



SESSION 6: POLYCARP TO ST. IRENAEUS – CONTENT

I. Developments within the Church.

- A. Late in the first century and into the second a baptismal confession developed:
 - “Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?”
 - “Do you believe in Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died, and rose the third day living from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?”
 - “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?”

These questions were soon changed to declarative statements, forming a baptismal creed.
- B. Preparation for baptism and the baptismal service were:
 - done once (or at most twice) yearly, preferably in flowing water,
 - started on Thursday of Holy Week with bathing, and continued through Friday and Saturday with fasting and repentance,
 - begun at dawn on with prayers over the water and naked catechumens, renouncement of Satan, anointing with oil of exorcism, entering the water with deacons, washing by the presbyter three times (coinciding with the three-fold confession), anointing with oil of thanksgiving,
 - the baptized were then taken to the church, where the bishop laid on hands and anointed them,
 - they then received their first Eucharist.
- C. The new Christian was expected to lead a new life, confessing Christ, avoiding idolatry, living in charity with all, practicing strict sexual purity and avoiding the accumulation of wealth. Commission of sins after baptism was a serious problem (see 1 John 5:16). With deliberate sin after obtaining the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remained a sacrifice for sins. Soon a penitential process developed for a second repentance, involving open confession before the church and a long period of penitence and exclusion from the Eucharist. Then a public restoration consisted of the laying on of hands of the bishop. This was called **exomologesis**, and was available only once.
- D. The place of marriage in Christian life was a concern. Some believed that marriage was a sure way to bind oneself to the world’s values. Although the Church was never against marriage, many congregations had those who practiced virginity, and they were honored.

II. In the 18th year of Emperor Hadrian’s reign (125) Jews began a second revolt under the leadership of Bar Kochba. The Roman army destroyed them and Hadrian forbade any Jews from remaining in Jerusalem (that is, the Jewish diaspora). The city was renamed “Aelia” and repopulated with Gentiles. The Jerusalem church had its first non-Jewish bishop.

III. The heresy of Montanism.

In about 150 Montanus of Phrygia began developing this heresy, which was condemned by the Council of Nicea (325). Of significance is the fact that the apologist Tertullian became a Montanist late in his life, because of its asceticism and strictness. Montanus ultimately hung himself in a state of frenzy. This heresy is characterized by: 1) belief in an imminent

millennium, 2) extreme asceticism and speaking in tongues, 3) considering themselves spiritual and others carnal, 4) opposition to art of any kind, 5) seeking of martyrdom, and 6) that Montanus was an incarnation the Holy Spirit, preaching a higher revelation than Christ.

IV. The Apologists.

Persecutions prompted early Christian leaders to write and speak in defense of Christianity (Greek ‘apologia’ = speaking in defense). They were not apologizing! The age of the Apologists was from about 103 to 220, and included Justin, Tatian, Irenaeus and Tertullian.

A. Justin Martyr (103-165).

1. Was a Palestinian from Nablus, of pagan parents, who studied various non-Christian philosophies, and converted to Christianity when he saw the fearless conduct of Christians facing persecution.
2. He emphasized the Doctrine of the Logos described by John: “The Logos has been active throughout human history as the revealer of God... What Christian faith distinctively knows and declares is that this divine Logos was born a human being of a virgin and given the name Jesus, and was crucified, died and rose and ascended into heaven. Thus, it is not true to say that Christ came into existence only 150 years ago.”
3. He was known as the earliest antagonist of heretics and wrote against Marcionism: “There was one Marcion of Pontus who is still busy teaching his adherents to believe in some other god greater than the Creator. All over the world, with the help of the demons, he has induced many to speak blasphemously, denying that the maker of this universe is the Father of Christ, and declaring that the universe was made by another god greater than He.”
4. Justin’s disciple Tatian composed the first harmony of the gospels. They both wrote an apology to the Roman senate and Emperor Antoninus Pius, who responded to Asian governors regarding persecutions: “You get them (Christians) into serious trouble by your accusation of atheism, and thereby strengthen their existing determination; and if accused they would choose apparent death rather than life, for the sake of their own god. And so they are the real winners, when they part with their lives rather than agree to carry out your commands. As regards the earthquakes which have been and still are occurring, it will not be out of place to draw your attention to the fact that whenever they happen your courage fails you, providing a painful contrast between our morale and theirs. They gain increased confidence in their god; whereas you, the whole of the time that you appear to be ignorant, neglect the other gods and the worship of the Immortal. But when the Christians worship Him you bully them and persecute them to death. On behalf of these people many of the provincial at an earlier date wrote to our most divine father, who sent them a reply forbidding them to take any action against these people unless it was clear that they were scheming against the Roman government. I too have received information about them from many quarters; I have replied in accordance with my father’s wishes. But if anyone persists in starting legal proceedings against these people, simply because he is one of them, the accused shall be acquitted of the charge even if it is plain that he is one, and the accuser shall be liable to penalty.” Within a few years Antoninus Pius was succeeded by his two sons, who resumed persecutions.
5. Justin provides evidence that Christians considered the Eucharist to be the real presence of Christ: “For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the works of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made

into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnated Jesus.”

6. In On the Resurrection Justin present positive proof of the resurrection.
 7. His testimony: “Straightaway a flame was kindled in my soul, and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me, and whilst revolving His words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable”
- B. Irenaeus of Lyons.
1. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp; he became a presbyter, migrated through Rome and to Lyons in Gaul by 177. He was martyred in about 202.
 2. He spoke and debated against gnosticism and Marcionism, and was instrumental in the Church’s decision to exclude these heresies.
 3. Only 2 of his writings survive – On the Apostolic Preaching and Against the Heresies.
 4. He was the first patristic writer to make full use of the Apostolic writings as Scripture, giving uniquely clear, comprehensive and systematic presentation.
 5. He is seen as the preserver and interpreter of early Church tradition.
 6. He was involved in the quartodeciman controversy (conflict between Asia Minor and Rome over date of Pascha) in that he urged Bishop Victor to refrain from trying to excommunicate the churches of Asia Minor.
 7. He said that God’s purpose is to make us more divine – Christ represents “the destiny and true identity of the Adam whom God originally created. Christians follow the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Logos of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did through His transcendent love become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is himself.”
 8. He emphasized that as Christ had entrusted perfect knowledge to the Apostles, so had they to their successors – that is, Apostolic succession. “Only that Gospel is true which was handed down from the apostles and is preserved from their time by orthodox bishops without additions or omissions.”
 9. He was a defender of Church Tradition, “Having received this preaching and this faith...the Church, although scattered in the whole world, carefully preserves it, as if living in one house. She believes these things everywhere alike, as if she had but one heart and one soul, and preaches them harmoniously, teaches them, and hands them down, as if she had but one mouth. For the languages of the world are different, but the meaning of the Tradition is one and the same...”
 10. Refer to the readings for session 6 – excerpts from On the Apostolic Preaching.