

CHURCH HISTORY: SESSION 1
The Age of Catholic Christianity
AD 70-312

INTRO: Welcome to Church History 101. We will be taking a very quick trip through 2000 years of church history. At the beginning I want to make it clear that what we will study is not dusty facts that don't affect us today. Much of what we will study is the foundation for our faith today. Many of the issues we will look at are, maybe in new forms, the issues the church faces today. For example, there is a rise today in groups that put their emphasis on listening to the Spirit above church tradition and even the Bible. They speak of a new wind of the Spirit for a new age. We will be looking at this exact concept, except it took place in the 1st and 2nd century.

Consider what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 1:9-10

What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.
[10] Is there anything of which one can say,
"Look! This is something new"?
It was here already, long ago;
it was here before our time.

The first era we will look at is called the age of catholic Christianity. It is called this because it was a time of universal expansion of the Church in the known world. The term catholic means universal. This time period was marked by a universal vision, orthodox beliefs and by episcopal church government. We will talk about the development of the Roman Catholic Church next week.

I. Catholic Christianity

A. The spread of the faith

1. The beginning of the expansion of the church was among the Jews.
 - There were Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire.
 - Some scholars say that they may have made up 7 % of the population.
 - They had been allowed to remain distinct in the faith and practices.

2. There were many Gentiles that were attracted by the Jewish faith. They were called God-fearers. It was this group that was the most receptive to the gospel.
 - We know from the book of Acts that the Apostle Paul would begin by reaching out to the Jews in a community but would quickly turn his attention toward the receptive Gentiles. In Acts 18:4-8 we see an example of this in Corinth.

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

[5] When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. [6] But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

[7] Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. [8] Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

- There has probably never been a time when there was a more prepared group of people ready to hear the gospel message.

- This readiness allowed for a rapid spread of the church.

- The church saw itself as a kind of new Israel, which was to reach into the entire world.

- In this context “the world” referred to cities. The first missionary efforts were focused on cities and towns.

3. After the fall of Rome in AD 70 the center of the church moved to Syrian Antioch.

- Antioch was the third largest city in the Empire.

- By the end of the fourth century half the city were Christians.

4. Another important city was Edessa, which lay just beyond the borders of the Empire.

- Edessa had connections with Antioch and some Christians from Antioch went there to establish the church.

- From Edessa Christians moved east all the way to India.

- Tradition has it that it was Thomas who traveled to Edessa and then to India.

- There is a group of Christians in India today called Thomas Christians.

B. The Move West

- The major movement of the church was west from Antioch.

1. The next major city along the expansion was Ephesus.

- Paul found a receptive audience in Ephesus and he established a church there.

- We know from the book of Acts that Paul spent three years there.

2. Northwest of Ephesus is the region of Bithynia, a remote rural area.

- The gospel found fertile ground there, which was unusual. The rural areas were usually the most resistant to the gospel.

- In AD 112 the governor of Bithynia complained to Emperor Trajan about the rapid spread of Christianity.

3. The next major center for the church in its westward expansion was Rome.

- We know that both Paul and Peter ended up in Rome.

- To go to Rome was one of Paul’s highest goals, which we see fulfilled in Acts 28.

- By AD 250 there were no less than 30,000 Christians in Rome.

- Once the church was established in Rome that church became the leader in church affairs.

4. The further expansion of the church continued to the north and west but at a slower pace.

- We know that there was a church in Lyon France in the middle of the second century.

- There were churches in Spain by the third century.

- The church spread with the Roman Empire as far as Britain. We know that there were three bishops from Britain that attended a church council in Arles France in AD 314.

C. The Church in North Africa

1. Carthage became the center of Christianity for North Africa.

- Bishops gave leadership to the churches.
- North Africa produced the first Latin speaking churches.
- This points to an upper-class group. The lower classes all spoke koine Greek. Only the upper classes spoke Latin.

2. Another important area was Cyrene, just west of Egypt.

- Cyrene is mentioned four times in the New Testament.

Mark 15:21

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Acts 2:10

Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome

Acts 6:9

Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen,

3. Finally the expansion in North Africa moved to Alexandria.

- Alexandria was the second largest city in the Empire.
- It had a large Jewish population, which set the stage for the gospel.
- The Jews in Alexandria were the first to mix Judaism with Greek philosophy.
- Christians in Alexandria claimed that John Mark founded the church there.

