

Persecution in 2nd Century

- Increase of records with more details of persecution
- Acts of the Martyrs: arrest, trial and execution
- Gain perspectives on martyrs
- Insight of Rome's perspective

Correspondence: Pliny and Trajan

- 111 CE Pliny appointed governor of Bithynia
- Many Christians in region — temples empty
- Pray to gods, burn incense to emperor, and curse Christ
- Should Christians be punished for crimes or being Christian?
- Trajan: don't seek them, recant or punish, release recanters and ignore anonymous

Ignatius of Antioch

- 107 CE bishop of Antioch condemned to death
- Title: bearer of God
- Changed to “he who was borne by God”
- Unknown if betrayed by pagans or a Christian faction
- Dictated 7 letters on the way to Rome for death
- Refused to be freed to bear witness in his blood

Ignatius of Antioch

“I fear your kindness, which may harm me. You may be able to achieve what you plan. But if you pay no heed to my request it will be very difficult for me to attain unto God.”

“...so that I may not only be called a Christian, but also behave as such...My love is crucified...I no longer savour corruptible food...but wish to taste the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ...and his blood I wish to drink, which is an immortal drink...When I suffer, I shall be free in Jesus Christ, and with him shall rise again in freedom...I am God’s wheat, to be ground by the teeth of beasts, so that I may be offered as pure break of Christ.”

“If you remain silent about me, I shall become a word of God. But if you allow yourselves to be swayed by the love in which you hold my flesh, I shall again be no more than a human voice.”

Martyrdom of Polycarp

- 155 CE group brought to trial — Germanicus enraged mob who called for execution of Polycarp as well
- God's will he should die so faced courts

“For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no evil. How could I curse my king, who saved me?”

“Lord Sovereign God...I thank you that you have deemed me worthy of this moment, so that, jointly with your martyrs, I may have a share in the cup of Christ...For this...I bless and glorify you. Amen.”

- Hiding = martyrdom a calling — strengthened

Persecution of Marcus Aurelius

- Became emperor 161 CE
- Ordered persecution for obstinacy
- Superstitious believing Christians responsible for wrath of gods
- Enough ready to die they suffocated in cells

Defence of Faith

- Attempt to curb persecution clarify misconceptions of belief and practices; apologists, defenders of the faith

Rumours and Criticism

- Love feasts with brothers and sisters = orgies and incest
- Eating body and blood of Jesus, a baby — which Christians collected
- Attitude: ridiculous and unreasonable — self-contradictory

Rumours and Criticism

“In some private homes we find people who work with wool and rags, and cobblers, that is, the least cultured and most ignorant kind. Before the head of the household, they dare not utter a word. But as soon as they can take the children aside or some women who are as ignorant as they are, they speak wonders...If you really wish to know the truth, leave your teachers and your father, and go with the women and the children to the women’s quarters, or to the cobbler’s shop, or to the tannery, and there you will learn the perfect life. It is thus that these Christians find those who will believe them.”

The True Word by Celsus

Rumours and Criticism

- Also about class privilege and prejudiced, i.e. from Jews
- Ridiculous: above all but concerned with all
- If gods false why fear them by abstaining?
- Jesus a criminal and illegitimate son of Mary and Roman soldier
- If son of God why allow self to be crucified vs. destroy?

Rumours and Criticism

“What could be the purpose of such a visit to earth by God? To find out what is taking place among humans? Does he not know everything? Or is it perhaps that he knows, but is incapable of doing anything about evil unless he does it in person?”

The True Word by Celsus

Rumours and Criticism

- Gladly leave the surety of this life in hope of being raised to new life
- Resurrection silly — fire, beasts, fish godly treasure hunt?

