

THE ANCIENT CHURCH (AD 100–600) Cont'd.

Week 2: Monday February 1, 2021

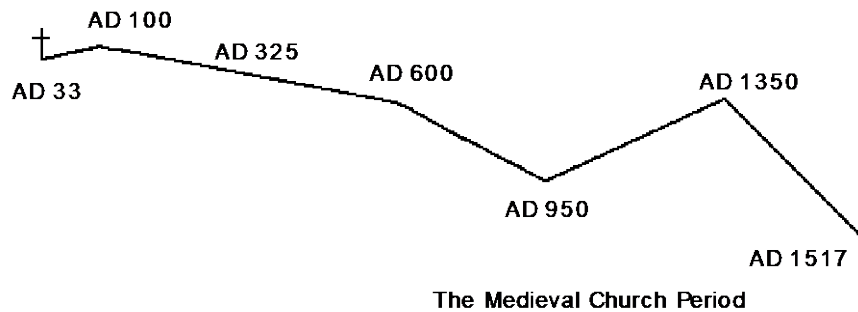
THE ANCIENT CHURCH (AD100–600) Cont'd.

Lecture 2

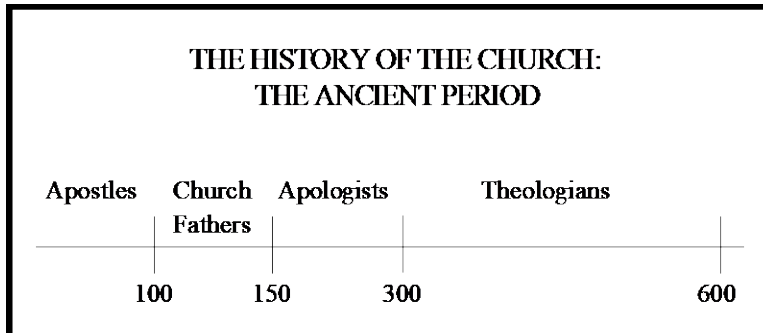
Topic: The Early Church Fathers

Due: Gonzalez, 1:xiii–xviii, 1–39

The Ancient Church Period



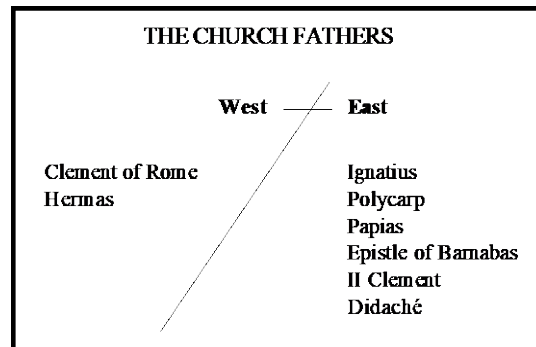
II. THE ANCIENT CHURCH (AD 100–600).



**A. The Era of the Church Fathers—the earliest post-apostolic writers (AD 100–150).
[This is the beginning of the Old Catholic Church]**

1. What are they?
 - a. The writers of Christian literature immediately following, and overlapping, the last of the apostles.
 - b. The writings themselves, i.e., unknown authors, 2 Clement, Didache.
 - c. Transitional period between the apostles and the Apologists.

2. Who are they? 5 men, 4 writings



- a) **Clement of Rome**, (*fl.* c. 96), a bishop of Rome.

Possibly the Clement of Phil. 4:3; Eusebius is the primary source. Though the claim is that he was the second or third bishop of Rome following Peter, there is no evidence exists of a monarchical bishop this early in Rome.

One of two written in the West, written in Rome, the other is Hermas.

His letter to the Corinthians began the ladder that led to Rome's supremacy in bringing people to obedience. He was the third bishop of Rome, AD 92-101. Roman Catholics claim he was the third Pope, this claim is completely unfounded. He demonstrates a Jewish background, he cites the LXX.

Eusebius: "In the 12 year of the same reign after Anacletus had been Bishop of Rome for 12 years he was succeeded by Clement who the apostle refers to in the fourth chapter of Philippians.

- b) **Ignatius, bishop of Antioch** (*ca.* AD 35-107)

One of the disciples of John and one of the first to die under Trajan's persecution, AD 107. Probably originally from Syria. Became the Bishop of the Church in Antioch [the second according to Origen, third according to Eusebius]. He was thrown to the lions in the coliseum in Rome. On the way to Rome, under a ten soldier guard, he wrote seven letters that reveal that in some churches there was already a move toward a monarchical Bishop He believed in apostolic succession. He sought martyrdom with open arms, pleaded with the people not to intercede on his behalf. This reflects the Galatian problem—works. This type of thinking leads to the monastic asceticism of later years.

Seven letters to Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, Smyrna, Polycarp.

c) **Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna** (ca. AD 69/70–155/160).

Born in AD 60. He was a younger friend of Ignatius and also a disciple of John the apostle. Bishop of Smyrna, then taken to Rome to be martyred by being burned at the stake in 154 AD. He wrote a letter to the Philippians similar to Paul's. Known for refusing to blaspheme Christ who he had served for eighty-six years and Christ had never done any wrong to him.

d) **Papias, bishop of Hierapolis** (c. AD 60–130),

Also a disciple of John the apostle according to Irenaeus, and associate of Polycarp. We might think they would have understood the gospel of John, but they do not. Papias wrote five books--- Λογίων Κυριακῶν Ἐξηγήσεις¹ “Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord” mostly oral traditions and legendary stories. He apparently also knew Philip the evangelist. He was very well educated and wrote a lot on eschatology as a chiliast (pre-millennial) with a literal 1,000 year Messianic kingdom. We do not know his fate.

e) **Hermas of Rome** (2nd century)

A slave, converted to Christianity, became very wealthy then lost all of his possessions through profligate living. He neglected his family, they fell into sin. Though his wife forgave him, his children left the faith. Little is known of him. One view is that he was a contemporary of Clement of Rome, late first century, the Muratorian Canon attributes the Shepherd to a brother of “Pope” Pius who died in 155. Origen thought it was the Hermas of Romans 16:14. Modern consensus goes with the Muratorian Canon.