D. The Social Impact of the Gospel

1. In the beginning the majority of believers came from the lower classes. They were simple, humble, ordinary people.

2. By the end of the second century Christianity was becoming a compelling force in the Empire. Many more educated people became followers of Christ.

3. A group of scholars emerged as defenders of the gospel before the educated people of the day.

- They were called apologists. The word is taken from the Greek word for defense.
- They defended the gospel against the attacks from the pagans.
- Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons in France, wrote five books against the gnostic heresies.
- Tertullian, the father of Latin theology, came from Carthage. He was the first person to use the Latin word trinitas (trinity).
- Out of Alexandria came Pantaenus and his star pupil Clement.

4. By the end of the third century the church was taking on the form of an empire within the Empire.

E. Reasons for the Spread of the Gospel.

1. Christians were moved by the burning conviction of the truth about Jesus.
2. The Gospel met a widely felt need in the hearts of the people. It introduced the love of God into people's quest for happiness.
3. The practical expression of Christian love.
 - Christians cared for the poor, widows, orphans, and prisoners.
 - A unique feature was the burial of the dead. Christians offered the poor a decent burial. They bought burial grounds for this purpose. This is how the early Christians first became associated with the catacombs, for these were used for burials.
4. Persecution helped to publicize the Christian faith.
 - The death of Christians was often witnessed by many people.
 - The word martyr originally meant witness.

II. The Persecution of Christians

A. Rome's Policy

1. For the first 200 years Roman persecution was sporadic.
2. In the beginning Rome viewed the church as an extension of Judaism. This was an advantage for the church. Christians received the same exemptions that the Jews did.
3. Once it became clear that the Christians were not a part of the Jewish community the pressure began to build from Rome.
4. **Why would Christianity be a greater threat to Rome than the Jews were?**
 - a. The Christians not only refused to worship the emperor; they were actively recruiting others to follow their lead.

B. Reasons for Persecution

1. The main cause for the persecution of Christians was their distinctive life-style.
2. A common term for Believers in the New Testament is *hagios*, which means holy ones.
 - a. This word is most often translated saints.
 - b. In a biblical sense every believer in Christ is a saint. Saints are not special super-believers.
 - c. The root of the word saints is "different"
 - d. Actually to be holy in the Bible means to be set apart for special use.
 - e. Here is the problem. By nature, a Christian is one who is fundamentally different from the community in general.
3. When Christians lived out their faith in their everyday lives they stood in stark contrast to the pagan way of life. People felt condemned without the Christians saying anything.

4. A major point of contention was the Christian's rejection of the pagan gods. Every aspect of Greek and Roman society was linked to the gods. This meant that Christians had to withdraw from most social activities. This caused friction in the community.

5. Christians also rejected common social events like the gladiatorial combats. Taking a moral stand on such issues put them in opposition to their community.

6. Christians' rejection of idolatry affected their ability to make a living.

a. Almost every profession had some direct link to pagan gods.

7. Christians stood in contrast to their society by their high regard for all people.

a. Slavery was rampant in Roman society.

- Slaves were seen as property and at the whim of their masters.

- Christians offered slaves dignity and value.

b. Christians valued children above their society.

- Unwanted or sick children were routinely taken out to the woods and left to die.

- Christians not only refused to do this, they often rescued abandoned children.

c. Christians elevated the status of marriage and sex.

- Roman society was extremely promiscuous.

- It was the Christian community to championed marriage and faithfulness.

8. All of these things and more resulted in a general hatred for Christians.

a. In AD 64, during the reign of Nero, Rome caught fire.

b. There was rumor that Nero himself set the city on fire.

c. To turn the focus away from him, Nero used this opportunity to blame the Christians.

d. A severe period of open persecution began and large numbers of Christians were imprisoned and killed.

e. It is believed that it was during this time that Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome.

- Peter was crucified upside down.

- Paul, being a Roman citizen, was beheaded.

C. False accusations were another cause of persecution.

1. Christians were accused of engaging in sexual orgies.

a. This, in part, arose because they met in secret and were closed about their meetings.

b. The fact that they called some of their meetings "The Love Feast" and they practiced the "holy kiss" also lent fuel to the fire.

c. The holy kiss is still practiced in Ukraine and other places.

