

## **Gifts of Finest Wheat**

### **Year 2, Session 2: Church History**

#### **Avoiding Plagiarism**

If left to my own devices I could probably, from memory, write about 1,000 pages of random essays on church history. But, not too surprisingly, I don't think trying to pass on a collection of random thoughts is a very helpful teaching strategy. So in order to give my presentations some structure I am using "Epic: A Journey Through Church History", a DVD series produced by Ascension Press and narrated by Steven Weidkopf, as a personal reference as I prepare my talks. For the most part what I'm taking advantage of is the structure Weidkopf provides, as he organizes the overwhelming number of significant events in church history into some sort of coherent narrative. It would be impossible for me to reference every time his ordering and selection of events influences my presentations. I'm stating this for the sake of honesty, and for the sake of giving credit where credit is due. In those cases where the Epic series provided me with information that I had not previously encountered I'll be more explicit about citing it as a reference.

#### **Some Necessary Exclusions**

In the fall Mike Brummond taught an eight week series on ecclesiology, or the study of the nature of the church. In the spring Fr. Milota will teach on eight week session on the sacraments. Obviously it is not possible to teach church history without including some discussion of the sacraments, as well as some discussion of the structure and nature of the church, but I am going to try to keep to a minimum my duplication of material that was taught by Mike in the fall, or that we can expect to be covered by Fr. Milota in the spring. I am going to be focusing on the persecutions faced by the church, the relationship between church and state, various heresies that have arisen throughout church history, and how the church has reacted to these heresies.

To the extent that it is necessary I will discuss ecclesiology and the sacraments, and to the extent that it is possible I will stay away from those subjects so that we can have more time to cover those topics which have not, and will not, be covered in other sessions of Gifts of Finest Wheat. Mike Brummond's presentations on the subject of ecclesiology can be found at the following link on the Sts. Peter and Paul parish website, [http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/gfw/gfw\\_year2\\_session1.htm](http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/gfw/gfw_year2_session1.htm), and I encourage all of you to attend Fr. Milota's talks in the spring.

#### **Methodological Notes**

We are attempting to cover 2,000 years in eight weeks. This is an impossible task. Even the best scholars and teachers in the world would do an extremely inadequate job of carrying out this task, and I certainly don't fall into that category. What I want to do is communicate as much information as possible in the very limited amount of time we do have.

One way to do that would be to use every minute of each week's scheduled two hours, and to try to cram as much information as possible into those two hours. I do not think that would be a helpful approach. The goal isn't to see how much information I can throw at you, maybe using an auctioneer's speaking style for the whole two hours every week while I do so. The goal is to see how much information those of you in the class can retain. I think the best way to do that is boil things down to just the absolute essentials, and also to have the classes move at a steady pace, but one that is reasonable enough that you can follow along. I'm going to hold myself to not much more than an hour each week, so that there is time for questions at the end of each session, and so that the experience of attending one or more of these talks isn't like trying to drink from a fire hose.

### **Historical Background Information**

I am going to pick up the discussion of church history around 100 AD. A certain amount of background information needs to be assumed, because there is not time for an in depth discussion of the background of the church prior to the year 100 AD. To begin our study I believe it is necessary to understand that as we approach the year 100 AD we find a church guided by the sacred texts of the New Testament, texts which were written between approximately 50 and 95 AD. We need to understand that Christ gave his Apostles real power and authority as they guided the church, and that this authority was passed on to the ordained bishops and priests who followed in the footsteps of the Apostles.

Additionally, Christians were meant to live lives formed by the distinctive moral teachings of Christ. These teachings build on the beliefs and practices of the Old Testament, beliefs and practices that set the Jewish people apart from their pagan neighbors. The most distinctive aspects of Jewish and Christian morality, aspects that would probably for the most part have seemed bizarre to the pagans who encountered Judaism and Christianity, were a concern for the poor and a commitment to sexual fidelity within marriage and sexual abstinence outside of marriage. The Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, like their Jewish predecessors, were marked by a commitment to common worship. The defining elements of this worship were the proclamation of the scriptures, the preaching of Christ's gospel of grace from these scriptures, and the reception of Christ's Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

The last paragraph was a summary of the eight sessions I taught on the New Testament last spring. The text of my eight talks from last spring can be found at this link, [http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/gfw/gfw\\_year1\\_session3.htm](http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/gfw/gfw_year1_session3.htm).

### **Assignments**

For those of you pursuing the certificates verifying your completion in the full Gifts of Finest Wheat program there will be a written assignment that will go along with this session. That assignment is a single 1,500 word essay. Each week I will present one possible topic which you may choose to write your essay on. If you would like to write an essay on something besides one of these eight topics you must check with me first.