The work claims that that the content was revealed to Hermas by a woman and an angel. It is loosely modeled after the symbols and visions of Revelation. He wrote to warn people against immoral living. His is a devotional work dated sometime in the second century. It was often read in church services because it communicated reality to the people.

f) *The Epistle of Barnabas*. AD 130-150

Written anonymously by a Christian from Alexandria. This is not

¹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1224.

the same as the Gospel of Barnabas which was a Gnostic gospel. It was forbidden by Pope Gelasius, and used by Moslems to teach the “truth about Christ. He shows that Judaism and the law were inadequate for salvation. Only the death of Christ is sufficient. Christians are not required to obey the law which ended with the death of Christ. His hermeneutic abuses typology to the point of allegory, i.e., the 318 servants of Abraham represent the death of Christ on the cross in that the Greek letter for 300 is in the shape of a cross and the Greek numerals for 18 are the first two letters of the name of Jesus.²

g) The Homily of *II Clement*.

Anonymous sermon, attached to 1 Clement. Dated around 150. The writer emphasizes a biblical view of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and godly living.

h) *The Epistle of Diognetus* late 2nd or possibly early 3rd century

It is uncertain who wrote it or to whom. Speculation is that it was written to the tutor of Marcus Aurelius.

It is commonly connected to the apostolic fathers, but its theme is apologetic. It presents a logical defense of Christian beliefs, the foolishness of idolatry, the failures and shortcomings of Judaism, the superiority of Christianity in its beliefs, morals, virtues, character building, and eternal blessings for the believer.

i) *The Didaché. (The Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations)*

A manual for church life which was probably written in the early second century. Its similarity to New Testament literature is thought by some to indicate a late first century date. The *Didache* describes church life in the late first and early second century.

3. What did they write? In total, nine writings

a) Epistolary literature.

(1) *The First Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians* (or I Clement) (Date: ca. AD 96/98).

A pastoral letter probably written by Clement. Paul’s letter apparently didn’t solve the Corinthian problems. An

² Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, Third Edition, Revised and Expanded. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 77.

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exhortation to love, humility, and to end quarrels and divisions. Contains devotional content which was read in most of the early church meetings. There were still problems with factions in the Corinthian church. One passage presents a clear understanding of the Gospel.

- (2) The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch (Date: ca. AD 110).

Six are to churches; one is a letter to Polycarp. He wrote them on the way to his death. He attacked a heresy composed of Docetic and Judaistic elements. And asked them not to forget his martyrdom. He also talks a lot about the bishop and obedience to him. He is the first to write about the development of the bishop as the ruler of the church (monarchical bishop).

- (3) *The Epistle to the Philippians* by Polycarp of Smyrna (Date: ca. 110 AD).

Similar to Paul's epistle; contains mostly practical exhortations to the daily life of Christians.

- (4) *The Epistle of Barnabas* (Date: ca. AD 117/132).

A tract to young Christians to keep them from falling into the trap of legalistic Judaism after their conversion from paganism. Two divisions, ch. 1-17: discourse on the Gospel, then 18-24 an exhortation to come to Christ. Probably Alexandrian since traditions says Alexandrian Christianity was founded by Barnabas and John Mark.

- (5) *The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* (or, The Homily of II Clement) (Date: before AD 150).

Not to be confused with 1 Clement. The first complete sermon found outside of the New Testament. Theme is to make progress in the commands of the Lord. A call to repentance, a call to the holy life, and a call to the resurrection.

- (6) *The Epistle of Diognetus* (Late second century).

Apologetic address to a heathen of aristocratic standing Diognetus. Argues for the validity of the beauty of the Christian faith. Courage of Christians in death and their love are discuss

- b) Apocalyptic Literature: *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord* (ca.

130 AD) by Papias.

5 volumes. His writings are no longer extant. This treatise is an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Upper Room Discourse, and Olivet Discourse. We have fragments, They are based on what the early Church thought that Christ meant by His sermons.

- c) Allegorical Literature: *The Shepherd* of Hermas (ca. AD 140/155).
- d) Catechetical Literature: The *Didaché* (or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) (Date: ca. AD 140).

4. What about their theology?

- a) A general summary and prospectus.

Their theology is unanalyzed. They are not answering complex questions requiring theological analysis. Most often they simply quote or paraphrase Scripture, which they view as the infallible and absolute Word of God and final authority.

- b) A summary of selected doctrinal insights.

(1) The Doctrine of Scripture in the Church Fathers.

- (a) The Fathers and the Old Testament. The Church Fathers looked upon the O.T as absolutely authoritative. Indeed the Fathers prefaced their O.T. quotations with such phrases as:

“For He (the Creator) saith” (Psalm. 27:7)
in *To the Corinthians*, 26.

“For the Holy Writing saith”.

“For thus it is written”.

“For thus saith God”.

“For the Scripture saith”.