2. Christians were also accused of practicing cannibalism.

a. This can be attributed to a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper.

b. When people spoke of the body and blood of Jesus it was assumed that they were literally eating people. In fact, some said they ate children.

3. Christians were also accused of being atheists.

- a. People could not comprehend imageless worship, so they accused the Christians of atheism.
- b. Although worship of the Greek gods was nominal at this time, people still believed that total neglect of the gods would bring disaster on the nation.
- c. Christians were seen as trouble makers and blamed for natural disasters that occurred.

D. Emperor Worship

1. The ultimate cause for the persecution of the Christians was emperor worship.

2. The seeds of emperor worship were sown in the Pax Romana. When Rome conquered an area, it brought stability and peace.

3. The Pax Romana engendered a deep sense of gratitude, which developed into the birth of the goddess Roma, the spirit of Rome. By the 2nd century there were temples all over the empire to Roma.

4. The next step was to personify the spirit of Rome in the Emperor.
 - a. The first temple to the emperor was built in 29 BC at Pergamum.

5. At first the emperors were reluctant to embrace this idea.

6. As the Empire continued to expand there was a need for some unifying element that could hold its diverse parts together. Emperor worship became that glue. It became official policy and was established in every province.

7. Refusal to worship the Emperor was viewed as disloyalty.

8. Under the rule of Decius (249-251) it was made universal and compulsory.
 - a. Everyone, with the exception of the Jews, was expected to give allegiance to Caesar.
 - b. Once a year everyone living within the Roman empire was expected to go to the temple of Caesar and offer a pinch of incense on the altar and proclaim Caesar is Lord.
 - c. After this act they were given a certificate and they were allowed to follow whatever religious practices they desired.
 - d. Caesar worship became the test of political loyalty to Rome.
 - e. Christians refused to proclaim Caesar as Lord and were branded as traitors.

E. Putting things in context

1. Christians are still being persecuted around the world today. What are some of the reasons?

2. What kinds of things might cause Christians in America to be persecuted today?

III. The Rise of Orthodoxy

A. The historical Jesus debate

1. Mahatma Gandhi is a prime example of separating the Jesus of history from what he taught.

2. Many people still try to separate the Jesus of history from the Jesus of faith.

3. The early church was faced with this crisis and made belief in the historical Jesus bedrock to our faith.

4. The battle for orthodoxy began very early in the life of the church.

B. Faith and Theology

1. **What are some common responses today to the idea of theology?**

- a. Many people are turned off by discussions of theology.
- b. They just want to have faith without being encumbered with the details.
- c. Many people fall into one of two camps. They see theology as boring and irrelevant or as divisive, fostering unnecessary conflict.

2. The early church realized that good theology was essential to strong faith.

3. Theology is the study of God, or rational thought about God.

- a. Bad theology, or wrong thinking about God, is called heresy.
- b. Good theology, or right thinking about God, is called orthodoxy.

4. It was the rise of heresy in the church that fostered the rise of orthodoxy.

5. Orthodoxy was not devised in the quiet corridors of academia.

- a. Each doctrine was worked out in practical ways by those who were living on the front lines of the faith.
- b. Each doctrine was pulled together in response to some heresy that threatened to undermine the faith.

6. Theology vs God's revelation about himself

- a. God's revelation in Christ is complete and definitive.
- b. Theology is our human response to God's revelation.
- c. Theology is our attempt to understand and clearly communicate God's revelation.
- d. We do this within the context of our language and culture.

7. The early church was a mixture of two significant cultures and languages.

- a. Jewish culture brought the idea of God as one and personal.
- b. Hellenistic culture introduced the philosophical side to our understanding of God.
- c. Jewish Christians emphasized that Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one of God.
- d. Hellenistic Christians emphasized the universal nature of the gospel.

C. False Gospels

1. From the very beginning the church had to guard against false gospels.

2. The New Testament gives us clues to some of these battles.

- a. Matthew 28:17-20: Jesus' authority and the Trinity

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. [18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

b. I Corinthians 15:3-4: reality of the resurrection and fulfillment of scripture

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

c. Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

d. 1 Timothy 3:16: Early hymn

**Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:
He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.**

3. The church made the doctrine of Christ central and bedrock to their faith.

4. The Gospel of John was written with two specific heresies in mind.

a. Ebionites challenged the divinity of Christ. They taught that Jesus was a mere man who by his complete obedience to the law was justified and became the Messiah.

b. Docetism challenged the humanity of Christ. They taught that Christ was not really a man but only seemed to be a man.