## Week 1: Persecution, Toleration, and Heresies (100 - 325 AD)

### The Christian Difference

Christians stood out from society

Sometimes seen as a negative thing

- Ridiculed for being poor and ignorant, didn't measure up to society's standards of rank and prestige
- Seen as being bad citizens, wouldn't worship the emperor, source of disunity  
Even Roman citizens who didn't really believe in the whole host of pagan gods would still honor them as a solely political act  
It was truly believed by many that Roman army owed its success, empire owed its stability, to worship of pagan gods<sup>1</sup>  
Flood, bad harvests, invasions sometimes blamed on fact that Christians had abandoned devotion to Rome's traditional gods<sup>2</sup>
- Christians even accused of being cannibals  
Probably based on misunderstanding of Christian teachings on the Eucharist<sup>3</sup>

Sometime seen as a positive thing

- Their holiness attracted people to the church
- The love and support the community of Christians showed for each other
- Their outward directed love towards the poor and sick<sup>4</sup>
- Sometimes outsiders were impressed by the bravery they showed when they faced torture and martyrdom<sup>5</sup>
- Women sometimes more easily won over as converts because of status given them in church  
Equality of sexes before God  
Viewed infidelity of married men as sinful  
Roman society tended to accept this and only look down on women who committed adultery<sup>6</sup>

### Persecution of the Early Church

The persecution Christians faced was severe, but not constant, alternating periods of persecutions (which varied in intensity) and toleration

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1993), 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 56-58.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 58-59.

## Persecutions Faced by the Early Church<sup>7</sup>

Emperor, and Dates	Description
• Nero, 64-67	Blamed Christians for burning of Rome, significant number, including Peter and Paul, put to death
• Domitian, 95	Most emperors didn't actually want to be worshipped as a god, Domitian did, severe consequences for Jews and Christians who refused to do so <sup>8</sup>
• Trajan, 98-117	Christians weren't to be sought out, but public acts of Christian worship or witness were to be punished with death
• Hadrian, 117-138	Similar to persecution undertaken by Trajan
• Antonius Pius, 138-161	Local persecutions only
• Marcus Aurelius, 161-180	Local persecutions only
• Septimus Severus, 193-211	Forbade conversion to Christianity
• Alexander Severus, 222-235	Local persecutions only
• Maximus Thrax, 235-238	Ordered execution of church leaders
• Decius, 249-251	All citizens of emperor who would not sacrifice to pagan gods were to be executed
• Gallus, 251-253	Continued persecution undertaken by Decius
• Valerian, 257-259	All bishops, priests, and deacons ordered to worship pagan gods or face death, Christian worship forbidden
• Diocletian, 303-305	Ordered execution of all who would not worship pagan gods, Christian worship forbidden, Christians buildings and books destroyed
• Galerius, 305-311	Continued policy of Diocletian

Major leaders of church, responsible for important doctrinal teachings, resistance to dangerous heresies, among those killed in these persecutions

- St. Ignatius of Antioch  
 Bishop of prominent Christian church in Antioch  
 Martyred in Rome in approximately 110 AD  
 While being transported from Antioch to Rome he was able to write seven letters to various groups of Christians<sup>9</sup>  
 Six to church present in different cities  
 One to future martyr, St. Polycarp

<sup>7</sup> The basic form of this chart is from, Steven Weidkopf and Dr. Alan Schreck, *Epic: A Journey Through Church History, Study Set: Questions and Responses* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 201, with supplementary footnotes taken from other sources.

<sup>8</sup> Chadwick, 26-27.

<sup>9</sup> William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers: Volume One*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 17

## Important Doctrinal Elements in his writings

### Divinity of Jesus

His thoughts on this very damaging to liberal/revisionist/skeptical view that the divinity of Jesus was a doctrine that the church did not hold to during its earliest days

### Eucharist

Good counterpoint to idea that early church saw holy communion as only a symbolic act, and not reception and eating of the true Body and Blood of Jesus

***Week 1 Assignment Topic: Read the seven letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch, write a summary of his theological beliefs, be as thorough as you can without exceeding 1,500 words***

***These letters can be found at this link, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>, the early church sources located here are in alphabetical order, scroll down to find the seven epistles of St. Ignatius***

- St. Polycarp of Smyrna
  - Taught by apostle John
  - Recipient of one of seven letters of St. Ignatius
  - Martyred in 155 or 156 AD, at age 86<sup>10</sup>
  - Opposition to heresies of Marcion
    - Marcion rejected Old Testament, saw Jesus as being opposed to the evil God of the Old Testament
    - Because of this Polycarp called him “the first born of Satan”

## Resistance to Heresy

### Marcionism

### Gnosticism

- Spirit good, body bad
- Pre-existed Christianity
- Attempted to incorporate Christian ideas, but rejected key Christian concepts
  - Incarnation
  - Eucharist
  - Some held to Marcionism
- St. Irenaeus
  - Lived from approximately 140 to 202 AD
  - From what is now the modern nation of Turkey, probably the city of Smyrna
  - Eventually served as bishop of the French city of Lyons<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 84.

