

## PART 3: THE ANCIENT CHURCH

### **I. Persecutions – Caesar vs. Christ**

Nero's Massacre (July AD 64) Rome burns, so do the Christians

First organized persecution – Domitian (81-96)

Why were they Persecuted?

Polycarp – bishop of Smyrna (156-160) "Away with these Atheists!" -

Marcus Aurelius (161-180) (Richard Harris from Gladiator) a Stoic who hated Christians

Tertullian (207) – "The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church" (a montanist)

Full Scale persecutions – “Great Persecution” under Decius (249-251), Diocletian (284-305)

### **II. Heresies and Heretics**

**Montanism** (AD 172 to the fourth century) – the prophet Montanus and the new prophecies. Prophecy, asceticism, martyrism. Maximilla and her failed prophecies

**Origen** – (AD 185) *First Principles*, Good on some things, too much Neoplatonism, universal salvation, pre-existence of souls, later condemned

**Novationism** (251 AD) – The Cathari “Pure ones”, baptized afresh, no restoration, no repentance

#### Heresies that particularly afflicted the Early Church (Post Apostolic 95AD on)

**Gnosticism**, esoteric religious movement that flourished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD and presented a major challenge to orthodox Christianity. Most Gnostic sects professed Christianity, but their beliefs sharply diverged from those of the majority of Christians in the early church – i.e. they were heretics. The term Gnosticism is derived from the Greek word *gnosis* (“revealed knowledge”). In Greek philosophy and in Gnosticism, there is a fundamental metaphysical dualism at work between good and evil. An eternal battle between the forces of light and of darkness. Matter and Spirit, forms and phenomena; not just ethical, but metaphysical also.

Gnosticism has a redeemer myth: A being of light coming from heaven to this dark phenomenal, material world in order to tell all those who have light trapped within - that their true home is in the world of light and how to get back to this world of light-- imparts secret knowledge. It is revealed that their true home of origin is in this realm of light, and how they can get back to that world of light. Secret knowledge or Revelation that can help them leave a world of matter and ascend through various level of being and ascend the levels of being, which are guarded by angels, principalities, etc.

To its adherents, Gnosticism promised a secret knowledge of the divine realm. Sparks or seeds of the Divine Being fell from this transcendent realm into the material universe, which is wholly evil, and were imprisoned in human bodies. Reawakened by knowledge, the divine element in humanity can return to its proper home in the transcendent spiritual realm.

*Much scholarly knowledge of Gnosticism comes from anti-Gnostic Christian texts of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, which provide the only extensive quotations in the Greek of the original Gnostic texts. Most surviving Gnostic texts are in Coptic, into which they had been translated when Gnosticism spread to Egypt in the late 2nd and the 3rd centuries. In 1945 an Egyptian peasant found 12 codices containing more than 50 Coptic Gnostic writings near Nag Hammadi. One of these writings was the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas which has enamored modern day Christian heretics.*

**Monarchianism** (2<sup>nd</sup> Century) Also known as Sabellianism or Modalism. God exists in different modes but only in one mode at any time. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit describe different roles of the same one God. Tertullian responds that God is in fact one being (substantia) in three concrete individuals (personae).

**Arius and ARIANISM:** AD 300's Bright, popular scholar/deacon in Alexandria. Greek philosophy influenced his understanding of Scripture. Denied full deity of Son, had a beginning, from the Father, a demi-urge, highest of the angels, not eternal. Arianism considered most formidable threat to early Church. Still seen in liberalism/Jehovah's Witness theology today

*Things directly related to Arian Heresy:*

Council of Nicaea: AD 325 Called by Constantine to settle to nature of the Son question, homoousius formula adopted

but 3 groups develop - creed, anti creed (Arians), middle groups (compromisers)

*Homoousius:* AD 325 . Key word from Council of Nicaea Father & Son of the "same substance"

*Homoiousians:* AD 330's Formulation of middle group following Council of Nicaea as a compromise "similar substance"

