

Session 20: Everywhere, Always, and by Everyone

Text Reading: II Timothy 3:1 - 9

*“It was a sacred tradition,
attested by ecclesiastical authority,
the validity of which it was impious to doubt.”*
(George Park Fisher)

As with most analyses of history, the period of time known as the Middle Ages is variously dated by historians. Perhaps due to the convenient alliteration, many track the length of this period as ‘Rome to Renaissance’ – from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476 to the advent of the Renaissance in the 15th Century. This view of the chronology of the era has its merits as a literary analysis more than as a political one. Most scholars see the fall of the Roman Empire as the end of Classical Antiquity – an age characterized by the literature of Greek and the Latin. The Renaissance was a rediscovery of the classics, especially that of the Greek writers, which fueled a reinvigorated learning in the late Middle Ages. But the timeline below indicates that there is considerable overlap to historical periods, and their chronology depends largely on the perspective of the historian.



Considering the Middle Ages from a theological or ecclesiastical perspective yields a slightly different timeline, shifted a century or so to the right. Unfortunately lacking the alliteration, the Middle Ages runs according to this perspective from Gregory the Great to Martin Luther – from the ‘settling in’ of Roman orthodoxy to the advent of the Reformation. This is not to say that there were no theological ‘bright lights’ during the intervening centuries; nor is it

to say that Martin Luther himself brought immediate and pervasive illumination to the religious world. In many places the Middle Ages continued decades after the Reformation, which was itself foreshadowed decades (even centuries) earlier by brave and enlightened theologians like John Wyclif and Jan Hus. But for a historian's systematizing purposes, we can hammer a stake in the ground at the pontificate of Gregory I, and another 900 years later at the door of All Saint's Church in Wittenberg.

In addition, the concept of a Middle Ages is not a broad, worldwide phenomenon. It is not even comprehensively European, as many would think. It is a peculiarly *Western* event, not duplicated in the Byzantine East, the Far East, or in the Islamic world – all of which continued to see academic, artistic, and social advancements during this particular millennium. Thus Gregory's term as Rome's Bishop marks the beginning of the West's Middle Ages, incorrectly and sadly also known to many as the Dark Ages. "As far as the West is concerned, Gregory the First is the connecting link between the ancient and the mediæval period. In him the patristic age comes to an end."²²⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan denotes Gregory "the last of the church fathers and the first of the popes."²²¹ But before we investigate the circumstance in Gregory's day through which the Catholic Church settled into the long slumber of the Middle Ages, we return to summarize the conditions of the Eastern, or Greek, branch of Christianity.

In the centuries since the Great Cappadocians lived and taught, the Eastern Church had denigrated into a pawn of the political machinations of the Byzantine court. "In the East, a petrified creed and ritual and the despotism of secular rulers chilled intellectual activity."²²² Superstition was quickly taking the place of vibrant faith, and the adoration of relics – pieces of bone or strands of hair from some apostle or saint, fragments of clothing or of the cross upon which Jesus died, or even of Noah's ark – was taking the place of theological thought

²²⁰ Fisher; *History of Christian Doctrine*, 199.

²²¹ Pelikan, 349.

²²² Fisher; *History of Christian Doctrine*, 200.

and true spiritual worship. Neve refers to this development as a 'lower Christianity' and a 'paganized religion' that developed alongside of the great Christological settlements that were ironed out during the Patristic Age.²²³ In the end, however, superstition triumphed over theology. At the Second Nicene Council (AD 787) it was decreed that no church could be consecrated until it was properly supplied with relics. The Roman bishop at that time, Sergius I, forbade the publication of this council in any Western church.²²⁴ The last of the Eastern theologians to make a mark upon the church as a whole was John of Damascus - a gifted scholar in Law, Philosophy, Theology, and Music - who died in AD 749.

As we have seen in previous lessons, the Eastern branch of the Church seemed content with the Christological settlements of the fourth and fifth centuries, and did not participate to any great extent in the conflicts surrounding the issues of nature and grace (i.e., the Augustinian-Pelagian debate). Perhaps the reticence of the Greek – speaking segment of Christianity to participate in the controversies raging over in the Latin-speaking branch came from the Eastern Church's reluctance - and later, its refusal - to acknowledge the supremacy of the Roman bishop over Christendom. To this day the hierarchy of Eastern Orthodoxy is far more of a collegiate brotherhood of bishops (metropolitans) than the top-down structure that is Rome. Eventually the two wings of the church split, a division deeply rooted in the developing religious psyche of Greek versus Latin Christianity. How deep the separation was is indicated by a controversy that appears to all modern readers to be incredibly trivial, yet at the time it engendered vehement hostility of Greek against Latin.