Wrote important text “Against Heresies”

Attacked Gnostic views

Showed how these views were not held by apostles, not held by those who succeeded to the apostles, not taught in the scriptures, went against a correct understanding of Christ’s incarnation, and were incompatible with a correct understanding of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist

## Rigorism

Refusal to accept that mercy could be shown to those who caved into persecution, and who later desired reconciliation with the church

St. Hippolytus

- Anti-pope, thought legitimate popes erred in allowing those who had denied faith to be forgiven
- Imprisoned in Sardina with St. Pontianus, legitimate Pope
- Died reconciled to the church, 235 AD<sup>12</sup>

## Montanism

Absolute rejection of society

Tertullian, (155/160-240/250)

- Pagan, converted to Christianity, later left church and became Montanist
- Eventually became more extreme even than this group, founded group which bore his name<sup>13</sup>
- Early views on military, proudly pointed to the role Christian soldiers played in the 174 A.D. victory of the Twelfth Legion in Germany<sup>14</sup>
  - Claim made that prayers of Christian soldiers led to victory
  - Can debate tactical advantage of prayer
  - Can’t debate presence of Christian soldiers, Tertullian’s approval of their service
  - Shows his acceptance of Christian participation in society
  - Even military and political life
- Later rejection of participation in society
  - During his heretical period held to pacifist views<sup>15</sup>
  - Consistent with Montanist rejection of participation in society
  - Arts, business, politics, military service all seen as basically evil

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 112-113.

<sup>14</sup> Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, vol. 19 of *Message of the Fathers*, ed. Thomas Halton (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), 36-37

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

## The Later Persecutions

Decius and Gallus, 249-253

- Rigorism an issue again
- Novatian schism
  - Roman priest, held that church could not formally absolve those who had renounced faith
  - Could only pray that they be forgiven at last judgment
  - Left church when his more lenient rival Cornelius was named Pope<sup>16</sup>

Valerian, 257-259

Christians as scapegoats

Diocletian

- In decades preceding Diocletian tolerance of church reached point where even some provincial governors were Christians<sup>17</sup>
- Diocletian becomes emperor in 284, persecution does not begin immediately
- Divides empire in half, important long term consequences
- Where we get the word diocese from
- 303, Galerius begins persecution in the east, some say because of conversions in the army
- Not just death
  - Beatings and physical punishments
  - Imprisonment and forced labor
  - Basically slavery
- Some gave into persecution
- Destruction of scriptures seen as a great tragedy
- Galerius issues edict of toleration just before death

## The Emperor Constantine and the Toleration of the Church

- Constantine's father reigned in the west after death of Diocletian
  - Ended persecution of Church in the western half of the empire, this persecution continued in the east under Galerius
- Vision, journeying to Italy, supposedly saw a cross in the sky, familiar enough with Christianity to see this as sign from Christian God<sup>18</sup>
- Sign of Christ's name on his soldiers' shields<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chadwick, 119.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 120-121.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985), 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Chadwick, 125-126.

- 312, victory at Milvian Bridge against superior forces under the command of Emperor Maxentius<sup>20</sup>
  - Secured his status as emperor
  - Attributed this victory to the Christian God, at this time his understanding of unique and absolute claims of Christ was limited<sup>21</sup>
- Edict of Milan, 313
  - Western Emperor Constantine and Eastern Emperor Licinius agreed to end persecution of Christians and return stolen church property
  - Toleration, not status as official religion, that not granted until 380 AD
  - Other religions still allowed<sup>22</sup>
- Morality in law
  - Banning of infanticide
  - New laws made life better for women, children, slaves, and prisoners<sup>23</sup>
- Personal spiritual state, Uncertain
  - Originally a sun worshipping monotheist
  - Not baptized until death
  - Baptized by Arian bishop
  - In 324 had Licinius executed, in 326 had his wife (Licinius' sister) and son executed<sup>24</sup>
- End of persecution of church
- Founding of eastern capital of Constantinople (named after guess who), furthered east/west division<sup>25</sup>
  - One event paving way for eventual division of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches
- Emerging issue of state involvement in church affairs<sup>26</sup>
  - End of persecution was joyous, meddling of political leaders was going to prove to be a mixed blessing, morally problematic issue of unjust actions on the part of Christian leaders
    - 390 St. Ambrose of Milan had to force Christian Emperor Valentinian I to submit to public penance for acts of repression in Greek city of Thessalonica<sup>27</sup>
    - 528 Emperor Justinian banned other religions<sup>28</sup>

### **Arianism and the Council of Nicaea**

- Arius
  - North African priest

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450-680 AD* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Chadwick, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Meyendorff, 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Ware, 52.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Meyendorff, 7-8

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 5.

Denied divinity of Jesus

Jesus did not always exist

He is only the greatest of created beings

God has not always been Father

- Teachings were popular among the nobility and army  
Allowed nobility to see themselves as Christian but distinct from average person
- Constantine called council to address this issue<sup>29</sup>  
All bishops of the church invited  
Held in Nicaea, near modern city of Istanbul, 325 AD  
316 to 2 vote of bishops condemned Arius  
St. Nicholas story  
Santa Claus beat up Arius  
Creed we recite at mass composed here, and at Council of Constantinople in 381
- Homoousios, Consubstantial, One in Being – Jesus is divine, equal to the Father  
Opposed to Homoiousios, meaning only similar in being to the Father

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<sup>29</sup> Ware, 27.