Heick commented (*A History of Christian Doctrine*. I, 52): “Wherever ‘the Scriptures’ are mentioned or quotations are introduced with ‘*it is written*,’ we may be sure the Fathers were thinking of the Old Testament. It was regarded as the revelation of the past, present, and future.”

- (b) The Fathers on the sayings of Jesus and Paul. While the words of Jesus and Paul occupied a high place of acceptability, they were seldom quoted precisely

or prefaced as with O.T. citings. It appears that the Fathers elevated the circular writings yet without distinction (i.e., no concept of a canon, just wise books). Clement of Rome spoke of an elevated regard for Paul (I Clement 47): “*Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle.*” The Fathers made allusions to the N.T. books with the exception of Philemon, II John, and III John.

N.B. Along with apostolic writings various other writings soon came to be regarded with equal veneration (i.e., Hermas, Barnabas, Didaché, I and II Clement). Hermas speaks of his letter as a vision (2, 4). Ignatius calls his words those of God (“*I cried out, when I was among you; I spake with a loud voice, with my own voice...*” (To The Philadelphians, 7:2)).

N.N.B.B. The Church Fathers simply were pastoral and, given an absence of threatening issues, did not respond to systematize their thought. The relation of Paul to the O.T. was simply not considered. Paul was elevated, but not to the degree of the O.T.

- (c) The Earliest Fathers believed that the message of salvation came from God through Christ to the Apostle, then to their successors—Apostolic Succession of truth. Clement of Rome writes (42):

The Apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ was sent from God. Christ, therefore, is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both of these orderly arrangements, then, are by God’s will. Receiving their instructions and being full of confidence on account of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and confirmed in faith by the word of God, they went forth in the complete assurance of the Holy Spirit, preaching the good news that the Kingdom of God is coming. Through countryside and city they preached; and they appointed their earliest converts testing them by the spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty: for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier. Indeed, Scripture somewhere says: “*I will set up their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.*”

(2) The Doctrine of God in the Church Fathers.

In summary Neve (*A History of Christian Thought*, I, 106) wrote: “The early writers of the primitive Christian church were not given to doctrinal speculations about the Baptismal Formula; they used the trinitarian formula; but this formula did not provoke them to a discussion of the relation of the three to each other.” Kelley concludes (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 95): “The evidence to be collected from the Apostolic Fathers is meager, and tantalizingly inconclusive.”

(a) Clement of Rome.

- i) The Unity of Persons. Clement in his Epistle to the Corinthians coordinates the three persons by saying (58:2): “*As God lives, and the Holy Spirit*” and elsewhere (46:6): “*Have we not one God, and one Christ and one Spirit of grace poured upon us.*”
 - ii) The Pre-existence of Christ is taken for granted (22.1, 16.2) since He spoke through the Spirit in the Psalms.
 - iii) The Holy Spirit (8.1, 13.1, 16.2, and 63.2) is regarded as inspiring God’s prophets in all ages.
- (b) II Clement opens by advising its readers (1.1) to “*think of Jesus as of God, as of the judge of the living and dead.*”
- (c) Barnabas stresses Christ’s pre-existence by citing His cooperation with God in creation (5.5, 6.12), the reception of commands before the incarnation (14.3, 14.6), and that He is “*Lord of the entire cosmos*” (all things are in Him and unto Him) (5.5, 12.7).
- (d) Ignatius speaks of the triadic formula three times in his letters (*To the Ephesians*, 9.1, *To the Magnesians*, 13.1, 13.2). He declares that He is “*our God*” describing Christ as “*God incarnate*” and “*God manifest as man*” (*To the Ephesians*, 7.2, 19.3). In his pre-existent being “*ingenerate*”: the technical term reserved to distinguish the Uncreated from creatures) (*To the Ephesians*, 7.2, *To*

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Polycarp, 3.2).

- (e) Hermas clearly envisions three distinct persons but seems clearly subordinationistic (Parable 9, 1):

After I had written the Mandates and the Parables of the shepherd, the angel of repentance, he come to me and said to me: *“I wish to explain to you what the Holy Spirit showed you when He spoke to you in the form of the Church; (for that Spirit is the Son of God.)”*

(3) The Person of Christ in the Church Fathers

- (a) Clement of Rome.
According to the testimony of Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*. III, 3.3), Clement of Rome handed on the apostolic teaching intact in his letter to the Christian community at Corinth.
 - i) Clement clearly understands the ordering of salvation from God in Christ and the Spirit (42).
 - ii) Clement speaks of the incarnation of Christ in these terms (16.2): *“The scepter of the majesty of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ, came not in the pomp of arrogance or of pride, though He might have done so but in lowliness of mind according as the Holy Spirit spake concerning Him.”* Clement then quotes Isaiah 52–53.
 - iii) Clement also speaks of Christ as the preexistent Son of God. Chapter 36 is a particularly beautiful rehearsal of Hebrews 1.
 - iv) After His exaltation, He was united with the Father in glory and receives divine honor (32.4, 38:4, 43:6, 58:2, 63:3, 65:2).
- (b) Ignatius of Antioch.
 - i) Ignatius speaks of the incarnation as complete to exclude all hint of semblance. *“For if these things were done by our Lord in semblance, then am I also a prisoner in*

semblance” (*To the Smyrneans*, 4:3). He denies any attempt to have a docetic Christ.

- ii) Ignatius has a verse on Christ’s two natures that was often quoted in later history (*To the Ephesians*, 7:2). “*There is only one physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Grillmeier states of Ignatius (89), “Though the static character of a ‘two nature’ Christology may become visible as early as Ignatius a full, living dynamic is evident throughout his writings.”

