

# 22

## The Age of Shadows

100

**T**he first century closed with the death of the last of the apostles. We no longer have the New Testament as our guide to study the history of the Church of God. And because very little remains of church writings, most of what we know about the church comes from the writings of its adversaries.

Our plotting the history of the church is not unlike canoeing down a creek. Imagine an explorer who canoed from Lake Itasca in Minnesota down the length of the Mississippi River, across the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, and over the Mediterranean Sea to Jerusalem.

The Mississippi is very narrow at its source—so narrow one can jump across it. The Bible, Luke’s book of Acts in particular, is very descriptive of the beginning of the church. We can know exactly how, when and where it began.

But as we follow the explorer’s path down the Mississippi, the river grows wider. We can know we are heading in the same direction but can we know whether he coasted down the left bank, right bank, or down the middle? We can’t know for sure. And in the latter part of the book of Acts we have no

report of the other apostles—only Paul. And we have nothing about him following his first imprisonment.

As we head into the Gulf of Mexico, we know the general direction our explorer went—East. And we may know some of his stops. We can be fairly sure we are following his exact path but there is a bigger margin of error. The same is true as we traced Paul’s travels after his first imprisonment by his brief comments in his letters.

Once we hit the Atlantic Ocean it becomes extremely difficult to follow the path of this imaginary explorer. We have some clues but they are scant. As we leave behind the Bible, our following of God’s church also becomes difficult.

As we cross the Mediterranean and near the Holy Land—and walk the final leg to Jerusalem, our accuracy would pick up. So, too, as we near the present day in our study of God’s church, we’ll find it easier to trace its history.

“For fifty years after St. Paul’s life, a curtain hangs over the church, through which we vainly strive to look; and when it at last rises, about 129 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church in

many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul" (*Story of the Christian Church* by Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 41).

The reason for the changes? God's small, persecuted church had gone underground. What arose and was recognized as the "Christian" church was not the Church of God but the beginnings of the Roman Catholic Church—Satan's clever counterfeit.

"After the death of the Apostles Paul, Peter, and John, the history of the early church is confined to the writings of the Church Fathers, so called, who penned their epistles perhaps in sincerity, but not under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as did the apostles. While we may consider the epistles of these early writers from a historical viewpoint, we cannot consider them as a basis of doctrine, or faith, for their opinions are varied, the one contradicting the other..."

"Irenius, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Jerome, Justain Martyr, Dionysius, and Apolinaris, were all early writers of the church. Their writings in the first centuries, after the death of the original apostles and disciples, were laborious and expensive, being mostly confined to baked clay tablets, and some parchments, and bark from trees. These writing remained, much of which was found in the great library of Alexandria, Egypt, where they were totally destroyed by the followers of Mohammed, early in the sixth century..."

"Thus the early writings became extinct with the exceptions of fragments having been taken to Rome and Constantinople. As the contention between the Bishops of Jerusalem and Alexandria with those of the West, and especially with Rome, became intense, the original writings of these men were either totally destroyed, or forever concealed, and new and spurious works printed during the seventh century, the writings being so changed, in revisions, they could scarcely be recognized" (Dugger and Dodd, pp. 62-64).

In the remainder of this chapter and in the two which follow, we will study the lives and writings of John's three disciples: Pa-

pias, Ignatius and Polycarp.

### Papias of Hierapolis

Papias, after being trained by John at Ephesus, became bishop of the Church of God at Hierapolis, city within a few miles of Colossae and Laodicea, in the Maeander River Valley (Smith, "Papias," p. 237).

The name "Papias" indicates he was a native of the Phrygian area. He also shared in the "enthusiastic religious temper characteristic of Phrygia..." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Papias," Vol. XX, p. 737).

Papias wrote five volumes titled *The Sayings of the Lord Explained*. Irenaeus, who called him "a man of the old time," says these are his only writings: "To these things Papias, who had listened to John and was later a companion of Polycarp, and who lived at a very early date, bears a written testimony in the fourth of his books; he composed five."

Papias wrote the following in the preface to his work: "I shall not hesitate to furnish you, along with the interpretations, with all that in days gone by I carefully learnt from the presbyters and have carefully recalled, for I can guarantee its truth. Unlike most people, I felt at home not with those who had a great deal to say, but with those who taught the truth; not with those who appeal to commandments from other sources but with those who appeal to the commandments given by the Lord to faith and coming to us from truth itself. And whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other disciple of the Lord, and what Aristion (the reputed author of the present ending of Mark's Gospel) and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying. For I did not imagine that the things out of books would help me as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice."

In other passages of his writings, Papias told of certain miraculous events and other

110

matters on the basis of direct information. The apostle Philip resided at Hierapolis with his daughters and Papias, their bishop, heard a “wonderful” story from the lips of the two daughters. Papias described the resurrection to physical life of the wife of Manaen, and another miracle that happened to Justus, surnamed Barsabas. Justus swallowed a dangerous poison and by God’s grace was not injured by it. (This is the same Justus put forth with Matthias to replace the traitor Judas in Acts 1:23).

Other stories which were passed along by word of mouth are included in Papias’ works, along with parables and teachings of the Savior that were not otherwise known.

Papias correctly identified God’s kingdom including the 1,000-year rule of Christ on earth immediately following his return (Rev. 19:11-20:6). “He says that after the resurrection of the dead there will be a period of a thousand years, when Christ’s kingdom will be set up on this earth in material form. ...it is partly due to him that the great majority of churchmen after him took the same view, relying on his early date; e.g. Irenaeus and several others, who clearly held the same opinion.”

Papias gave accounts throughout his five-volume book of the Lord’s sayings which he obtained from Aristion or learned directly from the Apostle John (Eusebius, pp. 149-152).

