

The Church in the 2nd & 3rd Centuries

Troubles Inside and Outside

PART ONE: THE SECOND CENTURY

I. Persecution: The Church Under Fire

A. Why Christians Were Persecuted

1. Initially sheltered under Judaism (a permitted religion in Rome)
2. By early 2nd century, a deep divide had opened between Jews and Christians
3. Core issue: allegiance. "Jesus is Lord" vs. "Caesar is Lord" — no compromise possible
4. Emperor Trajan (AD 112): first official policy making Christianity a capital crime

II. Key Figures: The Apologists

B. Polycarp of Smyrna (c. AD 70-160)

5. Bishop of Smyrna; personally knew the apostle John
6. Letter to the Philippians — composed largely of NT quotations; warns against Docetism
7. *Martyrdom*: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury"

C. Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 35-110)

8. Bishop of Antioch; condemned to Rome and martyred (~AD 110)
9. Letters to churches: argued for single leader per church; condemned Docetism

D. Justin Martyr (c. AD 100-165)

10. Wandering evangelist; wrote two volumes of Apology defending Christianity to Rome
11. Argued Christianity fulfilled Greek philosophy; provides best account of 2nd-century worship
12. Executed under Marcus Aurelius (c. AD 165)

E. Irenaeus of Lyon (c. AD 130-200)

13. Discipleship chain: John taught Polycarp; Polycarp taught Irenaeus
14. Most important church father of the 2nd century; bishop of Lyon after persecution of AD 177
15. Greatest work: *Against Heresies* — thorough refutation of Gnosticism (survived completely intact)

III. Development of the Church in the Apostolic Age

F. Church Organization

16. Threefold ministry — bishop, presbyters, deacons — universally accepted by AD 180
17. Bishop = senior pastor ("first among equals"); presbyters = elders; deacons = care for sick/poor

G. Church Worship (per Justin Martyr)

18. Scripture reading, exposition, prayer, Lord's Supper — celebrated every Sunday
19. Singing: responsive psalm-chanting without instruments (instruments considered pagan until ~6th-7th c.)
20. Two parts: Service of the Word (open to all) / Prayers and Eucharist (baptized believers only)

H. Church and Society

21. Christian values clashed with pagan culture at every point
22. Avoided state festivals, theatres, gladiator games; condemned abortion, infanticide, easy divorce
23. Called "self-righteous and anti-social" by their neighbors

IV. False Teachings and Heretical Challenges

I. Docetism

24. From Greek dokeo ("to seem") — Jesus only appeared human; no real incarnation, death, or resurrection
25. Addressed by John in 1 John 4:2-3; condemned by Ignatius and Polycarp

J. Gnosticism (arose c. AD 130-160)

26. Claimed special gnosis (secret knowledge) unavailable to ordinary Christians
27. Core beliefs: material world is evil; inferior Demiurge (OT God) created it; no physical resurrection
28. Humanity's problem = ignorance (not sin); salvation = escaping the body
29. Key leader: Marcion — built rival church, rejected OT, discarded most NT books
30. **Church's threefold response: (1) Rule of Faith, (2) Apostolic Churches, (3) Canon of Scripture**
31. Church acquired a new name: Catholic (Greek katholikos, "universal")

K. Modalism

32. God acts in three modes, not three distinct persons — destroys the gospel
33. Tertullian coined the word "trinity" (trinitas) in response

L. Montanism (c. AD 170)

34. Claimed ongoing prophetic revelation; visions, tongues, ecstasy; date-setting for Christ's return
35. Many prophecies failed; church rejected it: apostolic Scripture cannot coexist with new authoritative prophecy
36. Eventually expelled; survived until 6th century

PART TWO: INTO THE THIRD CENTURY

Central question: How do we counter false teaching? Answer: Sound, systematic theology.

V. Key Figures of the Late 2nd and 3rd Centuries

M. Tertullian of Carthage (c. AD 160-225)

37. Reckless life until ~age 30; converted and became fierce theological defender
38. Apology (AD 196): argued Rome should stop persecuting Christians
39. "*What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?*" — warned against Greek philosophy corrupting Christian truth
40. First to use trinitas; articulated one substance / three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
41. On Christ: one person, two distinct natures — fully God and fully man
42. Later drawn to Montanism; underappreciated in his day; rediscovered in recent centuries

N. Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 185-254)

43. Brilliant prodigy; teaching theology by age 18; fame spread across the empire
44. On First Principles — first known systematic theology in church history
45. First to expound the doctrine of eternal generation of the Son
46. Key errors: two-stage creation; "degrees" of divinity in the Trinity (laid groundwork for Arianism)
47. Greatest theological pioneer who was wrong about almost everything — blazed trails for others to correct
48. Arrested during persecution of 250; died from torture injuries, AD 254

O. Cyprian of Carthage (c. AD 200-258)

49. Former wealthy lawyer and professor; converted 246; elected bishop within 2-3 years; gave fortune away
50. Rebaptism controversy: baptism outside the church is invalid (opposed by Bishop Stephen of Rome)
51. Elevated the bishop above presbyters — early seeds of Roman Catholic hierarchy
52. *"You cannot have God as Father who does not have the church as mother"*
53. Beheaded in the Valerian persecution, AD 258