

Class 3: Challenges to Orthodox Christianity

An Inquirer's Class about
Christianity and
The Episcopal Church

The Early Christian Expansion - 1

- The early Christian communities were marked by their allegiance to Jesus (see McManners, 1-26).
- They elevated him to a high station, and in him they believed God had visited God's people.
- Jesus was a prophet and more than a prophet; he was an example and a teacher of a way of truth and righteousness that surpassed John the Baptist, Jesus' immediate forebear.

The Early Christian Expansion - 2

- He was the messiah, the leader of ancient expectation. His work, life, and ministry was felt by high-ranking priestly families of Jerusalem to be a threat to their power and to their political collaboration with the occupying Roman forces.
- The claim that with his coming, God had inaugurated his dominion left Jesus open to charges of blasphemy, which were quickly changed into charges of sedition.
- He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to die the death of a political criminal: crucifixion.

The Gentile Question

- Inclusion of Gentiles by the earliest Christians was hotly contested in the apostolic community
- Conservative Jews (i.e., James) did not want their national religion assimilated into the surrounding Gentile world. They wanted the moral and ceremonial law to be observed.
- More liberal Jews (i.e., Peter and Paul) felt membership of the church should be open to Gentiles. They believed that Gentile Christians did not need to be circumcised or had to keep the traditional Jewish festivals.

Paul - 1

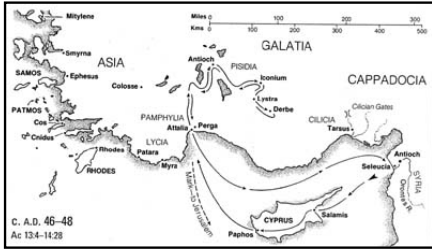
- Paul was a Hellenized Jew with Roman citizenship.
- He was a Pharisee with a once conservative view; he previously persecuted the early church (Acts 8:1-3).
- After his conversion, Paul became a fervent missionary.
- He rejected the view that non-Jewish believers should keep the law of Moses. This eventually led to a break between the church and the synagogue.

Paul - 2

- Paul's Theology
 - The distinctive heart of Christianity could be found in the historic facts of the gospel; i.e., the Jesus of history was one with the Christ of his faith.
 - Jesus represented the eternal wisdom of God in creation.
 - God was uniquely present in Jesus.

Paul's First Journey: Antioch and Cyprus

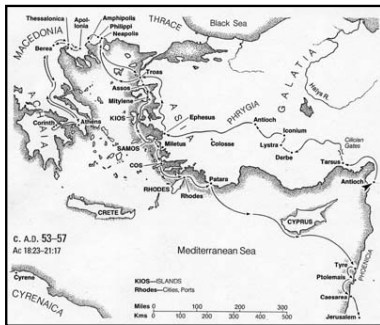
- It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians.



Paul's Second Journey: Greece



Paul's Third Journey: Asia Minor, Greece, Athens, Jerusalem



Conflicts and Persecution - 1

- Stephen was the first person recorded to die for his belief in Christ following his witness before the council of the Jews (Acts 6:8-7:60).
- To conservative Jews, nascent Christianity was a heresy: good Jews were being subverted.

Conflicts and Persecution - 2

- The Christians in turn, sought refuge under the Romans (see Acts 18:14-15).
- As long as the conflict was seen by the Romans as a disagreement among Jews, there was little cause for concern. But when there was public disorder or a riot, severe action was taken.

Conflicts and Persecution - 3

- Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome around 51 C.E. apparently because of their disorderly conduct over "Chrestus."
- As the Jews began to be more openly insurgent against Rome (between 60 and 135 C.E.), the Christians sought to distance themselves Judaism, and that meant that Rome began to see Christianity as something quite different from Judaism.
- This eventually led to 250 years of Roman persecution of Christians from the time of Nero to the conversion of Constantine.

The First Persecution

- On June 18, 64, a 6 day-long fire broke out in Rome. Ten of 14 sections of the city were destroyed.
- The people screamed for justice.
- Many people blamed Nero for the fire. Nero tried to deflect the blame, but the rumors of his culpability persisted.
- Eventually he blamed the Christians.

Other Persecutions

- By the end of the second century, Christian martyrdom was well known.
- Bishop Ignatius of Antioch wrote seven letters while on his way to martyrdom.
- The law said that Christians should not be sought out, but if found out they should be punished.
- The idea emerged that martyrdom was not something that one chose, but as something for which one was chosen by God.

The Great Persecution - 1

- Diocletian was one of four co-presiding emperors.
- He had reorganized the empire and placed administrative authority on four emperors, two of whom had the title "Augustus," and two of whom had the title of "Caesar."
- Christianity had been growing during these three hundred years, and there were many soldiers in the army.

The Great Persecution - 2

- In about 295 C.E., there were a large number of Christian soldiers put to death because of their faith. All Christians were expelled from the legions.
- Fire broke out in the Imperial palace, and the emperor accused the Christians of setting it.

The Great Persecution - 3

- Diocletian ordered churches destroyed and sacred Christian books burned.
- Diocletian became convinced that all Christians were plotting against him, and he unleashed the most cruel pogrom against Christians in history.
- Christians were killed with "refined cruelty."