*Athanasius:* AD 298-373 "Father of orthodoxy" ATHANASIUS CONTRA MUNDUM. Deacon to Alexandria, bishop of Alexandria, & his recording secretary at council of Nicaea Virtually sole defender of Nicene creed during period of intense opposition to position Became bishop of Alexandria in AD328, served for 45 years, spent 20 years in exile Golden decade Almost lived to see his views of the deity of Christ triumph at the council of Constantinople AD 381

Constantius: AD 300's , Son of Constantine. Becomes sole emperor following clashes/deaths of brothers/cousins. Arian influenced. Exiled Athanasius for 6 years

### **The Orthodox View of the Nature of Christ, from the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)**

II. The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature,[10] with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin;[11] being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance.[12] So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.[13] Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.[14] (WCF 8.2)

10. John 1:1, 14; I John 5:20; Phil. 2:6; Gal. 4:4

11. Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:14, 16-17; 4:15

12. Luke 1:27, 31, 35; Gal. 4:4; see Matt. 1:18, 20-21

13. Matt. 16:16; Col. 2:9; Rom. 9:5; I Tim. 3:16

14. Rom. 1:3-4; I Tim. 2:5

**Donatism – Denied Imperial rule over church, like Novatians refused those who returned to the church**

#### **c) The orthodox Churchmen and Apologists**

Irenaeus (AD 177) Bishop of Lyons, Opposes Gnosticism, Christ Fully man/Fully God. *Against Heresies*

Justin Martyr (d. AD 165) Nablus - Christian Philosopher, Christians not Atheists, Dialogue with Trypho

Tertullian (AD 200) Also Opposed Gnosticism, defends orthodoxy – Wrote against Marcion

Athanasius (AD 296-373) *Contra Mundum* – Exiled 5 times – *On the Incarnation*

#### **a) Theological Movements**

From Presbyterians to Episcopalians (180) – then from equality of bishops to a hierarchy

Constantine (305) and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (Maxentius) – End of persecution, Growth of

Caesaropapism – edict of Milan

Changing view of Baptism – sign and seal to salvific

Apostolic succession (2<sup>nd</sup> century) – bishop to bishop

Growth of the importance of the Roman Bishop (Pascha controversy)

Syncretism – Christianity Adopts Pagan customs

Vestments (post Constantine) *"Four main periods may be distinguished in the development of the Christian priestly dress. The first embraces the era before Constantine. In that period the priestly dress did not yet differ from the secular costume in form and ornament. The dress of daily life was worn at the offices of the Church."* – From the RC Encyclopedia

Holidays (Late Second century on)

Candles, incense, garlands (Roman religion)

From the Pagan Gods to Saints, Martyrs, and Mary – the growth of the Cultus

Relics, Tomb

From House Churches → to Simple Churches (Basilica) → to Cathedrals

Shift in the power base, West → East → West

### Augustine/Pelagius

Augustine (354-430)

Soteriology, Does God Save Sinners or Do Sinners Save Themselves?

### Jerome (345-420)

The Vulgate Translation of the Bible (382-405)

### **b) Some Good things – The First Four Ecumenical Councils**

Problem – ABBERRANT CHRISTOLOGY – The value of Heresy to the Church

1) Nicaea (325) – Condemns Arianism, produces the Nicene Creed

2) Constantinople (381) – Reaffirms Trinitarianism

3) Ephesus (431) Condemned Nestorianism, Nestorius separated the divine and human natures so that two persons existed in a dual personality. Ephesus stated in 431 A. D. there were 2 Natures in one person. “So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man” - key issue for Eastern Church, Also condemned Pelagianism (Augustine (395) vs. Pelagius – Doctrines of Grace vs. Ancient "Finneyism"): Key issue for western Church.

4) Chalcedon (451) Condemns Doceticism (Christ only appeared to be human) and Eutychianism (Not fully human or fully deity – third thing):