The *filioque* clause of the ancient Apostles' or Nicene Creed is about as innocuous a statement as can be imagined. With regard to the Person of the Holy Spirit, the Latin versions of the creed began to speak thus: "*And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and giver of life, who from the Father and **the Son proceeds.***" The

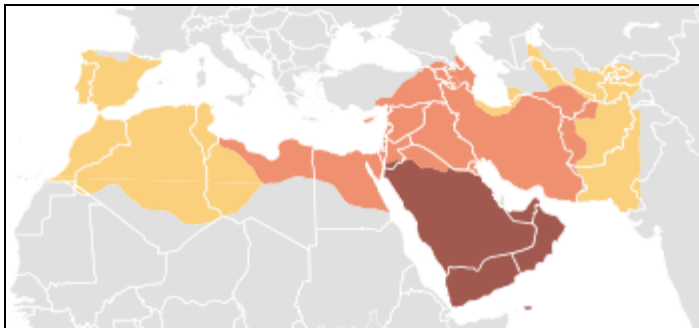
²²³ Neve, 168.

²²⁴ Fisher; *History of Christian Doctrine*, 201.

latter word are the *filioque* clause - proceeding from the Son. This minor phrase, which says no more than Scripture itself, was the proverbial straw under which the Greek camel's back finally gave way. In AD 1054 "The Patriarch (of Constantinople) broke off all intercourse with the Papal legates at Constantinople" and the rift between East and West was rendered permanent.

The isolation of the East was further exacerbated by the historically sudden rise of Islam across the nations of North Africa, into the Near East, and

The Spread of Islam (AD 622 - 750)



northward into Asia Minor. We say 'historically sudden' in the sense that the rapidity of conquest of the Muslim armies was remarkable in the annals of religious warfare; within one hundred years of the death of Mohammed (632),

Age of the Caliphs

- Expansion under Muhammad, 622–632
- Expansion during the Rashidun Caliphate, 632–61
- Expansion of the Umayyad Caliphate, 661–750

Islamic rulers controlled territory larger than the Byzantine Empire. The combination of Muslim arms, which were virtually unbeatable during this era, and the paganized Christianity that had developed in these regions, brought rapid conversions of multitudes to the Islamic religion. This left only a minority of the citizens in any of the conquered territories as even nominally Christian, and the Eastern Emperor in Constantinople felt himself obliged to be their protector. Hence much of the energy of the Byzantine court, both political and religious, was spent in negotiating safe haven treaties with the Muslim caliphs, safe passage for Christian pilgrims traveling to Palestine, and the freedom of Byzantine Christians to continue to practice their faith unmolested by their new Islamic overlords.

Church History

But at the same time, the Muslim armies did not simply stop at the borders of Asia Minor and mildly agree to a division of territory with the Byzantine Emperor. Warfare between the successive emperors in Constantinople and the successive caliphs in Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus or Baghdad was chronic and frequent for the next 700 years. Constantinople itself was essentially besieged by Islamic forces for the last two hundred years of her Christian existence. Finally, on May 29, 1453, Constantinople fell - the Byzantine Empire was dead.

During this time the isolated and segregated Christian churches spread throughout the Muslim world grew farther and farther apart with respect to communication between sister congregations. The Maronite Christian sect grew in the area of modern-day Syria and Lebanon; the Coptic Church took the lead in Egypt; Persian Christians followed the condemned teachings of Nestorius, and the branches of Eastern Orthodoxy in the Balkan region divided along nationalistic lines. Interestingly, the Eastern Church's early settlement (some would say stagnation) into a heavily traditional and mystical liturgy did, in some sense, keep these widely scattered and isolated branches connected with a remarkable similarity of worship. Each one adhering to the earliest forms of teaching and practice - from long before Islam ever developed - they all passed through the centuries in much the same way.

Developments in the West:

The Eastern Empire and the Byzantine armies were an effective buffer to the Latin West, keeping the danger of Islamic invasion to a minimum, at least from that direction. The islands of the Mediterranean were in constant threat, and Sicily itself became an Islamic protectorate for many centuries. Spain, too, was overrun by the Islamic Moors and remained under the dominion of the Muslim faith until the Catholic houses of Aragon and Castile, united by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, finally ousted the Islamic forces from the

Church History

Iberian Peninsula in 1492 (a far more significant event at the time than the sea voyage of Cristóbal Colón; aka Columbus).

From the viewpoint of the seemingly inexorable spread of Islam across the Mediterranean world, the most significant event in the early Middle Ages is undoubtedly the Battle of Tours, fought in AD 732. This was the battle that 'saved' the West from the same fate that was overcoming the East, the displacement of Christianity by Islam, and of emperor by caliph.



