



SESSION 5: ST. IGNATIUS TO ST. POLYCARP – CONTENT

- By 110 the Church had established its first feast day – Epiphany, on January 6. Baptisms were conducted on the Friday and Saturday before Pascha; males and females were baptized separately. This was followed by anointing (chrismation); then they were given water, milk and honey. Art began to appear in churches and catacombs, especially the sign of the fish – ichthus – an acrostic for, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”. As the Church became increasingly Gentile, the possibility of heresies became greater, prompting an emphasis on episcopal authority.
- By 120 it is known that Christians sang ‘O Gladsome Light’, the hymn we sing during vespers.
- By 123 most churches acknowledged a canon of scripture consisting of the 4 gospels, 13 letters of Paul, I Peter and I John. The Letter of Barnabas, I Clement, Shepherd of Hermas and the Didache were used by some. Debate about scriptural canons was driving the churches towards common understanding. The continued writing of letters between churches continued to build a sense of unity.
- By 123 the Didache was in use – a guide for Christian conduct. The author(s) is unknown. Some Church Fathers considered it a part of the New Testament. Although it was not ultimately included, it is considered part of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. It may have been the first written catechism. It was mentioned by Eusebius in 324, and was rediscovered by the Metropolitan of Nicomedia in 1873. The first English translation was in 1883.
- From 98 to 138, Trajan and Hadrian were emperors of the Roman Empire. This was a time of tremendous growth and expansion of the Empire; they were not much interested in the Christians. Their positions were that Christians are potentially troublesome and subversive, should be punished when caught, but should not be sought out. But martyrdom grew significantly. Regional governors had more influence on the attitude toward Christians, so it was from local populace that persecutions emanated. Jews and Christians were producing so many martyrs that governor Pliny the Younger wrote to Trajan, who decreed that Christians could not be burned, but could be punished if discovered. These persecutions prompted Christian leaders to defend their faith in teaching and writing – thus the **Apologists** – with which we shall soon deal.
- In 144 the heresy of **Marcionism** appeared and grew, especially in Syria. Marcion, a wealthy shipowner, began this when he was excommunicated from the Church. He moved from Asia Minor to Rome ~130, and became known as Marcion of Sinope. He created a gospel consisting of 10 chapters from Luke (which he had edited), and of Paul’s epistles. All other writings were rejected as they implied Jesus came from the Jews. **This was the first known assertion of a canon of Scripture, and it ultimately forced the Church to establish the New Testament canon.** Marcionism said that: 1) Christ is the Savior sent by God, 2) the chief Apostle is Paul, 3) the Old Testament is rejected, 4) the Hebrew God is a separate god and a lower entity than the God

of the New Testament, 5) the Hebrew God is a tyrant, 6) Christ simply appeared in Galilee; he had no human birth or real human body. Marcion was anti-semitic.

7. In 154 a conflict between the churches in Asia Minor and Rome led ultimately to the first attempt of the Roman church to dominate Christianity. Churches in Asia Minor observed Pascha on the Hebrew 14th day of Nissan (that is, a fixed date that occurred on different days from year to year). The Roman church observed Pascha on the first Sunday after Passover (that is, on a fixed day that occurred on different dates from year to year). Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna visited Bishop Anicetas in Rome to resolve the difference; it was not resolved. About 40 years later Bishop Victor of Rome called a local synod and formalized the Roman practice. Bishop Polycrates led the Asia Minor churches in refusing to change. Victor then attempted unsuccessfully to excommunicate the churches of Asia Minor.

8. Polycarp (69-155) was converted to Christianity by the Apostles. He became a student of John and later a teacher of Irenaeus. Polycarp became the Bishop of the church in Smyrna, and was close to Ignatius. His only surviving writing, the Letter to the Philippians, is among the earliest Christian writings to survive. The Philippians had deposed several priests. Polycarp wrote them of Apostolic authority handed down from the Apostles – i.e. **Apostolic succession** – and urged reinstatement. Polycarp preached against gnosticism and Marcionism. In 154, when in Rome to discuss the conflict about Pascha, he met Marcion, who said, “Do you not recognize me?” Polycarp replied, “Indeed I do! You are Marcion, the firstborn of Satan!” Polycarp was martyred in 155, and that was well-documented in 156 by the church in Smyrna.