The Early Church: Overview of Third Century

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New “S” Word

• **Synthesis**: the combination of a thesis and an antithesis to form a higher truth; a compound containing diverse elements.

• Review of Past “S” Words:
  – Syncretism
  – Sacramentalism
  – Sacerdotalism
New Testament and Philosophy

- See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.  
  Colossians 2:8

- For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 1 Corinthians 2:2
New Testament and “Apologetics”

- Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6

- But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 1 Peter 3:15
Traditional or “Linear” View of the First 500 Years

Where we are
This week

- 33: The Age of the Apostles
- 100: The Age of the Apostolic Fathers
- 150: The Age of the Apologists
- 300: The Age of the Theologians
- 600
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Roman Emperors</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Christians Persecuted</th>
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<tr>
<td>0 Tiberius</td>
<td>Council of Jerusalem</td>
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<td>25 Claudius</td>
<td>Rome</td>
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<td>50 Nero</td>
<td>Fall of Jerusalem</td>
<td>Asia</td>
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<td>75 Vespasian</td>
<td>Eruption of Vesuvius</td>
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<td>100 Trajan</td>
<td>Hadrian</td>
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<tr>
<td>125 Antonius Pius</td>
<td>Rome, Gaul, and Africa</td>
<td>Polycarp</td>
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<tr>
<td>150 Marcus</td>
<td>Marcion excommunicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>175 Aurelius</td>
<td>Montanism starts in Phrygia</td>
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<td>200 Septimus Severus</td>
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<td>225 Decius</td>
<td>Novatianists set up congregation in Rome</td>
<td>Decian Persecution</td>
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<td>250 Valerian</td>
<td>Gallienus in Rome</td>
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<td>275</td>
<td>Empire divides East/West</td>
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<td>300 Diocletian</td>
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<td>Diocletian Persecution</td>
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Periods In Between Persecutions

- During the time between the persecutions, Christianity grew large and prosperous.
- First Churches were built publicly. One was visible from Diocletian's palace.
- The church continues its amazing spread reaching all classes, particularly the lower. Callistus—a former slave—actually becomes bishop of Rome and makes claims for special importance of the Roman bishop.

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”
Eastern Thinkers Dominate

The Apologists

First Latin Theologian

Hippolytus
Iraneus
Tertullian

Aristedes
Justin Martyr
Theophilus
Athenogoras
Lactanius
Clement of Alexandria
Origen

Chart 29
Linear View of Age of Apologists

The Age of the Apologists

Montanus

Ebionite Heresy
Marcionite Heresy
Montanism
Gnosticism

Local Persecution

Worldwide Persecution

150 Justin Martyr
Athenagoras
Irenaeus
Tertullian
Clement of Alexandria
Origin
Cyprian
Gregory of Thaumaturgus

Where we are this week
Separation or Synthesis?

The Schools of Thought in Early Christianity

School of Asia Minor
Irenaeus

School of Alexandria
Clement of Alexandria
Origen

"What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

"Athens belongs to Him"
Clement of Alexandria

- Philosophical basis for Christianity
- Emphasized knowledge

“Jesus turned all our sun sets into sun rise”

Died 215 AD
Clement of Alexandria: Beginning of Synthesis

• Synthesized Christianity and Greek philosophy together.

• Believed that philosophy could lead one to Christianity and that it could be used in sharing the Gospel.

• He or his predecessors established a school in Alexandria to teach Christianity, like the philosophers before him had done with their philosophies.

• His greatest pupil was Origen.

190 AD Clement becomes head of the Alexandrian school
Two Paths to True Knowledge?

“Our is the great Teacher of all wisdom, and the whole world, including Athens and Greece, belongs to Him.”

Clement of Alexandria

on Philosophy

The Hebrews

The Law

Schoolmaster

Galatians 3:24

Christianity

The Greeks

Philosophy

Schoolmaster

Christianity

Chart 34
Tertullian: Separation (c. 155-c. 220)

- Lawyer
- North African (Carthage)
- Coined term “Trinity”
- First *Latin* writer of theology
- Condemned the attempt to use Greek philosophy to explain Christianity.
- Rigid in his morality, he joined the Montanists in mid-career

“What has Jesus to do with Plato? What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”
Tertullian Emphasized Faith, not Reason or Knowledge

• When asked about how he could believe the Gospel, he replied, “I believe because it is impossible.”