5. The battle the church faced was for the incarnation, the reality that God took on human form. This battle is still raging today. The Jesus project is an attempt to separate the historical Jesus from the Jesus of faith.

D. Gnosticism

1. One of the greatest threats to the church early on was Gnosticism.

2. Gnosticism was a group of movements rather than one unified movement.

3. Gnosticism tried to reshape the gospel along "spiritual" lines.

4. Each gnostic group was led by a philosopher who claimed to have special spiritual knowledge. This is where the name comes from. Gnosis is the word for "to know".

5. All Gnostic schools accepted the idea of salvation, the idea of a Supreme Being, and the idea of heavenly beings at work in the universe.

6. They diverged from orthodox Christianity in how they viewed the material world.

7. Their basic belief was dualism.

a. Dualism says that the world is divided into two cosmic forces, good and evil.

b. The material world is evil and the spiritual world is good.

c. The Creator God was therefore evil. They identified him with the God of the Old Testament.

d. The God of the New Testament was Spirit and was good.

e. The world we know came into being through a series of emanations from the true God. Each emanation was slightly less than the one before until we come to the one who created the material world.

f. The light of the good god was somehow transferred into human beings through these emanations and needed to be redeemed from its prison in the material world.

g. The Ultimate God sent one of his subordinates into the world to free men from the material. This subordinate was called "Christ".

h. This "Christ" could have nothing to do with the material world directly. All Gnostics agreed that Christ was not human. The first major test of orthodoxy centered not on Jesus' deity but on his humanity.

i. There were several ways the Gnostics explained Jesus.

- The Christ entered Jesus at his baptism and left Jesus just before his trial and crucifixion.

- Jesus was not really human but a hallucination.

E. Holding onto the historical Jesus

1. Gnosticism highlights the reality that we cannot separate Jesus from history and our material world without losing the gospel itself. The gospel is wrapped up in the incarnation.

2. Gnosticism would have removed the gospel from the reach of all people and confined it to a select group with special spiritual knowledge.

3. Gnosticism forced the church to clarify orthodox belief.

4. One result is what we know as the Apostles' Creed.

(International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

a. **The Oldest Creed:**

- The Apostles' Creed is the oldest creed, and the foundation for most others.

- It is not the direct work of the Apostles, but has its roots in apostolic times, and embodies apostolic teaching.

- It was the creed that could be appealed to as held by the church in all its great branches, and so as forming the test of catholicity.

b. **Form of the Creed.**

In the first place, what is the creed? Here, first of all, it is to be pointed out that the received form of the creed is not its oldest or original form. The creed exists in two forms—a shorter and

a longer; the former, known as the Old Roman Form, going back certainly as early as the middle of the 2nd century (about 140 AD), the latter, the enlarged form, in its present shape, of much later date. Its final form was probably given to it in South Gaul not before the middle of the 5th century.

- Old Roman Form:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty. And in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; (the life everlasting)."

- The Received Form:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

c. Origin of the Creed.

The legend was that the creed took shape at the dictation of the Twelve Apostles, each of whom contributed a special article. This legend is not older than the 5th or 6th centuries.

- Baptismal Confession:

The Apostles Creed may have its roots in the baptismal confession made by converts at the time of their baptism.

- The primitive confession may have contained no more than "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," but we have evidence within the New Testament itself that it soon became enlarged.

- Paul speaks of the "form of teaching" delivered to converts (Romans 6:17), and reminds Timothy of "the good (beautiful) confession" he had made in sight of many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12). Similar language is used of Christ's confession before Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13).

- We may perhaps conjecture from the epistles that Timothy's confession contained references to God as the author of life, to Jesus Christ and His descent from David, to His witness before Pontius Pilate, to His being raised from the dead, to His coming again to judge the quick and the dead (1 Tim. 6:13; 2 Tim. 2:8; 2 Tim. 4:1).

- Early Christian writers, such as Ignatius (110 AD), and Aristides the apologist (circa 125 AD), show traces of other clauses.