N.B. The Christology of the Fathers is much clearer than their understanding of other areas of systematics. With the possible exception of Ignatius, the Fathers did not venture into speculation (Christ was simply Logos [God or Word] and sarx [flesh]). Grillmeier writes (105): “Despite this emphatic delineation of the God–manhood of Jesus Christ, there is still no doctrine of two natures in a technical sense.”

(4) The Work of Christ and the Church Fathers.

The Fathers generally maintain a vagueness, an unspeculative approach to the meaning of Christ’s death. Shedd stated (*History of Doctrine*. II, 207): “Examining them, we find chiefly the repetition of Scripture phraseology, without further attempt at an explanatory doctrinal statement.” Orr says (*Progress of Dogma*, 212): “The Apostolic Fathers are profuse in their allusions to redemption through the blood of Christ, though it cannot be said that they do much to aid us in the theological apprehension of this language.”

“Grace by its very nature, in the thought of the New Testament, must be the absolutely predominant factor in faith, else it is not grace. In the Apostolic Fathers grace did not have that radical character” in (T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, 133).

- (a) Clement of Rome.
In four passages Clement in his letter to the Corinthians connects the blood of Christ with redemption. In 7:4 he states, “*Let us fix our eyes on*

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the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is unto His Father, because being shed for our salvation it won for the whole world the grace of repentance" (cf. also 12.7 and 49.6). The blood appears as the means of redemption; it is procured by Christ; it is directed to the Father; and it has won the possibility of human repentance.

(b) Ignatius of Antioch.

To the Trallians he writes (2.2): Christ "died for us that believing on His death ye might escape death." The Philadelphia church "rejoices in the passion of our Lord 'and is saluted' in the blood of Jesus Christ (Introduction)." To the Smyrneans he writes (6.1): "*Even the heavenly beings, if they believe not in the blood of Christ, judgment awaiteth them also.*" Ignatius' devotion to Christ's cross is as notable as his love for His person (*To the Ephesians*, 18.10: "*My spirit is devoted to the Cross.*" However, like Clement, he gives us no theory.

(c) Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*, 8: "Let us, then, continue unceasingly in our hope (7) and in the Pledge of our justification, that is, in Jesus Christ, who bore our sins in His own body on the tree (8) who did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth (9); yet, for our sakes, that we might live in Him (10), He endured everything."

(d) Other Fathers.

The *Didaché* and Hermas never connect redemption with the death of Christ. (In the *Didaché* Christ is a revealer of knowledge and in Hermas He is a laborer that reveals a new law. *The Epistle of Barnabas* connects forgiveness with blood (5.1— "For to this end the Lord endured to deliver His flesh unto corruption that by the remission of sins we might be cleansed which cleansing is through the blood of His sprinkling" [then he quotes Isaiah 53]). He then says (7.2): "If then the Son of God suffered that His wound might give us life let us believe that the Son of God could not suffer except for our sakes." Elsewhere he speaks (14.5) of Christ redeeming us out "of the darkness of our hearts."

- (e) *The Epistles of Diognetus*, which is collected in the Fathers but is actually last second century, has a lovely passage (4.2–6): “And when our iniquity had been fully accomplished, and it had been made perfectly manifest that punishment and death were expected as its recompense, and the season came which God had ordained, when henceforth He should manifest His goodness and power (O the exceeding great kindness and love of God), He hated us not, neither rejected us nor bore us malice, but was long-suffering and patient, and in pity for us took upon Himself our sins, and Himself parted with His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the guileless for the evil, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but His righteousness would have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us lawless and ungodly men to have been justified, save only in the Son of God? O the sweet exchange, O the inscrutable creation O the unexpected benefits; that the iniquity of many should be concealed in one Righteous Man, and the righteousness of One should justify many that are iniquitous! Having then in the former time demonstrated the inability of our nature to obtain life, and having now revealed a Saviour able to save even creatures which have no ability, He willed that for both reasons we should believe in His goodness and should regard Him as nurse, father, teacher, counselor, physician, mind, light, honor, glory, strength and life.”

(5) The Doctrines of Salvation in the Church Fathers.

As the Church Fathers have evidenced a theological vagueness (i.e., a non-speculative spirit) in the previous doctrines that we have studied, it is also true of the doctrines of sin and grace. Kelley writes (163): “For the most part, however, they are rehearsing the clichés of catechetical instruction, so that what they say smacks more of affirmation than explanation. While taking it for granted that men are sinful, ignorant, and in need of true life, they never attempt to account for their wretched plight.”

- (a) In the West.

- i) Clement of Rome grants that men are in need of divine blessing (that “they may obtain thy favor” [61]), which is only granted through Christ (16– “Ye see, dearly beloved, what is the pattern that hath been given unto us; for, if the Lord was thus lowly of mind, what should we do, who through Him have been brought under the yoke of His grace”). In a rather nice passage he states (32–33):

Letter to the Corinthians, 32: We, therefore, who have been called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, neither by our wisdom or understanding or piety, not by the works we have wrought in holiness of heart, but by the faith by which almighty God has justified all men from the beginning: To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. What, then, shall we do, brethren? Shall we cease from good works, and shall we put an end to love? May the Master forbid that such should ever happen among us; rather, let us be eager to perform every good work earnestly and willingly.

In another place he writes (7):

Let us fix our gaze on the blood of Christ and know how precious it is to His Father, because it was poured out for our salvation and brought the grace of repentance to the whole world. Let us look back over all the generations, and let us learn that in generation after generation the Master has given a place of repentance to all those who have the will to turn to Him.