The Edict of Milan

- One of the emperors, Galerius, revised his anti-Christian stance, and on April 30, 311 pardoned all Christians
- Constantine, the son of Constantius, one of the four emperors, began to maneuver into a position of power upon Galerius' death.
- Eventually, Constantine won the battle for Rome and stated that all persecution of Christians would cease in 313 C.E.
- This agreement became known as the Edict of Milan.

Orthodoxy: Making Christianity Christian - 1

- Factors feeding orthodoxy
 - Perceptions of Jesus. Faithful people in the Roman-Jewish world had different perceptions of Jesus, different ideas about salvation and Jesus' role in the salvific work of God, even as they professed Jesus as Lord and Savior.
 - Hellenistic thinking. The philosophy of the Greeks had appeal to some, but not all early Christian groups.

Orthodoxy: Making Christianity Christian - 1

- Factors feeding orthodoxy
 - Other religions. Paganism and mystery cults abounded, and their influence was to be felt as Christianity wrestled with its own self-definition.
 - The early years of the church were involved with defining what was meant by professing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Some Primary Teachers of the Early Church

- Latin School
 - Irenaeus: Against the Gnostics
 - Tertullian: Against the Gnostics and the Docetists
- Alexandrian School
 - Clement of Alexandria: Christian apologist
 - Origen of Alexandria: Christian apologist

Irenaeus - 1

- Irenaeus is credited with establishing the need for Christianity to define itself against Gnosticism.
- Advanced idea of a creedal religion.
- Fought against the elitism of "rebaptism" as it was practiced in Gnosticism.

Irenaeus - 2

- Irenaeus' theology
 - God is the creator of all things.
 - Christ is the basis for the continuity between creation and redemption.
 - We were made by the same God who now in Christ offers us salvation.
 - Christ as the head of a new humanity.
 - God's plan for the redemption of humanity reaches its ultimate expression in the incarnation of Jesus.

Tertullian - 1

- Wrote against all sort of heretical movements in the early church, including the Gnostics (notably Valentinus) and the Docetists.
- Saw the Gospel as a new form of law.
- He rejected the injection of philosophy into Christian faith (contrast this with the Alexandrian school).

Tertullian - 1

- Argued that all discussion with heretics on the basis of scripture is out of order, for heretics have no claim on scripture.
- The rule of faith follows apostolic tradition. Only the church has the right to use the scriptures, and to determine what is Christian doctrine and what is not.
- His Christology was that in Christ there were two natures united in one person.

Clement of Alexandria

- Clement argued that just as the law had been given to the Jews, logic (or rationalism) had been given to the Greeks.
- The sole purpose of law and logic is to lead to Christ.
- Clement saw Christianity as the fulfillment of Old Testament scripture and Greek philosophy.

Origen - 1

- Heavily influenced by Greek philosophy - particularly Philo.
- Theology
 - God is perfect and creation is imperfect (this comes from the Platonic school).
 - In this world, human beings go through a period of trials, making use of freedom, in order to return to the unity and harmony of all intellectual beings which is the purpose of God.
- Throughout Origen's works is the idea of purification of the soul.

Origen - 2

- Christ was the single being in whom the divine and human natures co-existed in mystery.
- Since we are imperfect beings, and unable to contemplate the divine, Christ was sent to us to achieve that contemplation of the divine.
- Christ is therefore a victorious savior (the resurrection), and an example, and an illuminator.

Heterodoxy: When is Christianity not Christian?

- Gnosticism - 1
 - The prime deity (god) existed outside (or above) the sensate world. God was the divine One from whom the divine nature of human beings emanated.
 - But that divine nature (the soul) became entrapped in the inferior, material, sensate world.

Gnosticism - 2

- Because God was divine, and incapable of creating anything that was not perfect, a lower deity was responsible for the creation of the sensate world.
- The lower deity was called the *demiurge*, and he was assisted by still lower beings called *archons*.
- Knowledge was seen as the key to allow the soul to escape the material world and return to the unknown true God through an awakening saving call or the revelations of the redeemer.

Major Gnostic Teachers

- Marcion
- Valentinus
- Manichaeism
- Arius

Christianizing the Empire - 1

- Constantine
 - The Edict of Milan promoted tolerance of all religions - including Christianity.
 - The Edict also made it possible for the church to own property which forever changed the face of Christianity.

Christianizing the Empire - 2

- Constantine built huge and ornate churches in many places.
- The liturgies that were written for these churches were grandiose.
- All of this facilitated the development of a clerical elite similar to the imperial aristocracy.
- The church imitated the empire in its function and in its social structure.

From Rome to Constantinople

- The City of Constantine ("Constantinople")
 - In the heart of ancient Byzantium.
 - In a strategic military location to deal with the Germans and the Persians
 - In an ideal location with regard to the trade routes.

From Rome to Constantinople

- In the center of the city was a statue of Apollo, set atop a huge stone column brought from Egypt. Constantine left this statue in the city, but had the head removed so that his own bust could be placed on Apollo's body.