- "Rule of Faith":

Before the middle of the 2nd century the confession at baptism had crystallized into a tolerably settled shape in all the greater churches. We have accounts given us of its contents (besides the Old Roman Form) in Irenaeus, Tertullian, Novatian, Origen, etc.; and they show substantial unity with a certain freedom of form in expression.

- The form used in the Roman church came gradually to be the recognized type.
 - After the middle of the century, the confession rose to new importance as the result of the Gnostic controversies. It assumed the character of a formal creed. It came to be known as the "Rule of Truth," or "Rule of Faith," It was employed to check the interpretation of Scripture by these fantastic heretical speculators.
 - The creed had originated independently of Scripture—in the early oral teaching and preaching of the apostles; hence its value as a witness to the common faith.
 - It was never intended to supersede Scripture; it was held to corroborate Scripture.
 - It was employed as a check on those who sought to allegorize away the Christian faith.
- d. The creed affirms that God created the earth and that the material world is good.
 - e. The creed affirms both the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ.
 - f. The creed affirms that man is a whole, not divided into a good soul and an evil body.

IV. The Formation of the Bible

A. The Basics of the Bible

1. The Bible was the supreme standard for orthodoxy as well as the church's inspiration for persevering in the faith.
2. The term Bible literally means book.
3. It is called the Holy Bible to stress the unity of the scriptures.
 - a. Early Greek speaking believers shifted from the plural form Biblia, meaning the books, to the singular Bible, meaning the book.
4. The Bible is divided into the Old and the New Testaments.
 - a. The word testament is the same as the word covenant.
 - b. Covenant speaks of a special relationship between God and humanity.
 - c. A biblical covenant was always initiated and sustained by the stronger party.
 - d. The Old Testament tells the story of the Jews and their relationship with God.
 - e. The New Testament tells the story of Jesus and the birth of the church.
5. The word for the collection of books that make up the Bible is canon. It comes from Greek and means "a measuring rod" or "a ruler".
6. Because the first Christians were all Jews, the church was never without Scriptures.
7. Early believers went to exaggerated lengths to show that the Old Testament belonged to the church.
 - a. There was the pattern of promise and fulfillment. We see this most clearly in Matthew.
 - b. Others used allegory to interpret the Old Testament. This turned every event in the Old Testament into an allegory of some New Testament truth.

c. One of the greatest allegorical teachers was Origen from Alexandria.

B. The Apocrypha

1. The Apocrypha are a set of 12-15 Old Testament books that are accepted by the Roman church but rejected by most Protestant churches.

2. This discrepancy can about because when the church adopted the Old Testament as its own there were two sets of books.

a. The Jews in Palestine had a canon that corresponds to the 39 books of the Old Testament.

b. The Jews who lived beyond Palestine were more open to include other books in addition to the 39.

c. This was further complicated by the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, because it included the Apocrypha.

d. The early church was divided over this issue. Those who lived closest to Palestine tended to accept only the 39 books. Those who lived in the West and came under the influence of Augustine tended to include the Apocrypha.

e. During the Reformation in the 16th century most Protestants rejected the Apocrypha, while the Roman Catholic Church, following the influence of Augustine, accepted them.

3. When it comes to the New Testament there were three major reasons for a book to be included in the canon.

a. There was the test of internal validity. These books demonstrated the power of the Word of God.

b. Books were included that were used regularly in Christian worship. Those books that continued to inspire and challenge the church were seen as inspired by God. They were widely recognized by the churches as authoritative.

c. The most important test was connection to one of the Apostles. The book had to clearly demonstrate that it came directly from one of the Apostles or from one of the men who worked directly with the Apostles.

- The books of Matthew, John, 1,2,3 John, Revelation, 1,2 Peter, James and all of Paul's letters are attributed directly to an Apostle.

- The rest of the books are connected to the Apostles through a close associate: Luke, Paul's traveling companion, John Mark received his information from Peter.

C. Developing the Canon of Scripture

1. Over time the church would have settled on the canon, but the process was hastened by negative pressures on the church.