In chapter 32 he comments rather perceptively:

- ii) *The Shepherd* of Hermas seems to conceive sin as outward acts and an inward desire (sins and sin); Hermas is the only Father to broach an idea of a sin nature with a rabbinical concept of a wicked imagination or desire (*Mandate*, 12:1.1, 12:2.2). And yet

salvation is seen in a moral self-motivated context (*Mandate*, 12:6.2). “If ye turn unto the Lord with your whole heart, and work righteousness the remaining days of your life, and serve Him rightly according to His will, He will give healing to your former and ye shall have power to master the works of the devil.”

(b) In the East.

- i) *The Epistle of Barnabas* contains the only hint that the Fathers connected mankind’s plight to the narrative of Genesis 3, but this reference is indirect (12: “For the Lord caused all manner of serpents to bite them, and they died forasmuch as the transgression was wrought in Eve through the serpent”) although he later suggests that the souls of infants are sinless (6: “He renewed us in the remission of sins, He made us to be a new type, so that we should have the soul of children”). In a somewhat clear passage he writes (16): “But let us enquire whether there be any temple of God. There is; in the place where He Himself undertakes to make and finish it. For it is written; And it shall come to pass, when the week is being accomplished, the temple of God shall be built gloriously in the name of the Lord. I find then that there is a temple. How then shall it be built in the name of the Lord? Understand ye. Before we believed on God, the abode of our heart was corrupt and weak, a temple truly built by hands; for it was full of idolatry and was a house of demons, because we did whatsoever was contrary to God. But it shall be built in the name of the Lord. Give heed then that the temple of the Lord may be built gloriously. How? Understand ye. By receiving the remission of our sins and hoping on the Name we became new, created afresh from the beginning. Wherefore God dwelleth truly in our habitation within us. How? The word of His faith, the calling of His promise, the wisdom of the ordinances, the

commandments of the teaching, He Himself prophesying in us, He Himself dwelling in us, opening for us who had been in bondage unto death the door of the temple, which is the mouth, and giving us repentance leadeth us to the incorruptible temple. For he that desireth to be saved looketh not to the man, but to Him that dwelleth and speaketh in him, being amazed at this that he has never at any time heard these words from the mouth of the speaker, nor himself ever desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple built up to the Lord.”

Yet at the same time salvation is conceived within a moral context (Christ the new lawgiver). Classically he writes (19): “Thou shalt work with thy hands for a ransom for thy sins.”

- ii) *The Homily of Clement* has some particularly interesting statements relative to sin and salvation. This homily recognizes that all mankind is sinful and full of evil lust (13:1 “we are full of much folly and wickedness”). This state of sinfulness calls for repentance which is not so much a change of mind as a change of habits by good works (16:4: “Almsgiving therefore is a good thing, even as repentance from sin. Fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving than both. And love covereth a multitude of sins, but prayer out of a good conscience delivereth from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these. For almsgiving lifteth off the burden of sin;” (8:6) “Keep the flesh pure and the seal (baptism) unstained, to the end that we may receive life;” (6:9) “But if even such righteous men as these cannot by their righteous deeds deliver their children, with what confidence shall we, if we keep not our baptism pure and undefiled, enter unto the Kingdom of God? On who shall be our advocate, unless we be found having holy and righteous works”).

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iii) Ignatius writes (*To the Smyrneans*, 2, 3):

“He underwent all these sufferings for us, so that we might be saved; and He truly suffered, just as He truly raised Himself, not as some unbelievers contend, when they say that His passion was merely in appearance. It is they who exist only in appearance; and as their notion, so shall it happen to them: they will be bodies and ghost-like shapes. I know and believe that He was in the flesh even after the resurrection. And when He came to those with Peter He said to them: “Here, now, touch Me, and see that I am not a bodiless ghost.” Immediately they touched Him and, because of the merging of His flesh and spirit, they believed. For the same reason they despised death and in fact were proven superior to death. After His resurrection He ate and drank with them as a being of flesh, although He was united in spirit to the Father.”

Again to the Philadelphians (8):

I beseech you, therefore, do nothing in a spirit of division, but act according to Christian teaching. Indeed, I heard some men saying: “If I do not find it in the official records in the gospel I do not believe.” And when I made answer to them, “It is written!” they replied, “That is the point at issue.” But to me, the official record is Jesus Christ; the inviolable record is His cross, His death, and His resurrection, and the faith which He brings about:—in these I desire to be justified by your prayers.”

iv) Polycarp to the Philippians (8):

“Let us, then, continue unceasingly in our hope and in the Pledge of our justification, that is, in Christ Jesus, who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, who did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth; yet, for our sakes, that we might live in Him He

endured everything.”

(6) The Sacraments and the Church Fathers.

(a) The Sacrament of Baptism.

From the beginning baptism was universally accepted as the rite of admission to the Church; similarly “it was *always* held to convey the remission of sins,” writes Kelley (194). Barnabas tells us for example (11):

“This He saith, because we go down into the water laden with sins and filth, and rise up from it bearing fruit in the heart, resting our fear and hope on Jesus in the spirit. *And whosoever shall eat of these shall live forever*; He meaneth this; whosoever, saith He, shall hear these things spoken and shall believe, shall live forever.”

The Didaché (7):

“In regard to Baptism—baptize thus: After the foregoing instructions, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. If you have no living water, then baptize in other water; and if you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Before the Baptism, let the one baptizing and the one to be baptized fast, as also any others who are able. Command the one who is to be baptized to fast beforehand for one or two days.”