• He argued, ‘Know what the Scriptures teach, and stop there.’
Christianity Confronts Culture

- Christians avoided the arena.
- Christians refused to join in patriotic festivals celebrating patron deities.
- condemned the popular theater

"Among us nothing is ever said, or seen, or heard, which has anything in common with the madness of the circus, the immodesty of the theatre, the atrocities of the arena, the useless exercises of the wrestling-ground,"

Incredible Cultural Challenges for Early Christians

- Christian masons hired to build pagan temples
- Christian school teachers hired to teach pagan myths (as though true)
- Christian doctor asked by patient to chant to god of medicine, Aesculapius
- Christian wife, married to pagan, required to expose new born child.
- Christian soldier, ordered to massacre defeated enemy’s women and children.

“We have a reputation for living aloof from the crowds.” — Tertullian
Cultural Separation of Christians

• “Most heathen feasts and social parties were held in the precincts of a temple after sacrifice had been made, and the invitation was usually to dine “at the table” of some god. A Christian could not go such a feast. Inevitably, when he refused the invitation to some social occasion, the Christian seemed rude, boorish and discourteous….The early Christian was almost bound to divorce himself from the social and economic life of his time, if he was to be true to his Lord.”

• *Church History in Plain Language*, Bruce Shelley.
Origen : Synthesis Achieved  
(c. 185- c. 254)

- From Alexandria, Egypt
- A true scholar and theologian, but used allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
- Influenced heavily by the Neo-Platonists and Philo, a Jewish Neo-Platonist of the first century.
- The first textual critic. He created the Hexapla, with Hebrew, a Greek transliteration, and four Greek translations.
- The first in the Christian church to write biblical commentaries
- Heavily influenced by Greek Philosophy.
- Castrated himself
- Universalist
- No Free Will
Origen’s Bad Theology

Salvation by faith or knowledge?
Ransom Theology of Atonement
– Christ was ransom to Satan
Pre-existence of man in spiritual world, purgatory

“The Scriptures were composed through the Spirit of God and have a meaning which is obvious and another which is hidden.”

Origen and the Ransom-to-Satan View of the Atonement

PAYMENT

BONDAGE

RELEASE

CHRIST’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Chart 38
AD 248 Rome Celebrates 1000 Year Anniversary
3rd Century Plague Ravages Empire Christians Blamed Again

- The Plague in 250
- Brought back by soldiers from Parthian campaign
  - (also possibly smallpox) killed more than 5,000 people per day and lasted for 16 years
  - As much as ¼ of entire Roman population dies!
Persecutions under Decius, AD 250

- Commanded all Romans to sacrifice to the gods before a magistrate and to obtain certificates certifying that they had done so.
- Many professing Christians rushed to obtain their certificates, some by sacrificing and others by bribing officials or obtaining forged certificates.
- The bishops of Rome (Fabian), Antioch (Babylas) and Alexandria (Alexander) all lost their lives in this persecution.
- This persecution basically ended with Decius' death in 251 at the hands of the Goths.
To the Commissioners of Sacrifice of the Village of
Alexander's Island [Province of Egypt]: From
Aurelius Diogenes, the son of Satabus, of the Village
of Alexander's Island, aged 72 years: ----scar on his
right eyebrow. I have always sacrificed regularly to
the gods, and now, in your presence, in accordance
with the edict, I have done sacrifice, and poured the
drink offering, and tasted of the sacrifices, and I
request you to certify the same. Farewell. ------
Handed in by me, Aurelius Diogenes. ------I certify
that I saw him sacrificing [signature obliterated].
Done in the first year of the Emperor, Caesar Gaius
Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius Pius Felix
Augustus, second of the month Epith. [June 26, 250
A.D.]
Flavian Amphitheater: Location of Gladiator Games and Christian Martyrdoms

“If the Tiber floods the city, if the Nile refuses to rise, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is an earthquake, famine or pestilence, at once the cry is raised, “Christians to the lions.”

Tertullian
Beginning of Christian Mythology:

- Christina is one of the martyr saints of Italy whose story is so far-fetched that it gravely undermines the credibility of similar stories.

- According to the legend, she broke up some idols belonging to her pagan father, a magistrate, and gave the golden fragments to the poor. Infuriated, her father had her beaten with iron rods and thrown into a dungeon. Later, he dragged her forth, had her torn with iron hooks and fastened over a fire. When the flames miraculously turned against the onlookers, her father ordered a heavy stone tied around her neck and flung her into lake Balsena. An angel rescued her. Her father died in his malice and the succeeding magistrate continued to persecute Christina. She survived a blazing furnace for five days, was then exposed to snakes (which would not hurt her) and was finally finished off with arrows at Tyro, after having her tongue cut out.

- Her relics were preserved at Palermo, Sicily inside the head of a gold statue of a Roman Emperor!!
Church Discipline: Easy Believism vs. Lordship Salvation?

• The large number of "lapsed" (those who had denied the faith by sacrificing) caused great upheaval and turmoil in the church.