2. About AD 140 Marcion shook the church.

a. Marcion, the son of a bishop, came under the influence of a gnostic teacher named Cerdo.

b. He came up with his own canon of scripture.

c. He rejected the whole Old Testament and all of the New Testament that favored the Jews.

d. His canon consisted of an edited version of Luke and ten Pauline letters.

e. Marcion was excommunicated in AD 144 but Marcionite churches began to spring up parallel to the orthodox churches.

f. Marcion presented the church with two problems:

- He rejected the Old Testament
- He shaped the New Testament exclusively in the image of Paul.
- g. Tertullian said that Marcion made Paul the apostle of the heretics. How could the church accept Paul's letters without accepting Marcion's teachings?

3. The church came up with its own solution

- a. They restored the Pastorals and the letters of the other apostles
- b. They linked all the letters to four Gospels by using Acts as the bridge.
- c. They also affirmed the Old Testament, because without it the New Testament didn't make sense.

4. By retaining the Old Testament the church made two important points.

- a. The God of the Old and New Testaments were one and the same.
- b. The rich historical heritage of God's interaction with the Jews was preserved as a foundation for Christian faith.

D. New Revelations

1. A significant change took place in the church in the second half of the second century.
2. The days of God speaking and acting directly to the church were ending and the church was becoming an institution.
 - As more and more people joined the church the distinction between the church and the world began to blur.
 - In some ways the church was becoming secularized.
3. In response to this Montanus appeared as a new voice in the church. AD 156-172
 - Montanus demanded that the church return to a higher standard, exercise greater discipline and make a sharper distinction between itself and the world. This was not bad and could have had a positive effect on the church.
 - Montanus took his campaign too far. He claimed that he and his prophetesses were the new voice of God for the church.
 - Montanus preached that the Old Testament period was past, the period of centering on Jesus had ended, and the church was entering the new age of the Spirit.
 - Montanus declared that Jesus was not the final word from God. The new revelations from the Spirit superceded all that came before.
4. Montanus forced the church to regroup and solidify the canon.
 - The church reaffirmed that Jesus and the apostolic witness about Jesus was central to all our worship and teaching.
 - The way they did this was to set apart the apostolic writings as uniquely authoritative.
 - In this way they made the canon of scripture the standard for all further teaching and practice.
 - The church affirmed their belief in the Holy Spirit in two ways.
 - * During the apostolic age the Holy Spirit inspired men to write the words of God.
 - * Now the Holy Spirit enables men to understand, interpret and apply those words.

5. The first complete list of books, as we have them today, was recorded in a letter from Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria in AD 367. This list was formalized by church councils in North Africa at Hippo (393) and Carthage (397).

6. In one sense we can say that the church created the canon, but that is not truly accurate.
- The church simply recognized those writings that had proved to be authoritative in the church.

- They fully submitted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles. Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

V. The Power of Bishops

In the beginning, the church believed that the new birth of the Spirit was the indispensable mark of the Christian. This was verified by water baptism.

The question arose, what happens to a person who sins seriously after receiving the Spirit and baptism?

The solution was to grant to bishops the authority to forgive sins. This authority is called episcopacy.

A. Designating Leaders for the Church

1. Paul set the pattern by designating pastoral leaders in each church to care for the spiritual needs of the believers.

2. These new leaders were divided into two groups:

a. The first group was called elders. Other terms used for this group are presbyters, bishops, overseers, pastors, and shepherds.

b. The elders were responsible for teaching new converts, leading public worship and maintaining church discipline.

c. The second group was called deacons.

d. Deacons assisted the elders in every way except in presiding over the Lord's Supper.

3. During the apostolic age the church had a traveling group of Spirit-empowered leaders and a resident group of leaders to care for the local congregation.

4. This pattern soon changed from a group of leaders in the church to a single bishop (pastor) assisted by elders and deacons.

5. We first see this pattern at the end of the 1st century. Ignatius, the pastor of the church at Antioch, wrote some letters, in which spoke of a single pastor.

6. Apparently one elder in the church would rise above the others in the areas of corresponding with other churches, handling the funds for the poor, preaching the true faith in conflicts with heretical teachers, and administering the Lord's Supper.

7. This pattern gradually permeated the whole church, although it was not administered in exactly the same way.

- We know that as late as AD 180 there was still multiple leaders in the church at Alexandria.
- Many small churches in Asia Minor and Africa had their own bishop.
- In France the bishop of a large town would supervise the congregations in smaller towns and assign elders to them.