The Shepherd of Hermas (Parable, 9; 16):

They had need, [the shepherd] said, “to come up through the water, so that they might be made alive; for they could not otherwise enter into the kingdom of God, except by putting away the mortality of their former life. These also, then, who had fallen asleep, received the seal of the Son of God, and entered into the kingdom of God. For, he said “before a man bears the name of the Son of God, he is dead. But when he receives the seal, he puts mortality aside and again receives life. The seal,

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therefore, is the water. They go down into the water dead, and come out of it alive.”

Again (*Mandate*, 4, 3, 1): “Sir,” I said, “I will continue to question you.” “Speak,” he replied. “I have heard, sir,” said I, from some teachers, that there is no other repentance except that which took place when we went down into the water and obtained the remission of our former sins.”

(b) The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

The early church held an ambivalence concerning the table for they saw it both in terms of a physical reality and a thanksgiving. Of importance is that it focused on a past event, not an ongoing reality. The Church conceived the Eucharist with a natural and unconcerned realism. *The Didaché* states (9–10):

“9. But as touching the Eucharistic thanksgiving give ye thanks thus. First, as regards the cup: We give Thee thanks O our Father, for the holy vine of Thy son David, which Thou madest known unto us through Thy Son Jesus; Thine is the glory forever and ever. Then as regards the broken bread: We give Thee thanks, O our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou didst make known unto us through Thy Son Jesus; Thine is the glory forever and ever. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever and ever. But let no one eat or drink of this eucharistic thanksgiving, but they that have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord hath said: Give not that which is holy to the dogs.”

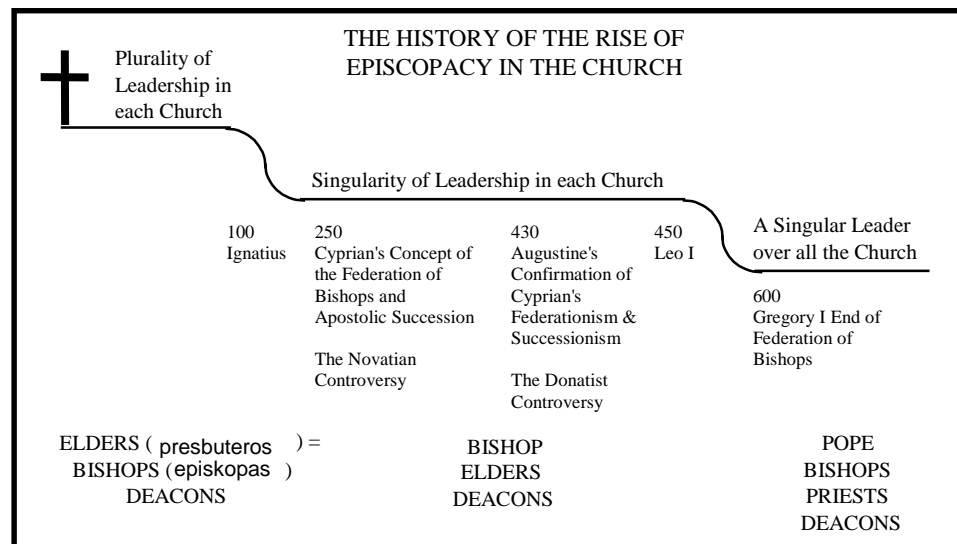
“10. And after ye are satisfied thus give ye thanks: We give Thee thanks, Holy Father, for Thy holy name, which Thou hast made to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which Thou hast made known unto us through Thy Son Jesus; Thine is the glory for ever and ever. Thou, Almighty Master, didst create all things for Thy name's sake, and didst give food and

Church Fathers

drink unto men for enjoyment, that they might render thanks to Thee; but didst bestow upon us spiritual food and drink and eternal life through Thy Son. Before all things we give Thee thanks that Thou art powerful; Thine is the glory for ever and ever.”

Ignatius says even more graphically (*To the Ephesians*, 20): “Breaking one bread which is the medicine of immortality and antidote that we should not die but live forever in Jesus Christ.”

- (7) The Doctrine of Ecclesiology: the shift to singularity of the bishop’s office.



- (a) Jerusalem: early leadership was in the hands of the family of Jesus (e.g., James).
- (b) Alexandria: Evidence is sparse, but it appears that the elders elected one of their number as bishop.
- (c) Syria and Rome: a witness to plurality of church leaders in each church.
 - i) *The Didaché* (which may be Syrian) mentions itinerant apostles and prophets.

“Now about the apostles and prophets: Act in line with the Gospel precept. Welcome every apostle on arriving, as if he were the Lord. But he must not stay beyond one day.

In case of necessity, however, the next day too. If he stays three days, he is a false prophet. On departing, an apostle must not accept anything save sufficient food to carry him till his next lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.”

It also addresses more fixed elected officials. They are plural in number and chosen by the congregation.

“You must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are a credit to the Lord, men who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well tried. For their ministry to you are identical with that of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for along with the prophets and teachers they enjoy a place of honor among you.”

- ii) Hermas of Rome recognizes with Clement of Rome a plurality of local leadership (*Vision*. 2, 4).

“[Hermas recounts that the old woman who is the Church came to him in a vision and said:] Therefore shall you write two little books and send one to Clement and one to Grapte. Clement shall then send it to the cities abroad, because that is his duty; and Grapte shall instruct the widows and the orphans. (But you shall read it in this city along with the presbyters who are in charge of the Church).”