The Arian Controversy and The First Church Councils - 1

- Arius denied the divinity of Christ
- Council of Nicea (325 C.E.)
 - Produced a sharply anti-Arian creed affirming that the Father and the Son were "homoousios," "of one substance." The creed was accepted almost unanimously, however, the crucial term, "homoousios" was ambiguous.
 - This ambiguity was good because it allowed for accommodation of diverse views.

The Arian Controversy and The First Church Councils - 2

- Council of Constantinople (381 C.E.)
 - Produced the "Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed," which is what we call the Nicene Creed. This was later affirmed at the Council of Chalcedon (451) as the Nicene "faith of the 150 fathers"
 - Creed makes the same fundamental affirmations against the Arian heresy that denied the equality of the Father and the Son, asserting that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is homoousios ("of one substance") with the Father.

The Arian Controversy and The First Church Councils - 3

- The Council at Calcedon, 451 C.E.

"This is the one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, manifested in two natures without any confusion, change, division, or separation. The union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each are kept, and both are joined in one person, and both are joined in one person and hypostasis. They are not divided into two persons, but belong to the one Only-begotten Son, the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. All this, as the prophets of old said of him, and as he himself has taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers has passed on to us."

Augustine of Hippo

- Had two problems with Christianity:
 - The Bible was inelegant and spoke of a "schizophrenic" God.
 - What was the origin of evil? If God was responsible for evil then God was not perfect.
- So, Augustine became a Manichee. Because Manichaeism said that the Biblical world - particularly the Old Testament - was not the word of the eternal God of light. It was about the lower god, the *demurge*. Second, evil was not caused by God, but by the forces of darkness.



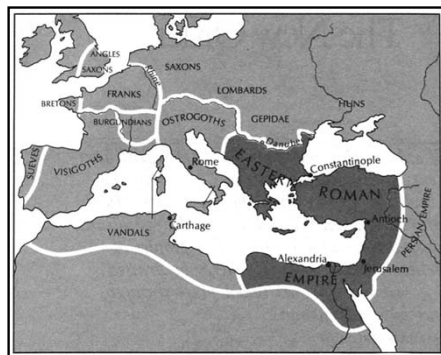
Augustine of Hippo - 2

- The Will is the Key
 - The Manichees did not believe in free will.
 - Augustine argued that human beings decide for themselves what is and what is not needed out of circumstance or out of an inner necessity.
 - This meant that evil was not a "thing" like the Manichees imagined, but it was rather a conscious, willful choice to negate good.

Augustine of Hippo - 2

- The City of God
 - The city of God is built upon love of God.
 - The other city is built on love of self.
 - Augustine believed that both metaphors co-exist in all institutions, and that there is an ongoing battle between these "cities." Eventually only the city of God will remain. Augustine felt that God allowed Rome to follow its free will, and to spread the Gospel. Having done that the city could now follow its human destiny, and be destroyed.

Collapse of the Roman Empire



Rise of Monasticism - 1

- With the Edict of Milan, Constantine allowed Christianity to flourish.
- Some bewailed the low level to which Christianity had descended.
- New converts wanted prestige and position, and did not care to delve too deeply into the meaning of baptism and the life of the cross.

Rise of Monasticism - 2

- Bishops competed with each other for power. Many saw the relative peace promised by the Edict of Milan as the trap of Satan.
- Many fled the church.
- They left behind the world and moved into the country.
- An exodus of people into the church was equaled by an exodus of people seeking solitude.

The Holy Roman Empire

- The Holy Roman Empire officially began Christmas Day in 800 when the Pope Leo III declared Charles, the King of the Franks - later known as Charlemagne - the first Holy Roman Emperor of the West.
- The Roman Empire was incarnated under the auspices of the Church.



East Versus West

- The eastern empire spoke Greek and the western empire spoke Latin.
- The vacuum of power in the west with the collapse of the political structure in Rome gave the Bishop of Rome the opportunity to fill the void and become an increasingly important political power.
- The eastern empire was politically stable and would last 1000 more years until the rise of Islam.

The *Filioque* and the Schism of 1054 - 1

- The original Nicene Creed said that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father."
- In the sixth century the words "and from the Son" (called the *filioque*) were added to this sentence so that it reads, "from the Father and from the Son."

The *Filioque* and the Schism of 1054 - 2

- The eastern churches saw this as tampering with the Definition of faith.
- By Charlemagne's time, the *filioque* was recited in the Frankish churches.
- In Rome, the Pope tried unsuccessfully to avoid alienating the eastern churches by using the Apostle's Creed instead of the Nicene Creed.

Other Problems that Led to the Schism of 1054

- The western churches began to use leavened bread for communion (such as we use at Trinity). The eastern churches balked.
- The Western church had declared celibacy for its priests a universal rule (eastern clerics could marry).
- The western church had a problem with the power that the Byzantine emperor had over the Christian churches (as a result of the stability of the eastern political empire).

The Schism

On June 16, 1054, the Pope excommunicated the Patriarch of the eastern church, and the final break between the eastern and western churches was completed.