8. By late in the 2nd century the unchallenged leaders of the church were the bishops.

9. The Gnostics claimed that they had special knowledge handed down through special messengers from Jesus.

10. The orthodox Christians countered these claims by stressing the public teaching of the churches, the Rule of Faith, and the bishops in the churches established by the apostles.

B. What is the role of Bishops?

1. Over the years the church has had different responses to the role of the bishops.
2. Some argue that the early church leaders were wrong to establish bishops and the idea should be rejected.
3. Some contend that the early leaders were exercising their liberty in the absence of any clear direction from God. This means that the office of bishop can be adjusted to come in line with our times.
4. Some argue that the Holy Spirit directed the early church to set up the form of government and that this is binding for today.
5. Many people felt that the coming of the episcopacy meant the departure of the Spirit.

C. What about unforgivable sins?

1. By the beginning of the 3rd century the moral fiber of the church had begun to fray.
2. During the first two centuries Christians believed that a person's baptism cancelled all sin in their life up to that point.
3. Serious sin that took place after baptism required special treatment.
4. There were three sins that were singled out. They were sexual immorality, murder and denial of the faith. These could be forgiven by God but not by the church.
5. If a person committed one of these sins, they faced exclusion from the fellowship and from the Lord's Supper.
6. The first to readmit repentant sinners of this sort was the bishop of Rome, Callistus, in 217-222.
 - a. He readmitted repentant sinners who had committed adultery.

- b. He justified his action by saying that the church in Rome was the heir to Peter and Christ had given Peter the power to bind or loose sins.
- c. This was the first time a Bishop of Rome claimed this authority.

7. In AD 250 the church faced a severe time of persecution.

- a. Emperor Decius commanded that all citizens must sacrifice to the traditional Roman gods.
- b. Those who did were given a certificate.
- c. Those who did not were imprisoned, tortured and killed.
- d. Many Christians complied to save their lives.
- e. Those who refused and died as a result were called martyrs or witnesses.
- f. Those who survived the persecution without compromise were called confessors.
- g. Those who gave in to the pressure were called the lapsed, the fallen ones.

8. After the persecution ended the church was faced with the problem of what to do with the fallen.

- a. In some congregations as many as 2/3 had given in.
- b. Like Peter they had denied that they knew the Lord, but now they were repentant.
- c. It was widely held that outside of the church there is no salvation, so pressure mounted to readmit these repentant sinners.

D. The birth of The Saints

1. There was enormous respect and awe for the martyrs and the confessors.
2. Records of the martyrs' sacrifice were kept in each church and their birthday into heaven was celebrated.
3. Some contended that the confessors by their unusual courage had achieved a special power from God. They could cover with their merit the demerits of the lapsed.
4. Cyprian rejected this blanket pardon and introduced a system of readmission based on the seriousness of the sin.
 - a. Those who sacrificed only after severe torture were to be shown leniency.
 - b. Those who willingly sacrificed faced a more severe punishment.
 - c. To deal with the degrees of guilt the church created a graded system of penance.
5. The idea from North Africa that the confessors could stand for the lapsed did not go away. It reappeared years later in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Treasury of Merit and the practice of indulgences. In these two things the church could transfer the merits of the unusual spiritual to needy sinners.
6. Two leaders in Rome squared off over this issue: Novatian and Cornelius.
 - a. Novatian took the traditional stance that the church had no power to forgive murder, adultery or apostasy.
 - b. Cornelius claimed that bishops had the authority to forgive even grave sins.
 - c. Novatian saw the church as a society of saints. Cornelius saw the church as a school for sinners.

d. Cornelius won in the end.

7. From this point on the Catholic church had a second sacrament called the sacrament of penance.

VI. The Rise of the Intellectuals

By the third century the church was faced with the need to define the Gospel in terms that intelligent men could understand. The church was being forced to engage the world of pagan thought. Christianity was no longer a minor Jewish sect. It had become the dominant rival to the old ways of Rome.

A. Light in the World

1. The church stands in the awkward position of being in the world but not of the world.

2. John 17:16-18

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. [17] Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. [18] As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

3. In the third century the church struggled with how to live in this dual role of separation from the world yet being an agent of penetration into the world.

4. One of the chief opponents to using Hellenistic philosophy to promote the gospel was Tertullian.

5. The battle with Gnosticism made Tertullian and others resistant to incorporating philosophy in any form in the proclamation of the gospel.

a. This is a struggle the church faces in most every generation.

b. Today the debate is over the use of business theories and practices in the church.