**The evidence suggests that the church in Rome was led by a plurality of leaders in the first and second centuries. Hans Kung, a Roman Catholic scholar, states: “...the monarchical episcopate was introduced to Rome relatively late (The Catholic Church, 41). The first certain date of a single bishop is 222, Urban I; the first to claim; the primacy of Peter was Stephen in the third century; the first to appeal to Matt. 16:18 was Damascus I (366–84); the first to claim that all the churches were answerable

Church Fathers

to Rome was Julius I (337–52); Siricus I (384–99) was the first in the West to call himself “pope”.

- (d) Syria - a witness to singularity of church leadership.

Ignatius of Antioch has as his frequent theme “do nothing without the bishop”. He clearly presents the picture of a single bishop over each church (*To the Trallians*, 2).

Letter to the Trallians, 2: “Indeed, when you submit to the bishop as you would to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are living not in the manner of men but as Jesus Christ, who died for us, that through faith in His death you might escape dying. [2] It is necessary, therefore, —and such is your practice, — that you do nothing without the bishop, and that you be subject also to the presbytery, as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we shall be found, if we live in Him. [3] It is necessary also that the deacons, the dispensers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, be in every way pleasing to all men. For they are not the deacons of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God. They must, therefore, guard against blame as against fire.”

“Be careful, then, to observe a single Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and one cup of his blood that makes us one, and one altar, just as there is one bishop along with the presbytery and the deacons.”

To the Smyrneans (8):

“You must all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist, which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. Nor is it permitted without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate the agape; but whatever he approve, this too is pleasing to God, so that whatever is done will be secure and

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valid.”

To the Ephesians (3):

“In like manner let everyone respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ, and just as they respect the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and college of Apostles. Without these, it cannot be called a Church. I am confident that you accept this, for I have received the exemplar of your love and have it with me in the person of your bishop. His very demeanor is a great lesson, and his meekness is his strength. I believe that even the godless do respect him.”

To the Ephesians (7):

“He that is within the sanctuary is pure; but he that is outside the sanctuary is not pure. In other words, anyone who acts without the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons does not have a clean conscience.”

The test of one’s doctrine is following the bishop.

The Episcopal office comes from God, not from man.

Christians are to respect him as they respect God the Father.

- (e) Rome: I Clement articulates the teaching of apostolic succession (but no monarchical view).
 - God the Father sends Christ.
 - Christ sends the apostles.
 - The apostles send their successors.

“The Apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ was sent from God. [2] Christ, therefore, is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both of these orderly arrangements, then, are by God’s will. [3] Receiving their instructions and being full of confidence on account of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and confirmed in faith by the word of God, they went forth in the complete

assurance of the Holy Spirit, preaching the good news that the Kingdom of God is coming. [4] Through countryside and city they preached; and they appointed their earliest converts (13), testing them by the spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. [5] Nor was this a novelty: for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier. Indeed, Scripture somewhere says: “I will set up their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith (14)” *Letter to the Corinthians*, 42.

“Indeed, when you submit to the bishop as you would to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are living not in the manner of men but as Jesus Christ, who died for us, that through faith in His death you might escape dying. It is necessary, therefore,—and such is your practice,—that you do nothing without the bishop, and that you be subject also to the presbytery, as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we shall be found, if we live in Him. It is necessary also that the deacons, the dispensers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, be in every way pleasing to all men. For they are not the deacons of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God. They must, therefore, guard against blame as against fire” (*To the Corinthians*, 2).

God → Christ → Apostles → Apostles' Successors

Parenthesis: The Ignatian emphasis (monarchical bishop) will be combined with the emphasis of I Clement (apostolic succession), and we will then have the Episcopal form of church polity.

MONARCHICAL
BISHOP

+

APOSTOLIC
SUCCESSION

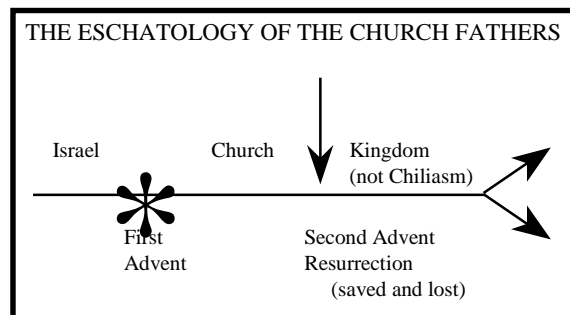
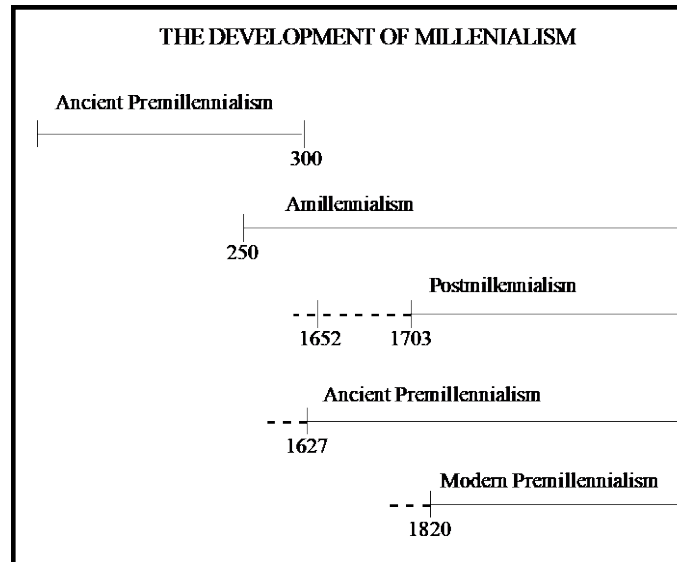
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EPISCOPAL
ECCLESIOLOGY

