



SESSION 7: IRENAEUS TO TERTULLIAN – CONTENT

1. By 180 Trinitarian doctrine was well-established throughout the Church. Athenagoras of Athens had written of, “God the Father and of God the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. And Saint Theophilus of Antioch had used the term “Trinity” to describe God.
2. By 180 the Roman Empire had expanded to its maximum, into Britain and Northern Europe, protected by Hadrian’s wall in England and Die Roemer across Germany. In 180 Northern tribes beyond the Rhine and Danube began threatening these Roman fortifications. This marked the **beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire**, which took 320 years and ended in 476.
3. In 202 Emperor Septimus Severus issued an edict that **all subjects must worship Sol Invictus**, the invincible sun. Judaism and Christianity were outlawed.
4. Around 215 the heresy of **Monarchianism** (or **Sabellianism**) appeared in reaction to Justin’s and other apologist’s writings that Jesus was the second divine being, begotten by the Father before creation. Chief proponents were Sabellius, Paul of Samosata and Theodotus, a leather seller. This heresy said: 1) God is one person working in three modes, 2) Christ was a mere man, born of the virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, upon whom divine power was bestowed at baptism and divine adoption was bestowed at his resurrection. It was non-trinitarian. It evolved under Theodotus, who had denied Christ when seized. He said this was acceptable because it was a man, not God, he had denied, thus excusing his fall. Monarchianists were not numerous. Theodotus was expelled by Rome and this heresy was condemned in Constantinople in 381 and died out quickly.
5. Around the time of Christ the Jewish philosopher/historian Philo developed the concept of the Logos as the intermediary between God and His creation. This may have inspired the apostle John to use the term Logos (i.e. the Word) to describe the second person of the Trinity (i.e. Christ). This influenced the creation of the Catechetical School of the Church of Alexandria, under the leadership of Pantaneus. This school emphasized the divinity of Christ and that deification, or becoming like God through intimate communion with Him and by His grace, is the meaning of salvation.
6. Alexandria, Egypt was the center of the world’s greatest library, of academic thought and of Hellenistic philosophy. **Clement of Alexandria** (215) was the second leader and first great Christian thinker of the Alexandrian school. He saw his mission as helping those seeking deeper truth and of being a defender of the faith while being a proponent of secular learning and culture. “Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, until the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a school-master to bring the Hellenic mind , as the law of the Hebrews, to Christ... There seems to me to be a first kind of saving change from heathenism to faith, a second from faith to knowledge; and this latter, as it passes on to love, begins at once to establish a mutual friendship between knower and known, until the self presses on to that which is indeed the Lord’s abode and remains there as a light standing and abiding; forever absolutely

secure from all vicissitude.” He taught that the Logos, that created the universe, is the manifestation of the Old Testament God which became incarnate in Christ. Origen, whom we shall visit next session, was the third leader of this school.

- 7. Tertullian of Carthage** (150-225) was the first theologian to write in Latin. The North African church of which he was a part became known as the ‘church of martyrdom’. He was probably a lawyer, and became a Montanist in 207. He said the soul is Christian by nature, and that *only* the Church has the right to interpret Scripture. All speculation is condemned. Christians have no business serving in the army, in government, or in businesses and educational institutions related to pagan religions. Those who fall into serious sin after baptism can only once be restored by repentance. The Church cannot tolerate adultery and fornication; they along with blasphemy and apostasy, cannot be forgiven. He developed an early expression of the doctrine of the Trinity, saying there is one divine substance which exists as three, distinct, continuous persons – Father, Logos/Son and Spirit. He also said that Christ is a union of two, distinct, unconfused substances, divine and human, in a single person. He and Hippolytus institutionalized the catechumenate; life and occupation were scrutinized, and admitted candidates spent three years in directed study.

Tertullian introduced the concept of satisfaction from Roman law into Christianity, that is, those who wish to be forgiven by God must offer God satisfaction for their sins. The soul must undergo some compensatory discipline in hades to amend for the very smallest offense (i.e. leading to the concept of purgatory). This belief set the foundation for the schism between the Eastern churches and the West (i.e. Rome) and is one of the major differences between Orthodox and Roman Catholic doctrine. It became one of the major causes of the Protestant Reformation. Although Tertullian is called “the father of Latin theology” and the “founder of Western Theology”, he has never been canonized by the Orthodox Church.

- 8.** In 235 Emperor Alexander Severus was murdered by his own troops. The Sussanid dynasty in Persia began trying to retake the territories that had belonged to Darius and Xerxes. For the first time the Roman Empire went on the defensive. The army increased, taxation increased and the urban upper class became increasingly impoverished. They began to hope for restoration of the better times of the past, and to believe they were being punished because they had neglected their gods.
- 9.** In conclusion, in the late 200’s the Church was dealing with the realism of sin and the need for repentance and confession, and this would continue as periods of relative peace would follow periods of persecution when many aposticized. Hebrews 6:4-6 says, “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.” Father Alexander Schmemmann relates, “Unfortunately, however, sin continues to enter men’s lives, and they have no recourse but to repent once more. The Church is called upon to save, not to judge, until the Last Judgement. Therefore a ‘second repentance’ was made possible to the excommunicant, permitting him to return to the Church and restoring the forfeited power of his baptism. As gradually developed, this new chance for sinners was guarded by the requirement of confession to the bishop or his representative, sometimes public confession; prolonged evidence of repentance, including various sorts of penance; and reinstatement only by stages in the freedom of Christians to worship together and partake of the sacraments. In very serious cases, restoration of the saving power of baptism

was sometimes withheld until the deathbed of the sinner... While in the joy of the first decades Christians felt more forcibly the wondrous newness of the gift, as time passed they could not help but become aware of the dimensions of the struggle to which it committed them. There is no room in the Church for sin; yet it exists for sinners. Therefore the development of a 'discipline of repentance' – an obvious lowering of standards – does not mean a change in the Church's original ideal, but a fulfillment of its eternal task, the salvation and renewal of man. Many could not accept this realism of the Church [among them Tertullian and the Montanists].”