

## 1. EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

### A. The Apostolic Fathers.

1. *The first church history was written by Luke; it is called the Acts of the Apostles (covering events from the Ascension of Jesus to Paul's arrival in Rome, before 65 AD).*
2. *The Apostolic Fathers begin with influential church leaders or thinkers after the time of the apostles, some of whom were said to be converted by certain apostles.*
  - (a) Clement of Rome (c.96), sometimes said to be the third Bishop of Rome.
  - (b) Ignatius (c.35–c.107), the second Bishop of Antioch, who became a legend because of his looking forward to martyrdom—to be the 'wheat of Christ' by being torn to bits by the lions.
  - (c) Polycarp (c.69–c.155), Bishop of Smyrna, possibly a convert of John, made legendary by his martyrdom.
  - (d) The Didache, a short Christian manual on morals and Christian practice. It calls for baptism by immersion if possible, otherwise by threefold affusion (sprinkling or pouring water).
  - (e) Hermas (second century), author of *The Shepherd*.

### B. The Apologists.

1. *This is the name given to certain Christian writers who set themselves to the task of defending the faith to outsiders.*
2. *They aimed to make converts among the educated.*
  - (a) Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165).
  - (b) Tatian (c.160), probably a Gnostic.
  - (c) Tertullian (c.160–c.220), a great theologian.
  - (d) Irenaeus (c.130–c.200), opponent of Gnosticism.

### **C. Some Church Fathers.**

- (1) Origen (d.254), a great scholar.
- (2) Cyprian (d.258), Bishop of Carthage.
- (3) Ambrose (d.397), Bishop of Milan.
- (4) Augustine (d.430), Bishop of Hippo.

### **D. The mounting influence and power of the Church of Rome.**

1. *Irenaeus gave weight to the tradition that it was founded by Peter and Paul.*
2. *Widespread belief that Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome under Nero (c.64 AD).*
3. *The fact that the church in Rome held up with great vigour under persecution by Nero.*
4. *Paul's epistle to the Romans served to thrust the church there into some prominence.*
5. *The prestige of being situated in the capital of the empire, 'the eternal city'.*
6. *Apparently by AD 100 it was the largest church in Christendom.*
7. *Its successful resistance of Gnosticism and other forces strengthened its reputation.*
8. *It is thought that the Apostolic Creed (c.150–170) was formed there.*
9. *It was looked to for leadership and orthodoxy by opponents of Gnosticism, especially Irenaeus.*
  - (a) *He said, 'It is a matter of necessity that every church should agree with this church,' meaning the church at Rome.*
  - (b) *It was apparently the only church in the West with which any of the apostles was associated.*
10. *It continued to have a number of strong and gifted men as its bishops.*
11. *There was a decline of Christian influence in Asia Minor and elsewhere where one might have expected great leadership. Note: Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 and again in 135.*

12. *The influence of the Epistle of Clement of Rome.*
13. *The Edict of Valentinian III (445), Emperor, affirming the primacy of the Pope.*
14. *The Chalcedonian Formula (451), drawn up by Leo, Bishop of Rome. It was acclaimed, 'Peter has spoken through the mouth of Leo.'*

## **E. Baptism, as it was understood.**

1. *Symbolic view; that baptism is a symbol of several things:*
  - (a) Christ's death, burial and resurrection.
  - (b) The believer's spiritual participation in Christ's death, burial and resurrection.
  - (c) A wholly new relationship to Christ.
  - (d) A cleansing from sin.
  - (e) The reception of the Holy Spirit.
  - (f) The result: admission to the church.
2. *Sacramental view: it is a rite which actually cleanses from sin whereby the grace of God is mediated to the recipient and regeneration is effected.*
3. *Changes in the meaning of baptism:*
  - (a) It came to be regarded as indispensable. 'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned' ([Mark 16:16](#)).
  - (b) Hermas regarded it as the very foundation of the church; for it washes away all previous sins.
  - (c) Justin said that baptism effected separation and illumination; washing away all previous sins.
  - (d) Tertullian believed it conveyed eternal life itself.
4. *Infant baptism.*

- (a) First mentioned by Irenaeus in an obscure way.
- (b) Tertullian discouraged it, holding that character should be formed first.
- (c) Constantine (d.337), who made the Roman Empire officially 'Christian', felt one should not be baptised until one was sure one would not sin again. (He waited until just before his death.)
- (d) Origen (d.254) said it was an apostolic custom.
- (e) Cyprian (d.258) favoured its earliest possible reception.
- (f) Probable reasons for the rise of infant baptism:
  - (1) Original sin, articulated by Augustine (d.430).
  - (2) Outside the church 'there is no salvation' (Cyprian), and baptism is the entrance requirement.
  - (3) Interpretation of Christ's words, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit' ([John 3:5](#)).
- (g) Became universal in the sixth century.