Main Apologists

- *Letter to Diognetus* (2nd C.), Aristides (before 138 CE)
- Justin (most famous): two part apology and *Dialogue with Trypho* (Jewish Rabbi)
- Justin's disciples: Tatian — *Address to the Greeks* and Athenagoras — *A Plea for the Christians* and *On the Resurrection of the Dead*
- Theophilus bishop of Antioch: three books *To Autolycus* — doctrine of God, interpretation of scripture, Christian life

Main Apologists

- All wrote in Greek including Origen's *Against Celsus* in 3rd C.
- Early Latin apologies: *Octavius* by Minucius Felix and *Apology* by Tertullian
- Gives a view into pagan objections and church's response

Christian Faith & Pagan Culture

- Rejected worship of gods and related
- Couldn't be soldiers for same reason
- Rejected classical literature which centred on gods
- Being Christian meant sole worship of God; deviation = rejection of Jesus, rejection of Jesus = rejection by Jesus
- Not all agreed with rejecting everything

Christian Faith & Pagan Culture

- Two tracks: rejection and redemption
- Rejection “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What does the Academy have to do with the Church?”
- Greek culture lower so unworthy of keeping
- Redemption: Logos = ‘word’ and ‘reason’ universal reason
- John’s Gospel Logos made flesh, 1 Cor. 10:1-4
- Whatever is good in classics is for Christians

Arguments of Apologists

- Pagans are atheists — gods are awful and need protection
- God who made the body can make the body anew
- Pagans are sexually immoral, not Christians
- All forms of bloodshed are rejected, how can they kill babies esp. known for taking them to care for them
- They are not subversive — they serve through prayer

Deposit of Faith

- Universal message = diverse people = diverse interpretation of message — all valid?
- No single system of doctrine, take pieces from other systems — obscuring Christ?
- Gives rise to orthodox Christianity affirming doctrines from Jewish heritage
- Affirm through creeds, canon and apostolic succession
- Heretics left their mark on church too

Gnosticism



- A movement inside and outside the church
- *gnosis* = knowledge
- Gnostic believed secret mystical knowledge give key to salvation
- Material evil, spirits trapped in bodies, need release to return to spiritual reality
- Need messenger to wake us up

Gnosticism

- In Christian Gnosticism Christ is this messenger
- Not really in a body only looked like = *docetism* 'to seem'
- 2 possible approaches to body: 1) body to be ignored to weaken power of it over the spirit or 2) spirit is good and can't be destroyed so let the body have its way
- Threat to Christianity: creation, incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection

Marcion

- Son of a bishop, he disliked Judaism and material world
- 144 CE went to Rome had a following
- Founded his own church to rival orthodox
- YHWH evil agent vs. God and Father of Jesus
- God doesn't judge but loves, vs. God of OT who punishes
- Canon: Luke and Paul — edited versions

Response

- Orthodox canon: OT, Gospels (four), Acts, Paul's epistles, other books, and Revelation
- By consensus not council
- Gnostics wanted only one gospel, i.e. not seeking to include theirs in orthodox canon — closed vs. open
- Gnostic gospels 2nd c. and 3rd c. focused on piety of Jesus never canonized
- Concern about worship vs. theology

Response

- Creeds especially for baptism
 - R: 150 CE recognize true believer from heresies
1. Do you believe in God, the Father almighty?
 2. Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Ghost and of Mary the Virgin, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose again at the third day, living among the dead, and ascended unto heaven and sat at the right of the Father, and will come to judge the quick and the dead?
 3. Do you believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

Response

- Trinitarian formula: Father, Son and Holy Ghost
- *pantokrator* = almighty, “all ruling” i.e. material world
- Jesus son of same God who is over all and he was born vs. appeared
- His death was datable and he really was crucified, died and rose again vs. docetism
- He will return to judge
- Holy church affirmed vs. Gnostic schools or Marcion’s church

Response

- Comes down to authority of the church to determine right vs. wrong
- All confirmed true message by Jesus; Gnostics secret access and Marcion purged writings
- Apostolic succession became important — bishops able to be traced back to apostles
- Church didn't have to be founded by apostle but affirm apostolic faith

Ancient Catholic Church

- *Catholic church* = episcopal collegiality and multiform witness of the gospel through canonical gospels
- *catholic* = universal and according to the whole — term to distinguish true church from heretical sects
- Title underscored it was universal and inclusive of witnesses it was founded on
- Only Church Catholic could claim whole apostolic witness so it became synonym for orthodox or correct teaching

Confessions Book II

1. How would bringing back revolting things be a step toward loving God? (pg. 27 or 43)
2. What does this image of God playing out the leash tell us? (pg. 27-28 or 43)
3. Why does he make so much of stealing some pears when 16? (pg. 32 or 49)
4. What is the result of Augustine's reflection of the pear theft? i.e. what can he offer? (pg. 35 or 51)