The Victorious Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours

The victorious Muslims in Spain sought to extend their triumphs north of the Pyrenees, moving into what is today southern France. Charles Martel, known as 'the Hammer,' led his Frankish troops in triumph over the Moorish forces under Abdul Rahman al Ghafiqi, the Governor-General of Islamic Spain. This victory halted the northern expansion of Islam, as the Muslims never again attempted a foray north of the Pyrene Mountains. It was a seminal moment for Medieval Europe, for it guaranteed that, dark though they may prove to be, the Middle Ages would be *Christian* and not Muslim. The connection of Charles Martel with the Christian Middle Ages was even closer, for he was the grandfather of Charles the Great, better known to history as Charlemagne, who proved to be a light shining in the Dark Ages. But that is matter for another session.

Meanwhile, back in Rome...we come to the meat of the lesson. The Latin Church did not stagnate to the same degree as the Greek, and now that it was protected from the threatening pressure of a foreign army and a foreign religion, Rome was able to increase her influence over the rest of Europe. Missionary activity during the latter centuries of the first Christian millennium tended to be of a tribal sort: bring the tribal ruler to the faith, and all of the inhabitants of the tribe followed suit. To be sure, this perpetuated the paganized Christianity that had developed in both East and West, but from a historical standpoint it also

gave birth to 'Christendom.' Christendom describes the socio-political world of Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire and due to the rise of the Frankish Empire of Charlemagne. It represents an idea, rather an *ideal*, in which all of the citizens born into the nations nominally governed by a Christian ruler, are Christians. Essentially it means an equating of the Church and the State - to be born a citizen of the State is to be born a member of the Church.

It took time to develop a political sphere that even remotely resembled Christendom, but over the early centuries of the Middle Ages both Church and State consolidated their authority over wider and wider sections of European social and political and religious life. Again, anticipating a latter session, we find in Charlemagne the first great 'Christian' Emperor after the abdication of Romulus Augustus in AD 476. And with Charlemagne begins the centuries-long effort to unite Church and State and all nations and peoples into one political and religious order: the Holy Roman Empire. The oft-quoted adage about the HRE is also a commentary on the whole of the Middle Ages - it was neither Holy, nor Roman, and was never much of an Empire. But the abiding characteristic of the age - the guiding principle of kings, emperors, and popes in Western Europe for over a thousand years - was to bring to fruition the Kingdom of God on earth through the Holy Roman Empire.

To accomplish this goal - the merit of which we will leave to the reader's judgment, and to our later study on the Middle Ages themselves - what were needed in Western Europe were *political unity* and *ecclesiastical uniformity*. The kingdom of France, and later that of England, would ensure that the first criteria never came to pass. But the second goal of ecclesiastical uniformity did, under the guidance of several politically astute and powerful popes, come very close to fruition. With the growing separation between the Greek and Latin branches of the Church, and the successive conquests of so much Eastern territory by Islamic forces, the See of Rome inevitably grew in influence and authority. Successive popes accorded increasing power to their pontifical throne, and in general the

Church History

bishops of the Latin Church acceded in this development. The process started as early as the mid-fifth century with Leo I Magnus; yet the real highwater mark was not with the first 'great' pope, but with the second: Gregory the Great. Pelikan writes,

Although earlier pontiffs, notably Leo I, had set forth much of the content of the doctrine of papal primacy and authority, there is probably no exaggeration in the conventional view, which sees the teaching and practice of Gregory I as the significant turning point for the papacy.²²⁵

As we have seen in previous lessons, Gregory was not so much an original or brilliant theologian – he was not a second Augustine – but he was skilled in the systematizing of doctrine, and was also an extremely gifted administrator. His well-known piety also earned him great respect. Thus he was ideally qualified to bring to consummation the maturing trend within Latin Christianity for all churches to acknowledge the supremacy of the 'throne of St. Peter' in all matters ecclesiastical. (Gregory and his successors would frequently attempt to extend this authority to matters political, with notably less success!) Thus Gregory the Great sets the ecclesiastical tone for the Middle Ages, a period extending almost 1,000 years beyond his own life, in letters such as the following quoted by Pelikan,

To all who know the Gospel it is obvious that by the voice of the Lord the care of the entire church was committed to the holy apostle and prince of all the apostles, Peter...Behold, he received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the power to bind and loose was given to him, and the care and principality of the entire church was committed to him...Am I defending my own cause in this matter? Am I vindicating some special injury of my own? Is it not rather the cause of Almighty God, the cause of the universal church?...And we certainly know that many priests of the church of Constantinople have fallen into the whirlpool of heresy and have become not only heretics but heresiarchs...Certainly, in honor of Peter, the prince of the apostles, the title of

²²⁵ Pelikan, 352.