• Should the church re-admit apostates? Unconditionally? Or should some act of repentance or “penance” be required for readmission?

• What about those who claimed to be believers but who had committed a serious sin, like adultery or murder? Were those sins unforgivable? Can they be readmitted to church membership?

Tertullian

“We do not forgive apostates, and shall we forgive adulteresses?”
Adulterers and Apostates Readmitted

- The first to accept repentant sinners as a matter of policy was the bishop of Rome, Callistus (217-222), who readmitted penitent members who had committed adultery.
- He argued that the church was like Noah’s ark, containing unclean as well as clean animals.
- He defended his action by claiming that the keys of Peter. This was the first time this authority was claimed by a bishop of Rome.
Cyprian, 200-258

- From Carthage, North Africa
- Taught Lord’s Supper was a re-sacrifice of Christ
- Urged celibacy.
- Infant Baptist

“He can no longer have God for his father who has not the Church as his mother...there is no salvation outside the church.”
Sacerdotalism

- Asserted the power of the bishops at a council in 251.
- Wrote *On The Unity of the Catholic Church*, which emphasized the authority of Rome's bishops.

“Outside the church there is no salvation”

Cyprian
Beginning of Penance and Origins of Indulgences

• In 251 “confessors” in North Africa, began readmitting the lapsed on a theory that their merits covered the demerits of the lapsed.

• This was also the beginning of the doctrine of the “Treasury of Merit”

• Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, rallied fellow bishops to his side and called a council which established stricter measures, acts of penance

• This was the beginning of “penance” and the power of the bishop to forgive sins.
Cyprian: Sacerdotalism and Penance

• "So too the the sacred meaning of the Pasch lies essentially in the fact, laid down in Exodus, that the lamb - slain as a type of Christ - should be eaten in one single home. God says the words: 'In one house shall it be eaten, ye shall not cast its flesh outside.' The flesh of Christ and the Lord's sacred body cannot be cast outside, nor have believers any other home but the one Church."

• The Unity of the Catholic Church“.

• He [Paul] threatens, moreover, the stubborn and forward and denounces them saying, ‘Whosoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” [1 Cor 11: 27]. All these warnings being scorned and condemned [lapsed Christians who take communion] before their sin is expiated, before confession has been made of their crime, before their conscience has been purged, by sacrifice and by the hand of the priest, before the offense of an angry and threatening Lord has been appeased [and so] violence is done to his body and blood; and they sin now against their Lord more with their hand and mouth than when they denied their Lord.

• The Lapsed 15-16m
Novationist Schism: Conservatives vs. Liberals?

- Novatian, in 251, had himself made Bishop of Rome in opposition to another bishop, Cornelius. It was a time of persecution, and Novatian's key role was to deny readmittance to the "lapsed. He broke the church of Rome in two, with the support of many of the "confessors,“

- Novation argued that only God could forgive sins!! The “official” response was that such a notion was heresy!!

- Cornelius, Bishop of Rome, opposes Novation and sets up a system of “penance” that if followed would allow the lapsed to rejoin the church

- Novatian's schism was not resolved until much later in 325. The Council of Nicaea gave guidelines for the reconciliation and re-admittance of Novatianist clergy.

“Only God can forgive sinners.”
Persecutions under Valerian

• Under Valerian the persecution intensified in 257-260. He banished ministers and prominent laymen, confiscated their property, and prohibited assemblies. The death penalty was used.
• Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus II of Rome both were martyred in this persecution.
• Ended in 260 when Valerian became a Persian prisoner of war and his son Gallenius revoked the persecution.
Rome Feels the Heat

- 251 AD Goths defeat and kill Emperor Decius
- 260 AD Parthians defeat and capture Emperor Valerian, Sack Antioch
- 262 Goths sack Ephesus, destroy temple of Artemis
- 268 Goths sack Athens
- 293 Tetrarch System Established
Late Empire

Initially a “time of troubles” with the empire constricting and a series of bad emperors.

Barbarian Invasions.
Defeats by Parthians.
Plagues devastate the population.
Questions to Consider

• How should Christians “make apologies” (defend) the faith using non-Christian reasoning or just “preach the Word and rely on the work of the Holy Spirit?
• Which Church father is Francis Schaeffer most like?
• What value does non-Christian philosophy have for us? Can we use it to discover truth? What about science? What’s the difference?
• To what extent should Christians desire a “Classical Education” for their children?
• How should the Church handle those who first apostatize (fall away or deny Christ) and then later seek readmission to the Church as members? Is “I’m sorry” sufficient?
• Should Christian families read “Harry Potter”?
• Should Christians see “R” rated movies?
• Should Christian children “trick or treat”?
• Do we synthesize with our culture or create our own culture and seek to conquer with it? Which did the early church do?