“Papias uses the term ‘the Elders,’ or Fathers of the Christian community, to de-

scribe the original witness to Christ’s teaching, i.e. his personal disciples in particular. It was their traditions as to the purport of that teaching which he was concerned to preserve” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Papias,” Vol. XX, p. 737).

We have very little additional information about Papias. However, we do know that about A.D. 115 he supported the accuracy of the Gospel of Mark. He wrote:

“And John the Presbyter also said this—Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy, but not, however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he had neither heard nor followed our Lord, but as before said, he was in company with Peter, who gave him such instruction as necessary, but not to give him a history of our Lord’s discourses: wherefore Mark has not erred in anything, by writing some things as he recorded them; for he was carefully attentive to one thing, not to pass by anything he heard, or to state anything falsely in these accounts” (Tenney, p. 155).

He also supported the Gospel of Matthew and quotes from 1 John and 1 Peter in his writings (Eusebius, pp. 152-153).

Papias did not escape violent death. He was martyred for his Christian beliefs along with Polycarp about the year 155 (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Papias,” Vol. XX, p. 737).

In our next chapter we will discuss the life and writings of the second of John’s students: Ignatius.

115

155

# 23

## The Life and Writings of Ignatius

95

**I**gnatius, the second of John's pupils, was born in Syria about the middle of the first century. He protected the people of Ephesus from the persecutions of Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Following John's release from Patmos in 95, Ignatius probably received final training before being appointed bishop of Antioch in Syria (*World Book Encyclopedia*, "Ignatius, Saint," p. 3642).

110

### Ignatius Arrested

These were very dangerous times in which to be Christian. But Ignatius, a pupil of John, was exceedingly zealous in his mission and ministry (King, p. 16).

Ignatius spoke of himself as "the last of the Antiochene Christians" (Trall. 13; Smyrn. xi). He may have been converted from paganism late in his life and his conversion may have been abrupt and violent. His surname was Theophorus, meaning "God-clad" or "bearing God." He was not a Roman citizen (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., "Ignatius," Vol. XIV, pp. 293-294).

When preaching from the Gospels, Ignatius quoted Matthew almost exclusively,

as if it were the only synoptic Gospel he knew. But he also knew all of Paul's epistles and probably made an allusion to the Gospel of John (Tenney, pp. 253, 406).

The focus of Ignatius' writings was church unity, brought about by obedience to the bishop, presbyters and deacons in each local church. "The local church is not an amorphous collection of believers, but an organised [sic] body under a properly constituted ministry of bishop, presbyters and deacons. Without a regular ministry such as this the community has no claim to be called a church.... One of the fundamental principles, upon which Ignatius insists most strongly, is that of unity.... How then is this unity to be secured? Ignatius answers that it is to be secured by obedience to the bishop.... There must therefore be loyal cooperation with the bishop. The brethren must work in harmony with him, supporting him in what he undertakes. This loyalty must especially find expression in attendance at that lawful assembly for public worship" (*The Historic Church* by J. C. V. Durell, B.D., pp. 31, 32, 52).

Closely associated with Passover in the early church was the Agapé, or Love-Feast.

110

Unity was expressed by practical hospitality in this common meal attended by both rich and poor. All ate together in unity (Durell, p. 35).

About 110 Ignatius was arrested by Roman authorities at Syrian Antioch, the city that once served as Paul's headquarters. Ignatius was sent under military guard to Rome where he was to be exposed to wild beasts in the amphitheater (Bruce, p. 428; *The History of Europe and the Church* by Keith W. Stump, p. 7). On his way to Rome Ignatius wrote seven epistles.

"The Epistles of Ignatius are translated by Archbishop [William] Wake from the text of Vossius. He says that there were considerable differences in the editions; the best for a long time extant containing fabrications, and the genuine being altered and corrupted... These [seven epistles] are supposed to form the collection that Polycarp made of the Epistles of Ignatius, mentioned by Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Athanasius, Theodoret, and other ancients; but many learned men have imagined all of them to be apocryphal." Archbishop Wake took great pains to make the following translations acceptable (*Lost Books*, p. 166).

### Ignatius Writes Ephesians

While under guard and on his way to Rome, Ignatius spent some time in Smyrna, an Asian city just a few miles inland from the Aegean Sea. There are numerous references to "leaven" and "unleavened" in Ignatius' epistles, which indicate this delay at Smyrna may have been caused by winter and the spring feasts were not far away. The soldiers and Ignatius awaited spring and the opening of the sailing routes.

During this delay, Onesimus, bishop of Ephesus, paid Ignatius a visit. Ephesus lay on the seacoast 30 miles southeast of Smyrna.

Apparently there was a problem with the church at Ephesus respecting Onesimus. Perhaps it was difficult for church members to get used to a new pastor after the death of Apostle John.

When the church at Ephesus learned

that Ignatius was in Smyrna, just 30 miles away, they sent Onesimus and four deacons—Burrhus, Crocus, Euclus and Fronto—to him with their greetings. Ignatius described this meeting in his epistle to the Ephesians:

"For hearing that I came bound from Syria for the common name and hope, trusting through your prayers to fight with beasts at Rome; so that by suffering I may become indeed the disciple of him who gave himself to God, an offering and sacrifice for us; (ye hastened to see me). I received, therefore, in the name of God, your whole multitude in Onesimus. Who, ...according to the flesh is your bishop; whom I beseech you, by Jesus Christ, to love; and that you should all strive to be like him. And blessed be God, who has granted unto you, who are so worthy of him, to enjoy such an excellent bishop" (Eph. 1:4-5).

In the next two verses, Ignatius mentioned the deacons who came with Onesimus.

In verse 8 Ignatius told the Ephesians to unite behind Onesimus: "It is therefore fitting that you should by all means glorify Jesus Christ who hath glorified you: that by a uniform obedience ye may be perfectly joined together, in the same mind, and in the same judgment: and may speak the same things according to everything. And that being subject to your bishop, and the presbytery, ye may be wholly and thoroughly sanctified" (vv. 8-9). This instruction is similar to Paul's in his letters to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12) and to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:1-16) many years earlier.

Ignatius told the Ephesians that staying away from church deprived them of the Bread of God. And if the prayers of one or two members is effective, how much more effective are the prayers of the bishop and the whole church? He that doesn't come together with the church is proud and God resists the proud. "Let us take heed therefore, that we do not set ourselves against the bishop, that we may be subject to God" (Eph. 2:2-3).

There were deceitful people in Ephesus claiming to be Christian but not producing

spiritual fruit. Ignatius labeled them “ravening dogs, who bite secretly” and told the brethren to guard against them and flee from them (v. 6).

Ignatius mentioned his “being bound for Christ’s name” in Ch. 1:10. In Chapter 3 he instructed the Ephesians on how to behave under persecution: to pray for the persecutors (vv. 1-2) and live mild, kind lives, producing spiritual fruit.

His instructions were excellent to Christians who must live among worldly people, especially unconverted mates or family members who have left the truth for this world’s ways. Christians’ good *works*, not their good *words*, could lead some to repentance:

“Pray also without ceasing for other men: for there is hope of repentance in them, that they may attain unto God. Let them therefore at least be instructed by your works, if they will be no other way. Be ye mild at their anger; humble at their boasting; to their blasphemies return your prayers: to their error, your firmness in faith: when they are cruel, be ye gentle; not endeavoring to imitate their ways. (Let us be their brethren in all kindness and moderation, but let us be followers of the Lord; for who was ever more unjustly used? More destitute? More despised?) That so no herb of the devil may be found in you: but ye may remain in all holiness and sobriety both of body and spirit, in Christ Jesus. The last times are come upon us: let us therefore be very reverent and fear the long-suffering of God, that it be not to us unto condemnation” (Ch. 3:1-5).

He added, “For Christianity is not the work of an outward profession; but shows itself in the power of faith, if a man be found faithful unto the end. It is better for a man to hold his peace and be [a Christian] than to say he is a Christian and not to be” (vv. 17-18).

Again, in Ch. 4:7, Ignatius referred to his condition: “Let my life be sacrificed for the doctrine of the cross; which is indeed a scandal to the unbelievers, but to us is salvation and life eternal.”

He concluded his letter, “My soul be for yours, and theirs whom ye have sent to the

glory of God, even unto Smyrna, from whence also I write to you; giving thanks unto the Lord and loving Polycarp even as I do. Remember me, as Jesus Christ does remember you. Pray for the church which is in Syria, from whence I am carried bound for Rome; being the least of all the faithful which are there, as I have been thought worthy to be found to the glory of God. Fare ye well in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ, our common Hope. Amen” (Eph. 4:17-19).

### Ignatius Writes to the Magnesians

About 10 miles inland from Ephesus lay the city of Magnesia. There was a Church of God in this city, with a bishop named Damas, teachers named Bassus and Apollonius, and a deacon named Sotio.

Damas was a young man and, like Timothy, had a difficult time gaining the respect of the congregation. When Damas learned that Ignatius was a prisoner on his way to Rome and was wintering over in Smyrna, about 35 miles to the north, he and his fellow ministers and deacon journeyed to see Ignatius.

Most likely this journey took place in the late winter or very early spring A.D. 110, for there are references to the spring holy days which come in March/April.

There is a reference in this epistle to the Magnesians keeping “the Lord’s Day” instead of the Sabbath. There are several possible explanations for this.

1. Ignatius, though trained by John, later left the church and taught heresy.

2. This entire letter is a fabrication and whoever wrote it put his own ideas in it and passed it off as authentic.

3. Translators or transcribers erred by not properly translating the original letter or by inserting a spurious passage into the real text, similar to what happened in 1 John 5:7-8 in the *King James Version*.

With the exception of this one passage, the letters of Ignatius, as printed in *The Lost Books of the Bible*, seem accurate and follow church doctrine as it was kept in the second century. We know God’s church did not for-

sake the Sabbath for a new day, because the Sabbath is a sign between God and his people (Ex. 31:13-17) and remains as one of the 10 Commandments (Ex. 20:8-11). We have already seen the Sabbath kept by the church through the end of the first century as recorded in Acts, the Epistles and Revelation in our Bibles.

In the second and third centuries Satan's counterfeit church arose. This church chose its own days to keep. It rejected God's Sabbath and holy days. Later in this book we will read of Church of God leaders debating with Roman Catholic officials over keeping the Passover.

But for now we shall assume this letter of Ignatius is accurate with the exception of this questionable passage. Remember, we are no longer dealing with inspired Biblical text but with historical writings. We don't look to these letters for doctrinal instruction but for a taste of the times—what the church experienced and felt in this transitional period following the death of the original apostles.

Ignatius referred to leaven as sin, a theme emphasized during the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

“Wherefore being become his disciples, let us learn to live according to the rules of Christianity; for whosoever is called by any other name besides this, he is not of God. Lay aside therefore the old and sour evil leaven; and be ye changed into the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ.... I know that ye are not puffed up; for ye have Jesus Christ in your hearts” (Mag. 3:8-9, 4:2).

Ignatius mentioned his bonds in Ch. 4:1. Later, in this final chapter, he admonished the Church of God at Magnesia to study and to be subject to the bishop:

“Study therefore to be confirmed in the doctrine of our Lord, and of his Apostles; that so whatever ye do, ye may prosper both in body and in spirit, in faith and charity, in the Son, and in the Father and in the Holy Spirit: in the beginning and in the end.... Be subject to your bishop, and to one another, as Jesus Christ to the Father, according to the flesh: and the Apostles both to Christ, and to

the Father, and to the Holy Ghost: that so ye may be united both in body and in spirit” (vv. 4, 6).

He asked the Magnesians to pray for him and for his home church of Antioch in Syria (vv. 8-9).

He concluded: “The Ephesians from Smyrna salute you, from which place I write you: (being present here to the glory of God, in like manner as you are,) who have in all things refreshed me, together with Polycarp, the bishop of the Smyrnaeans. The rest of the churches in the honour of Jesus Christ, salute you. Farewell, and be ye strengthened in concord of God: enjoying his inseparable spirit, which is Jesus Christ” (vv. 10-12).

### Ignatius Writes Trallians

Twenty miles east of Magnesia was the city of Tralles. The Church of God in that community was administered by Bishop Polybius. Polybius traveled 30 miles to visit Ignatius in Smyrna. Ignatius then wrote a short letter to the Church of God at Tralles.

Ignatius praised the church for its “apostolic character” and its “blameless and constant disposition through patience, which not only appears in your outward conversation but is naturally rooted and grounded in you” (Tral. 1:1, 2). He informed the church members that Polybius had told him of their deeds while he was in bonds (v. 3). Ignatius told the church to be subject to its bishop, presbyters and deacons (vv. 5-8). Without these church officials and the “college of the Apostles” there would be no church, summed up Ignatius (vv. 8-9).

He mentioned his bonds again in Ch. 1:8.

In Chapter 2 Ignatius warned the church about false ministers and heretics. He referred to leaven when he wrote, “Wherefore guard yourselves against such persons. And that you will do if you are not puffed up...” (Tral. 2:4).

There were some in Tralles who taught the Gnostic belief that Jesus had not been human. Ignatius countered their lie: “Stop your ears therefore, as often as anyone shall

speak contrary to Jesus Christ; who was of the race of David, of the Virgin Mary. Who was truly born and did eat and drink, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and dead; both those in heaven and on earth being spectators of it. Who was also truly raised from the dead by his Father, after the same manner as he will also raise up us who believe in him by Christ Jesus, without whom we have no true life. But if, as some who are Atheists, that is to say infidels, pretend, that he only seemed to suffer: (they themselves only seeming to exist) why then am I bound?—Why do I desire to fight with beasts?—Therefore do I die in vain: therefore I will not speak falsely against the Lord. Flee therefore these evil sprouts which bring forth deadly fruit; of which if anyone taste, he shall presently die” (Tral. 2:10-14).

In Chapter 3 Ignatius saluted the Trallians from Smyrna, together with members of the churches of God that were with him, refreshing him (v. 1). He asked the Trallians to pray for him and the church from which he had come—Syrian Antioch (vv. 5-6).

He concluded this letter with these words: “Fare ye well in Jesus Christ; being subject to your bishop as to the command of God; and so likewise to the presbytery. Love every one his brother with an unfeigned heart. My soul be your expiation, not only now, but when I shall have attained unto God; for I am yet under danger. But the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ, to fulfil both mine and your petition; in whom may ye be found unblamable” (vv. 7-9).

### **Ignatius Writes to the Romans**

Early in September of that year (possibly 110), Ignatius learned he was soon to be moved from Smyrna, where he had spent several months, on to Rome, where he was to face martyrdom. He had heard rumors that brethren in Rome were planning to intercede for him. So he wrote to them, saying he really wanted to be martyred.

“Forasmuch as I have at last obtained

through my prayers to God, to see your faces, which I have desired to do; being bound in Jesus Christ, I hope ere long to salute you, if it be the will of God to grant me to attain unto the end I long for... But I fear your love, lest it do me injury. For it is easy for you to do what you please; but it will be hard for me to obtain unto God, if you spare me... But if you shall love my body, I shall have my course again to run. Wherefore you cannot do me a greater kindness, than to suffer me to be sacrificed unto God, now that the altar is already prepared.... Only pray for me, that God would give me both inward and outward strength, that I may not only say, but will; nor be only called a Christian, but be found one” (Rom. 1:2, 4, 6, 10). Ignatius added, “A Christian is not a work of opinion; but of greatness of mind, (especially when he is hated by the world)” (v. 14).

In Chapter 2, Ignatius further explained his desire for martyrdom. To us, living in a fairly peaceful world, it is somewhat difficult to grasp someone’s earnest desire to die. But Ignatius had apparently lived a full life and was willing to die so that, in his next waking moment, he would be in the Kingdom of God at Jesus Christ’s return. Ignatius no longer wished to endure the pain, aches and bondage associated with his life early in the second century.

“I am willing to die for God, unless you hinder me. I beseech you that you shew not an unseasonable good will towards me. Suffer me to be the food for the wild beasts; by whom I shall attain unto God... But if I shall suffer, I shall then become the freeman of Jesus Christ, and shall rise free. And now, being in bonds, I learn, not do desire anything” (Ch. 2: 1-2, 7).

The ten soldiers who were escorting Ignatius from Antioch to Rome were so cruel to him that he described them as savage beasts: “From Syria even unto Rome, I fight with beasts both by sea and land; both night and day: being bound to ten leopards, that is to say, to such a band of soldiers; who, though treated with all manner of kindness, are the worse for it” (Ch. 2:8).

Again, in Chapter 3, Ignatius told the

brethren in Rome: "I have no desire to live any longer after the manner of men, neither shall I, if you consent. Be ye therefore willing, that ye yourselves also may be pleasing to God. I exhort you in a few words; I pray you believe me" (v. 6).

Ignatius concluded his epistle by telling the Romans he was writing from Smyrna (Rom. 3:12). Crocus, "most beloved" of Ignatius, was with him. Others from Antioch had gone on to Rome before him (v. 13). He wrapped up this letter with the date: "This have I written to you, the day before the ninth of the Calends of September. Be strong unto the end, in the patience of Jesus Christ" (v. 15).

### Ignatius Writes to Philadelphians

After spending several months in Smyrna, the soldiers moved Ignatius and other prisoners onward to Rome. They sailed north from Smyrna 110 miles up the coast of Asia to the port city of Troas. While in Troas (where Paul once had a vision before spreading the Gospel into Europe), Ignatius wrote to the Church of God in Philadelphia.

Ignatius commended the bishop, deacons and presbyters of Philadelphia and encouraged the church of God to be unified with them (Phila. 1:1-4). He then warned the brethren to flee false ministers and those who caused divisions (vv. 5-12).

Some heretics abstained from the true Passover service and claimed to celebrate a Eucharist of their own. Passover was important to church unity. Ignatius warned the Philadelphians: "Be ye careful therefore to observe one Eucharist [Passover]. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup unto union with his blood; there is one altar, as there is one bishop" (Phila. 1:10-12, as quoted by Durell, p. 35).

In Chapter 2 he solicited prayers of the brethren (vv. 1-5), warned against Judaizing (vv. 6-11) and encouraged unity again:

"I cried whilst I was among you; I spake with a loud voice: attend to the bishop, and to the presbytery, and to the deacons. Now some supposed that I spake this as foresee-

ing the division that should come among you. But he is my witness for whose sake I am in bonds that I knew nothing from any man. But the spirit spake, saying on this wise: Do nothing without the bishop: Keep your bodies as the temples of God: Love unity; Flee divisions; be the followers of Christ as he was of the Father. I therefore did as became me, as a man composed to unity. For where there is division, and wrath, God dwells not. But the Lord forgives all that repent, if they return to the unity of God, and to the council of the bishop" (Phila. 2:12-17).

By this time there were copies of the Gospels available. People who were newly converted from Judaism early in the second century sometimes found it hard to accept the teachings of Christ when they were so steeped in their Jewish teaching. And the Jewish rabbis and teachers in the synagogues clung to their old, sometimes corrupt copies of what Christians call the Old Testament.

Ignatius addressed this problem next: "I have heard of some who say; unless I find it written in the originals, I will not believe it to be written in the Gospel. And when I said, It is written, they answered what I lay before them in their corrupted copies. But to me Jesus Christ is instead of all the corrupted monuments in the world; together with those undefiled monuments, his cross, and death, and resurrection, and the faith which is by him, by which I desire, through your prayers, to be justified" (Ch. 2:20-21).

In Chapter 3, Ignatius thanked the Philadelphians for their prayers concerning the Church of God at Syrian Antioch. The persecution had stopped. And he gave them a commission: "to ordain some deacon to go to them thither as the ambassador of God; that he may rejoice with them when they meet together, and glorify God's name... Now if you be willing, it is not impossible for you to do this for the grace of God: as also the other neighboring churches have sent them, some bishops, some priests and deacons" (Phila. 3:1,3).

As he closed his letter, Ignatius men-

tioned two men who were with him at Troas. One was Philo, a deacon of Cilicia. The other was Rheus of Agathopolis, who “followed me even from Syria, not regarding his life” (v. 4).

Ignatius sent the Philadelphians his love as he concluded his letter, which was then carried to them by Burrhus (v. 6).

### Ignatius Writes to the Smyrnaeans

Ignatius also wrote to the church at Smyrna, where he had just spent some time in bonds. He complimented them by writing, “I glorify God, even Jesus Christ, who has given you such wisdom. For I have observed that you are settled in an immovable faith... being fully persuaded of these things which relate unto our Lord” (Smyrnaeans 1:2-3).

In the remainder of Chapter 1 he reminded the Smyrnaeans that Christ truly lived, died and rose again.

Ignatius told the brethren to avoid certain false teachers in Chapter 2: “But I arm you before-hand against certain beasts in the shape of men whom you must not only not receive, but if all possible must not meet with.... But consider those who are of a different opinion from us, as to what concerns the grace of Jesus Christ which is come unto us, how contrary they are to the design of God. They have no regard to charity, nor care of the widow, the fatherless, and the oppressed; of the bond or free, of the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from the Eucharist [Passover], and from the public offices, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ; which suffered for our sins, and which the Father of his goodness raised from the dead.... It will therefore become you to abstain from such persons; and not to speak with them neither in private nor in public. But hearken to the prophets, and especially to the Gospel, in which both Christ’s passion is manifested unto us, and his resurrection perfectly declared. But flee all divisions, as the beginning of evils” (Ch. 2:1-2, 14-16, 18-20).

Ignatius instructed the Smyrnaeans to follow their local church government just as he had instructed the brethren in his other

letters (Ch. 3:1-2).

In Ch. 3:4, Ignatius used the term “Catholic church”: “...as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic church.” Was Ignatius a Roman Catholic? It is possible that Ignatius was deceived into leaving the Church of God and joined the Roman Catholic Church. But this is not likely.

This reference, if accurately recorded and translated, says only “Catholic church” and *not* “Roman Catholic Church.” Catholic means “universal” and God’s church is certainly more universal than any other church—for it is led by Jesus Christ, who rules all creation from his throne in heaven at the right hand of God.

One meaning of “Catholic” with a capital “C” is: “noting or pertaining to the conception of the church as the body representing the ancient undivided Christian witness, comprising all the orthodox churches that have kept the apostolic succession of bishops” (*Random House College Dictionary*, “Catholic,” p. 213). This could be a description of the true Church of God!

Carl E. Purinton, who in 1961 was professor and chairman of the department of religion at Boston University, agrees that Ignatius was not referring to the Roman Catholic Church:

“Whereas Christianity had previously been only a loosely organized aggregation of churches, there now emerged a ‘Catholic’ church, usually referred to as the ‘Ancient Catholic Church’ to distinguish it from the medieval Roman Catholic Church. The earliest reference to the ‘Catholic Church’ comes from Ignatius of Antioch (died c. 110). Here the word ‘catholic’ is clearly used in the sense of universal. ‘Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.’ By the end of the second century, however, the term had come into use in a technical sense to describe the Ancient Catholic Church, a formally organized religious institution, with a ruling hierarchy of bishops, a collection of authoritative New Testament books, and a formulated creed” (*Christianity and Its Judaic Heritage* by Carl E. Purinton, p. 254).

Ignatius thanked the Smyrnaeans for

their hospitality, especially for receiving Philo and Rheus (Smy. 3:11). And he suggested they send someone with an epistle to his home church at Antioch “to congratulate with them their peace in God” (v. 18).

He sent along to the Smyrnaeans the love of Burrhus and the Ephesian brethren who went with him from Smyrna to Troas and “in all things” refreshed him (v. 20).

Ignatius concluded by saluting many of the friends he had made while staying in Smyrna:

“I salute the families of my brethren, with their wives and children, and the virgins that are called widows. Be strong in the power of the Holy Ghost. Philo, who is present with me salutes you. I salute the house of Tavius, and pray that it may be strengthened in faith and charity, both of flesh and spirit. I salute Alce my well-beloved, together with the incomparable Daphnus, and Eutechnus, and all by name. Farewell in the grace of God” (vv. 24-27).

### Ignatius Writes Polycarp

Just before leaving Troas for Neapolis on his way to Rome, Ignatius wrote a brief letter to Polycarp, bishop of the Church of God at Smyrna.

He wrote kind words about Polycarp: “Having known that thy mind towards God, is fixed as it were upon an immovable rock; I exceedingly give thanks, that I have been thought worthy to behold thy blessed face, in which may I always rejoice in God” (Polycarp 1:2).

Ignatius gave his fellow pupil of Apostle John some advice, including:

“Make it thy endeavor to preserve unity” (v. 4).

“Pray without ceasing: ask more understanding than what thou already hast. Be watchful, having thy spirit always awake” (v. 5).

“Let not those that seem worthy of credit, but teach other doctrines, disturb thee. Stand firm and immovable, as an anvil which is beaten upon” (v. 13).

“...But especially we ought to endure all

things for God’s sake, that he may bear with us” (v. 14).

“Let not the widows be neglected” (Ch. 2:1).

“Say to my sisters, that they love the Lord; and be satisfied with their own husbands, both in the flesh and spirit. In like manner, exhort my brethren, in the name of Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, even as the Lord the church” (vv. 7-8).

How reminiscent some of these words are to those Paul had written (Eph. 4:3; 1 Thes. 5:17, 21; Eph. 5: 22-23) and to those of James (James 1:27).

In Chapter 3 of his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius requested that a church member be dispatched to Syrian Antioch (vv. 1-5).

He also told Polycarp of the sudden decision to be moved from Troas to Neapolis:

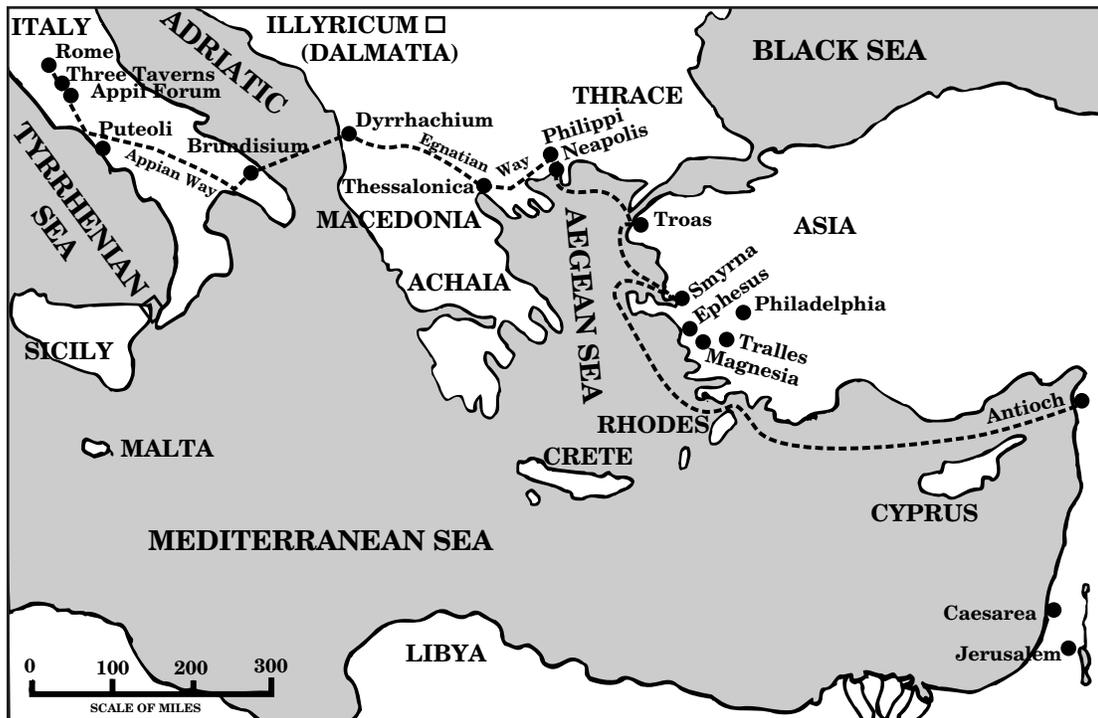
“But for as much as I have not been able to write all the churches, because I must suddenly sail from Troas to Neapolis; (for so is the command of those whose pleasure I am subject;) do write to the churches that are near you, as being instructed in the will of God, that they also may do in like manner. Let those that are able send messengers; and let the rest send their letters by those who shall be sent by you...” (Poly. 3:6-7).

Ignatius concluded his final epistle with salutations:

“I salute all by name, particularly the wife of Epitropus, with all her house and children. I salute Attalus my well-beloved. I salute him who shall be thought worthy to be sent by you into Syria. Let grace be ever with him and with Polycarp who sends him. I wish you all happiness in our God, Jesus Christ; in whom continue, in the unity and protection of God. I salute Alce my well-beloved. Farewell in the Lord” (vv. 8-11).

### Ignatius Is Martyred

Shortly after completing his epistle to Polycarp, Ignatius and other prisoners were loaded onto a ship. They sailed from Troas to Neapolis, the same route Paul had taken A.D. 50 (Acts 16:11). The 150-mile journey had taken Paul two days. If the winds were



Map shows the probable route used by Roman soldiers to take Ignatius from Antioch to Rome. Also shown are the cities to whose churches Ignatius wrote letters while on this journey.

similar, Ignatius' journey would have been the same duration.

Ignatius was taken by overland route to Rome (Ramsay, pp. 239-240). This was the shortest route. He disembarked at Neapolis and crossed Macedonia on that great road, the Egnatian Way. This 275-mile journey took him through Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Pella (not the same Pella as the one near Jerusalem), Heraclea and the port city of Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic Sea.

At Dyrrhachium Ignatius and those with him boarded a ship. They sailed nearly 100 miles southwest to Brundisium, a port on the "heel" of the Italian "boot." From there, the group traveled the Appian Way 120 miles northwest to Rome.

Ignatius was brought before Emperor Trajan.

"He boldly vindicated the faith of Christ before the emperor, for which he was cast into prison, and was cruelly tormented; for, after being dreadfully scourged, he was compelled to hold fire in his hands, and, at the same time, papers dipped in oil were put to his sides and lighted. His flesh was then torn with hot pincers, and at last was dispatched by the fury of wild beasts" (King, p. 16).

Ignatius, who once had been a pupil of Apostle John, died when lions devoured him in the Roman arena A.D. 110 (Stump, p. 7).

His position as bishop of the Syrian Antioch church was filled by a man named Heros (Eusebius, p. 147).

# 24

## Polycarp Defends the Truth

69

**W**hen the Jerusalem church fled to Pella and the apostle John fled to Ephesus, the church as a whole began to let down spiritually. “In the first 38 years, as congregations and conversions multiplied, the distant churches had frequently appealed to the mother church in Jerusalem. But now a period of declining zeal set in for the whole church” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 12).

### **Ephesian Era Loses First Love**

The growing lethargy was predicted by Jesus Christ in the Revelation to John. The seven churches addressed in Chapters 2 and 3 were *not just* literal churches. They also described seven time periods or eras of the church through history. The characteristics applied to each of the seven churches also applied to its corresponding era in history. (In addition, the attitudes and problems described in Revelation 2 and 3 can also be applied to groups of people living at any one time, no matter in which era they lived.)

Jesus Christ used the characteristics of the Church of God at Ephesus to describe the first era—or beginning years—of God’s

Church. Notice his description: “I know how hard you have worked and how patient you have been. I know that you cannot tolerate evil men, and that you have tested those who say they are apostles but are not, and have found out that they are liars. You are patient, you have suffered troubles for my sake, and you have not given up. But here is what I have against you: you do not love me now as you did at first. Remember how far you have fallen! Turn from your sins and do what you did at first. If you don’t turn from your sins, I will come to you and take your lamp-stand from its place...” (Rev. 2:2-5).

Jesus warned He would remove the lamp-stand from its place! “This was done physically, in type—even before the prophecy was written, when the Jerusalem headquarters church was transferred to Pella. It was done spiritually when the authority and respect in which this mother church had been held was stripped from it in A.D. 135 after a second Jewish war with Rome” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 12).

But there is another type. John was headquartered in Ephesus after the church fled to Pella. When John died near the turn of the century, his three main pupils were

bishops in other cities. Papias was in Hierapolis, Ignatius in Antioch and Polycarp in Smyrna. Onesimus succeeded John as bishop at Ephesus. But the church was letting down in its zeal and had little respect for this former slave [see Philemon] (Ignatius' Epistle to Ephesians, Ch. 1:4-5).

"The church congregation was a type of the entire church in apostolic times. The Ephesus Church had let down. It had not continued its work after A.D. 69 to all nations (Mat. 28:19)... The Church and most of its ministers seem to have acquired 'lazy bones.' Perhaps it was because they had decided Christ's return was not imminent (Mat. 24:48)....

"Ephesus and all the local congregations in the surrounding Roman province of Asia, were soon turned against Paul personally, by false teachers and disloyal elders who sought power and prestige for themselves. Many of these detached groups were permanently drawn away from the True Church. Ultimately, the 'mystery of iniquity' already in operation long before (2 Thes. 2:7) gathered them all in by posing as the universal mother church of Christianity!

"Jesus Christ *allowed* this—because Ephesus left its first love. Fully *able* to protect his own, He *let* the wolves devour these who had become lukewarm. It happened in Pella as well, as we will shortly see..." (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 12-13).

### Leadership Shifts to Smyrna

It was time for a new era in God's church. The candlestick at Ephesus was removed from its place. But the "gates of hell" would not prevail against God's true church (Mat. 16:18)!

Like a great relay race, the baton was passed from Ephesus to Smyrna, the second era mentioned in Revelation 2.

"At neighboring Smyrna, Polycarp presided over the church for half a century after John's death. Polycarp stood up boldly for the truth, though by this time the True Church in his area had dwindled to almost

nothing. History relates that, following the example of Peter, Paul, and John, he wrote many letters to congregations and individuals, though all these have perished, save one doubtful exception" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 13).

He encouraged "harmonious relations between the churches, both by writing letters to other churches himself and by forwarding to them copies of the letters of Ignatius. He also warmly takes up the suggestion of Ignatius that delegates should be sent from his own church to Syria. Indeed he contemplates going himself (Polyc. Phil. 13)" (Durell, p. 60).

"Polycarp was also familiar with the Pauline epistles and the Gospel of Matthew. He quoted 1 Peter and 1 John, and probably knew Acts" (Tenney, p. 407).