‘universal’ was offered to the Roman pontiff by the venerable Council of Chalcedon.²²⁶

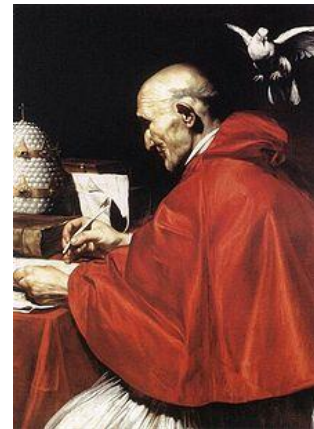
Gregory was perhaps the first pope – certainly he was the most influential pope – to elevate the doctrinal and practical traditions of the church to the same authority as Scripture. He had an interesting take on the number four as it related to the four biblical gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and the first four ‘ecumenical’ councils – Nicæa (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451). Somehow Gregory was able to construe the self-imposed pattern of four gospels/four councils into a divine imprimatur on the coequal authority of the Scriptures and Tradition, a deduction that would solidify and characterize Roman Catholicism for the subsequent 1400 years.

Bringing Christian thought into uniformity within the Church is not so ridiculous as it may sound. Most evangelicals today would agree that the Gospel cannot have multiple meanings, and many would agree that even the less fundamental doctrines of the faith are susceptible of only one true interpretation and presentation. Within denominational boundaries, at least, there is also a rough uniformity in practice as well, though few would hold today that all Christians are bound to worship in one and only one manner. Still, we agree that in Holy Writ the Church, and believers, have “*all things necessary for life and godliness*” which certainly must extend to the doctrine and practice of our faith. Nonetheless, achieving uniformity in either area has always been an imaginary victory rather than a real characteristic of the Church. Uniformity can be creedal – we all say the same words; or it can be enforced – the monarchs of Protestant England each had their Acts of Uniformity passed through Parliament; or it can even be charismatic – everyone exhibiting or pursuing the same ‘manifestation’ of higher spirituality: speaking in tongues. Maybe the inability of Christianity to achieve uniformity of doctrine and practice is due not so much to our own inability to agree as it is to the goal itself being false.

²²⁶ *Idem.*

Still, Gregory's significant leap forward (or backward, depending on the answer to that rhetorical question) was not original; it was a continuation of a trend that had begun centuries before. The guiding principle that governed the thoughts of the earliest fathers of the Church and onward through the Middle Ages and even the Reformation, was first stated by Vincent of Lerins in AD 434: *semper, ubique et ab omnibus* – that which has been believed *always, everywhere, and by all*.²²⁷

Though written two hundred years before his pontificate, these words were the unofficial motto of Gregory's tenure as Bishop of Rome. Tradition – that which has been always believed, believed everywhere, and by everyone – must therefore be the manifestation of divine truth through the teaching ministry of the Church. Never mind the fact that, as we have seen through these many lessons, *nothing* has been believed by everyone, everywhere. The Roman Pope, holding the keys of St. Peter, has the authority to *determine* which doctrines and which practices are to accorded *semper, ubique et ab omnibus*. This authority, practiced by Gregory the Great, would become institutionalized in the decree of papal infallibility *ex cathedra*, promulgated by Pope Leo XII at the First Vatican Council in 1869-70. Yet throughout the intervening years popes believed and promoted the doctrine, and much of the Roman Church accorded first place in this regard to Pope Gregory the Great. The portrait illustrated at right, painted around 1610 by the Italian Baroque painter Carlo Saraceni, ties the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (hence infallibility) to the writings and teaching of the first great Medieval Pope, “the last of the fathers and the first of the popes.”



The Holy Spirit Descending on Pope Gregory I

But Gregory's ardent application of *semper, ubique et ab omnibus* brings us full circle. We began this study of the history of the Early Church with a

²²⁷ Neve, 148.

Church History

discussion of John Henry Cardinal Newman's 'development of doctrine' theory. Newman's analogy of the growth of the acorn to the oak tree speaks of the inevitable and proper growth of Church doctrine and practice, a process that stands diametrically opposed to the concept of divine truth being that which has been believed always, everywhere, and by all. Rome has maintained the façade of uniformity for centuries, and has enforced her own brand of uniformity upon believers throughout both the Middle Ages and the Modern Era. But it is evident from even a cursory study of the history of doctrine that even within the Roman Catholic Church the venerable Tradition has not been believed *always, everywhere, and by all*.