##### 5. *Mode of baptism.*

- (a) The New Testament seems to assume immersion.
  - (1) The Greek word is *baptizo* (to plunge in water).
  - (2) Calvin, who did not immerse, granted that it was so in the New Testament.
- (b) Immersion prevailed until the late Middle Ages in the West; it is still practised in the East.
- (c) The Didache stated immersion was preferable, where there is 'running water'.
- (d) Affusion (sprinkling water) eventually replaced immersion owing to convenience.

##### 6. *By Tertullian's time an elaborate ritual had developed:*

- (a) First, a formal renunciation of evil by the candidate.
- (b) A threefold immersion.
- (c) The newly baptised tasted a mixture of milk and honey, symbolising a newborn babe.
- (d) He or she was then anointed with oil.
- (e) Hands were laid on him or her, in token of the reception of the Holy Spirit.
- (f) Tertullian is the first to reveal the existence of sponsors, or godparents.

## **F. The Lord's Supper.**

### 1. *The New Testament setting.*

(a) The New Testament seems to refer to two meals observed by early Christians.

(1) The Supper instituted by Christ in the Upper Room ([Luke 22:19–20](#)).

(2) An *agape* meal or love feast; a 'breaking of bread'; a common meal which was a bond of fellowship and a means of support for the needy ([Acts 2:46](#); cf. [Jude 12](#)).

(b) In many instances they seem to have been practised jointly ([1 Corinthians 11:20ff.](#)).

(c) In the second century the two were separate and the *agape* meal was later dropped.

2. *The use of the term 'eucharist' (thanksgiving, from eucharistia—[1 Corinthians 11:24](#) and [Matthew 26:27ff.](#)), by Justin Martyr referred to the supper and was retained largely by Catholicism.*

3. *Ignatius used two metaphors to describe the Supper:*

(a) 'Medicine of immortality'.

- (b) 'Antidote to death' which gives eternal life in Jesus Christ.
4. *By the late second century, the conception of a 'real presence' of Christ in the Supper was widespread.*
- (a) The Supper was looked upon as a sacrifice by Irenaeus and Tertullian.
- (b) Of course, a sacrifice demands a priest.
- (1) With Cyprian, the Supper is regarded as a sacrifice offered to God by a priest.
- (2) By 253 the Supper was seen as a sacrament, in which Christ is really present.
5. *The emergence of the Mass (fourth century).*
- (a) It was composed of two parts:
- (1) The sacrifice of the Mass.
- (2) The eucharist, or communion; the prayer of thanks which preceded the Supper.
- (b) Ambrose (d.397) applied to the eucharist the Latin expression *missam facere* ('to perform the Mass').
- (1) It comes from *missa* and *mittere* (to send).
- (2) The word was apparently used to dismiss the unbaptised from the part of the service when the Supper was observed.
6. *By the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church turned the eucharist into a refined dogma, known as transubstantiation.*
- (a) With a wave of the priest's hand and the words, 'Hoc est corpus meum' (this is my body), the bread is said to become the body of Christ.
- (b) The same sort of thing was done to the wine, making it to become the blood of Christ.

## **G. The church.**

1. *Apostolic succession, wherein it is held that the ministry is derived from the apostles by a continuous succession.*

(a) Bishops are said to be successors to the apostles because:

(1) They perform the functions of apostles.

(2) Their commission goes back to the apostles.

(3) Their continuity can be traced back to the apostles.

(b) This was first emphasised by Clement of Rome.

(c) It was elaborated on by Irenaeus and Cyprian.

(d) This is the foundation for the Episcopalian form of church government.

(1) The church's authority lies with the bishop.

(2) Apostolic succession is assumed.

2. *The Church and salvation.*

(a) Cyprian is the first to use the phrase, 'No salvation outside the church.' He also said, 'He cannot have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother.'

3. *The Church and State.*

(a) In 313 the Emperor Constantine saw a vision of the cross and the words, 'With this sign you will conquer.'

(b) This led to his conversion and decree to identify the Roman Empire with the Church.

(1) Until then the Church was without any connection to the State.

(2) After then the Church under Constantine became identified with the State.

4. *The sacraments eventually evolved to seven: baptism, the eucharist, holy*

orders, marriage, extreme unction, confirmation, penance.