Ignatius of
Antioch

Clement of
Rome

(8) The Eschatology of the Church Fathers



Florovsky, “Eschatology in the Patristic Age,” *Studia Patristica* (II. 250) wrote: “The Fathers never attempted a systematic exposition of eschatology, in a narrow and technical sense. But they were fully aware of that inner logic which had to come from the belief in Christ the Redeemer so the hope for the age to come: the end of the world, the final consummation, the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting.” Lampe (*Eschatology*, 17–18) says: “Consistency is not one of the characteristics of the Fathers.” Certain themes do clearly emerge in the Fathers. Kelley writes (462): “Four chief moments dominate the eschatological expectation of early Christian theology—the return of Christ, known as the Parousia, the resurrection, the judgment, and the catastrophic ending of the present world-order. In the primitive period they were held together in a naive, unreflective fashion, with little or no attempt to work out their implications or solve the problems they

raise.”

- (a) The Fathers and a Physical Resurrection.
 - i) There is universal assent among the writers/writings of this period to the *resurrection*, with the majority of them stressing the resurrection of the flesh. For example note I Clement 26: “Do we then think it to be a great and marvelous thing, if the Creator of the universe shall bring about the resurrection of them that have served Him with holiness in the assurance of a good faith, seeing that He showeth to us even by a bird the magnificence of His promise? For He saith in a certain place; And Thou shalt raise me up, and I will praise Thee; and; I went to rest and slept, I was awaked, for Thou art with me.”

Again Ignatius wrote to the Trallians (9):
“Be ye deaf therefore, when any man speaketh to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him. His Father, I say, will raise us in Christ Jesus apart from whom we have not true life.”

- ii) All the writers/writings of this period mention the resurrection of believers without discussing the resurrection of the wicked dead. The focus is clearly upon the hope of believers (I Clement 11:1, 12:7, 26:1, 27:1, 28:1, 51:1, 57:2, 58:1). II Clement 19 clearly teaches that immortality is the result of the resurrection. Ignatius makes it clear that heretics have no part in this resurrection (*To the Smyrneans*, 70) (cf. *To the Smyrneans*, 4, 5; Ephesians. 11; *To*

The Romans, 4; *To the Trallian's*, 9).

- iii) There is no consistent pattern of when these writers/writings viewed the time of the resurrection. I Clement places it at the Second Advent (24), Barnabas before the kingdom (5), and the Didaché after the Tribulation but before the Second Advent (16).
- (b) The Fathers and the Second Advent.
- i) The theme of immediacy is dominate in the Fathers. It is clearly set forth in I Clement 23; II Clement 11, 12; *Barnabas* 2; *Didaché* 10; and Ignatius (*To the Romans*, 10, *To Polycarp*, 3).
 - ii) This imminent appearing is clearly a visible appearing as stated in the *Didaché* (16) and II Clement (17). Clement noted: “And let us not think to give heed and believe now only, while we are admonished by the presbyters; but likewise when we have departed home, let us remember the commandments of the Lord, and not suffer ourselves to be dragged off the other way by our worldly lusts; but coming hither more frequently, let us strive to go forward in the commands of the Lord, that we all having the same mind may be gathered together unto life. For the Lord said, I come to gather together all the nations, tribes, and languages.
- Herein He speaketh of the day of His appearing, when He shall come and redeem us, each man according to his works. And the unbelievers shall see His glory and His might: and they shall be amazed when they see the kingdom of the world given to Jesus, saying, Woe unto us, for Thou wast, and we knew it not, and believed not; and we obeyed not the presbyters when they told us of our salvation.”
- iii) As indicated in the above quote, the Fathers associated the Advent with the

establishment of the kingdom. Many of the writer's writings perceive the primary purpose of the Second Advent to be the judging of believers and unbelievers (I Clement 34, 35; II Clement 17; *Barnabas* 15).

- (c) The Fathers and the Kingdom
 - i) The Fathers slightly vary the time of the establishment of the kingdom. I Clement places it at the resurrection of believers (50), II Clement at the Second Advent (12) and the resurrection (9), and Barnabas immediately preceding the resurrection (21).
 - ii) The purpose of the kingdom also varies. II Clement sees it as rest for believers (6) and worldwide rule by Christ (17); Barnabas sees it as a time of holiness in which Christians live and rule the earth (6); *Didaché* as a time prepared for the church (9); and Ignatius as the future home for believers (*To the Ephesians*, 16, *To the Magnesians*, 5).

N.B. The time of the judgment of the wicked is seen in II Clement as occurring at the Second Advent (16, 17). Barnabas speaks of it at the Second Advent (15).

- (d) The Fathers, The church and Israel.
The majority of the writers/writings in this period completely identify Israel with the church. This is explicitly stated by I Clement (9-10), II Clement (2, 3), Barnabas (he stresses the fact that the church has taken Israel's place in God's program 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14), and the *Didaché* (9, 14).
- (e) The Fathers and the "Last Days".
II Clement (14) and Ignatius (*To the Magnesians*, 6) maintain that the "Last Days" began with the incarnation. Barnabas (2) and Ignatius (*To the Ephesians*, 11) see special events in the future, such as Great Tribulation (Cf. also the *Didaché*, 16).

Summary:

