

Catechism & Theology Course

Session I, Class IV

10/10/23

“The church’s preaching is the same everywhere, and remains true to itself, supported by the witness of the prophets, the apostles, and all the disciples, from the beginning, through the middle, to the end, in a word, throughout the history of God’s constant activity of saving humanity, and making Himself present to us in faith. This faith never ceases. We receive it from the Church and guard it under the action of the Spirit, like a precious liquid that rejuvenates itself, and the vessel containing it. The Church has been entrusted with this gift of God, just as God gave his breath to the flesh that he fashioned in order that all the members might receive Its Life. And this gift conveys the fullness of union with Christ, that is, the Holy Spirit, pledge of incorruptibility, confirmation of our faith, ladder of our ascent to God... For where the Church is, there the spirit of God is also; and where the Spirit of God is, there the church is, and all grace. In the Spirit is truth.”

- St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III, 24, 15

History of the Early Church (Formation of New Testament)

Gospel of Jesus Christ

- Jesus enters 1st century Judaism (maybe in 4 BC; dates are approximate)
- His ministry is to “the lost sheep of Israel”; entirely in modern-day Israel and Palestine
- Raised/steeped in Jewish tradition
- Preaches the Kingdom of God
- Crucified by His own nation and people

Age of the Apostles

- Christianity is a response to the person of Christ
- Preaching of the Gospels and Good News is oral at first
- Persecution and Martyrdom await Christians
- St. Stefanos, the deacon, the first martyred; early as 34 AD in some accounts
- Era of *kerygma* continues

33 AD Death & Resurrection of Christ, and Pentecost

43 AD Apostle James, Son of Zebedee, Martyred in Jerusalem (Acts 12)

49 AD Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)

62 AD James, Bishop of Jerusalem, Martyred

65 AD Apostles Peter & Paul Martyred in Rome by Nero

99 AD Last living Apostle, John the Evangelist, Dies in Ephesus.

Witnessing a conviction about a PERSON, about Christ. Not a text. The Bible is not a Quoran. Jesus is the revelation.

Gospel Accounts:

- Mark: Likely written about 60 AD; before 70 AD (No mention of the fall of Jerusalem.)
- Luke: Written in Greece or Asia Minor in 70-80 AD
- Matthew: Written in Antioch. Could have been as early as 50 AD, but likely 70 AD. May have been written over a period of years. St. Ignatius of Antioch (67-107 AD), is one of the earliest witnesses to reference this text.
- John: Written in 96 AD, at the very end of his life (c. 96-100 AD)

Concerning Some of the Letters/Authors:

- Acts of the Apostles: Written by Luke, after his account of the Gospel, about 75-85 AD
- St. Paul's Letters: Thessalonians is likely the first, written in Corinth in about 50-51 AD. Galatians is also suggested as perhaps his earliest work. Though clearly written by Paul, the Orthodox find the dates unclear.
- St. James Epistle: Written in Jerusalem in 55-60 AD. Considered by some to be the earliest book. Written after martyrdom of St. Stephen

Scriptures Produced by the Church.

No "New Testament" as such at first. The Church is inspired by Christ, and references OT "scripture" and eyewitness accounts. Gradually Church brings together the writings of St. Paul and others constitutes the apostolic witness and message of the cross, death, and resurrection.

A litmus for the acceptance of certain literature and writings was that they coincided with the received Tradition which the Church had possessed since the day of Pentecost. Authorship was also important, as was the message of crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Scriptures in Orthodoxy has always been interpreted in the context of tradition

Early Church: Age of Persecution & Roman Empire

- Church has a direct line of continuity to Jesus Christ: James, the brother of the Lord, is Bishop of Jerusalem, and Peter, along with his disciples, and St. Paul's establishing communities all over the world
- These early communities still exist
- No static, dynamic: the Church is a living organism, a Mystery with institutions
- From even before Pentecost; a history in the Jewish
- Texts from 150 detailing Christian worship
- Greek language, roman law, art impact church environment

Importance of *Pax Romana*; but Christ is the real reason. Christianity goes beyond roman world

- Church grows.
- By third century, persecution is a mass phenomena
- Christians make up % 10 of Roman population
- Care for the poor a distinguishing marker
- Also, equality before God a major impact- cutting across social, economic, and ethnic fabric
- Message of salvation the principle cause of expansion

Dates:

- 67 AD Ignatius, Student of John the Evangelist, made bishop of Church in Antioch
- 92 AD Clement Becomes Bishop of Rome
- 107 AD Ignatius Martyred in Rome by Trajan
- 69-155 AD Polycarp of Smyrna
- c. 130-c. 202 AD Irenaeus of Lyon
- c. 114 – 165 AD Justin the Philosopher & Martyr

Early Administration

- Led by apostles, itinerant, not stationary. At outset of second century, based upon Acts, threefold pattern (bishop, elder, deacon) of Church leadership in place
- Led by councils
- Apostles established bishops to preside over the Eucharist

Looking Forward:

- 312-13 AD Edict of Milan from Constantine
- 325 AD First Ecumenical Council – Nicaea ; 318 Bishops present. Held under Constantine the Great.
 - o Creed Articulated
 - o Upheld the Divinity of Christ; against Arius.
- 381 AD Second Ecumenical Council – Constantinople; 150 Bishops present. Held under Emperor Theodosius the Great.
 - o Creed is completed
 - o Theology of the Holy Spirit Articulated; against Macedonius
- 397 AD Council in Carthage settles Books of the Bible (?); first three centuries not settled yet