6. There were those in the church who believed that faith and philosophy could live in harmony if they were both submitted first to Christ.

7. Leadership for this new approach came from Alexandria.

a. There was a school there called the catechetical school lead by Clement and Origen.

b. They blended Christian faith with the best of Hellenistic philosophy.

c. Clement said, "The way of truth is one. But into it as into a perennial river, streams flow from all sides."

d. A modern rendition of this sentiment is seen in the phrase "All truth is God's truth."

8. This Christian philosophical school seems to have developed outside of the church first.

a. There were many such philosophical schools in Alexandria.

b. Around 180 a Sicilian Christian named Pantaenus started a school of Christian Gnosticism.

B. A Pastor to Philosophers

1. Clement was drawn to Alexandria by Pantaenus' reputation.

2. Clement wrote many books.
3. He was best known as a messenger of Christianity in philosopher's garb.
4. He was the first Christian scholar, being well versed in the Scriptures as well as Greek philosophy and classical literature.
5. He wanted to be the apostle to the Hellenistic intellectual world.
 - a. His purpose was primarily pastoral.
 - b. He desired to grab people's hearts and lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus.
6. The Alexandrian scholars aimed to bring Christianity to bear on the thought system of the time.
7. Clement differed from the Gnostics because he remained committed to the apostolic gospel.
8. Clement also differed from the Gnostics through his behavior. Clement stressed the development of godly character and a godly life in this material world.

C. Origen and the Thirst for Truth

1. Clement's successor in Alexandria was Origen.
 - a. Origen aimed to bring all truth into God's plan of salvation.
 - b. Origen was a magnetic teacher and was asked to travel to many places to speak.
2. Origen translated philosophy into a way of forming character.
3. Origen considered the exposition of Scripture as his primary task.
4. He developed the allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
 - a. He taught that there are three levels of meaning in the Bible.
 - b. There is the literal meaning.
 - c. There is the moral application to the soul.
 - d. There is the allegorical or spiritual sense.
5. Origen was concerned that the Bible be its own commentary. Any single passage must be interpreted by the whole of the Bible.
6. Origen saved the Scriptures for the church by enabling intelligent Christians to believe in the Bible. By his scholarly efforts he preserved the historical foundation of the Christian faith.

D. A Theology for Thinkers

1. Origen was the first theologian to set forth the whole intellectual framework of Christianity. He did this first in his book "First Principles."
2. You could say that Origen laid the foundation for systematic theology.
3. Clement and Origen were able to engage their intellectual world without compromising the faith.

CHURCH HISTORY: SESSION 1
The Age of Catholic Christianity
AD 70-312
Student Notes

I. Catholic Christianity

A. The spread of the faith

B. The Move West

C. The Church in North Africa

D. The Social Impact of the Gospel

E. Reasons for the Spread of the Gospel.

II. The Persecution of Christians

A. Rome's Policy

B. Reasons for Persecution

C. False accusations were another cause of persecution.

D. Emperor Worship

E. Putting things in context

1. Christians are still being persecuted around the world today. What are some of the reasons?

2. What kinds of things might cause Christians in America to be persecuted today?

III. The Rise of Orthodoxy

A. The historical Jesus debate

B. Faith and Theology

1. What are some common responses today to the idea of theology?

C. False Gospels

Matthew 28:17-20

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. [18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

I Corinthians 15:3-4

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1 Timothy 3:16

Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:

He appeared in a body,

was vindicated by the Spirit,

was seen by angels,

was preached among the nations,

was believed on in the world,

was taken up in glory.

D. Gnosticism

E. Holding onto the historical Jesus

- Old Roman Form:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty. And in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; (the life everlasting)."

- The Received Form:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

IV. The Formation of the Bible
A. The Basics of the Bible

B. The Apocrypha

C. Developing the Canon of Scripture

D. New Revelations

V. The Power of Bishops

A. Designating Leaders for the Church

B. What is the role of Bishops?

C. What about unforgivable sins?

D. The birth of The Saints

VI. The Rise of the Intellectuals

A. Light in the World

B. A Pastor to Philosophers

C. Origen and the Thirst for Truth

D. A Theology for Thinkers