Polycarp was a relatively young man, about 40 years old when Ignatius was martyred. We know little about his personal life other than "...he may have been originally a Syrian slave, and later he seems to have possessed slaves of his own..." (*The Fathers of the Eastern Church* by Robert Payne, pp. 17-18).

### Polycarp Writes Philippians

Shortly after the death of Ignatius (A.D. 110), Polycarp wrote to the Church of God at Philippi (Bruce, p. 419).

We have a translation of this epistle made by Archbishop Wake. While there is controversy over the genuineness of this epistle, Wake implicitly believed it to be the original. There also is a translation available by Dr. Cave, attached to his life of Polycarp (*The Lost Books of the Bible*, p. 192).

There appears to have been a real problem with worldliness in the church at Philippi. Young men and women were burning with lust for each other. Some brethren were lusting after money. Even the ministers were letting down in their duties.

Polycarp responded to these problems, not in the flowery, religious-sounding words of Ignatius, but in hard-hitting powerful words, describing specific action to be taken,

often quoting Jesus Christ and the apostles' letters.

In Chapter 1, Polycarp commended the Philippians for their respect to those who suffered for the Gospel, and for their own faith. He told them to lay aside false teachings: "Wherefore girding up the loins of your minds, serve the Lord with fear, and in truth: laying aside all empty and vain speech, and the error of many; believing in him, that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead.... But he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also raise us up in like manner, if we do his will and walk according to his commandments; and love those things which he loved: Abstaining from all unrighteousness; inordinate affection, and love of money; from evil speaking; false witness; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, or striking for striking, or cursing for cursing" (Polycarp's Epistle to Philippians 1:6, 8-9).

Polycarp, in Chapter 2, told the Philippians neither he nor any minister could come up to the wisdom of Paul, who had founded the church there. He told them to study the letter Paul had written to them, which was now part of the New Testament (vv. 2-3).

In verses 4 and 5, Polycarp addressed money: "...for he that has charity is far from all sin. But the love of money is the root of all evil."

Next Polycarp addressed the family:

"And teach ourselves first to walk according to the commandments of the Lord; and then your wives to walk likewise according to the faith that is given to them; in charity, and in purity; loving their own husbands with all sincerity, and all others alike with all temperance; and to bring up their children in the instruction and fear of the Lord.

"The widows likewise teach that they should be sober as to what concerns the faith of the Lord: praying always for all men; being far from all detraction, evil speaking, false witness; from covetousness, and from all evil" (vv. 6-7).

Deacons were described in much the same way Paul did in 1 Tim. 3:8-10. Polycarp wrote: "Also the deacons must be blameless

before him, as the ministers of God in Christ, and not of men. Not false accusers; not double tongued; not lovers of money; but moderate in all things; compassionate, careful; walking according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all" (v. 10).

Polycarp gave specific instructions to the young men and women in the church:

"In like manner the younger men must be unblamable in all things; above all, taking care of their purity, and to restrain themselves from all evil. For it is good to be cut off from the lusts that are in the world; because every lust wars against the spirit: and neither fornicators, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, shall inherit the kingdom of God; nor do they do such things as are foolish and unreasonable. Wherefore ye must needs abstain from all these things, being subject to the priests and deacons, as unto God and Christ. The virgins admonish to walk in a spotless and pure conscience" (Philipp. 2:12-14).

Polycarp also gave specific instructions for ministers:

"And let the elders be compassionate and merciful towards all; turning from their errors; seeking out those that are weak; not forgetting the widows, the fatherless, and the poor; but always providing what is good both in the sight of God and man. Abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unrighteous judgment: and especially being free from all covetousness. Not easy to believe anything against any; not severe in judgment; knowing that we are all debtors in point of sin" (vv. 15-17).

Again, Polycarp mentioned false teachers and brethren—the "tares" Christ said would grow among the wheat but would produce no fruit (Matt. 13:24-30). Polycarp said to abstain from them: "Being zealous of what is good; abstaining from all offense, and from false brethren; and from those who bear the name Christ in hypocrisy: who deceive vain men" (v. 20).

In Chapter 3, Polycarp warned the Philippians about false teachings. Like John, he described Anti-Christ; and like Jude, he told them to believe what they had been taught

from the beginning—not “new doctrine.”

“For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, he is Anti-Christ: and whoever does not confess his suffering upon the cross, is from the devil. ...wherefore, leaving the vanity of many, and their false doctrines; let us return to the word that was delivered to us from the beginning; watching unto prayer; and persevering in fasting” (Philipp. 3:1, 3).

Polycarp described the suffering of Christ and of the martyrs in the church. He mentioned Ignatius, Zozimus and Rufus as well as Paul and the rest of the apostles. “For they loved not this present world; but him who died, and was raised again by God for us,” Polycarp related (vv. 5-9).

Christians were to be good examples among the Gentiles. “When it is in your power to do good, defer it not... Be all of you subject one to another, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that by your good works, both ye yourselves may receive praise, and the Lord may not be blasphemed through you” (vv. 10-13).

One of the presbyters, Valens, abused his office in the church at Philippi. He apparently had a problem with covetousness and had to be removed from office. Polycarp addressed this issue in Chapter 4.

“I am greatly afflicted for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you; that he should so little understand the place that was given to him in the church. Wherefore I admonish you that ye abstain from covetousness; and that ye be chaste, and true of speech” (Philipp. 4:1). Would Polycarp admonish the people in these three areas if Valens had not violated these? Could it be that Valens “coveted his neighbor’s wife,” a violation of the Tenth Commandment? Could he have committed adultery, breaking the Seventh Commandment? And could he have lied to cover up his sins, breaking the Ninth Commandment? Could he have coveted, been unchaste and untrue of speech?

“Keep yourselves from all evil,” continued Polycarp. “For he that in these things cannot govern himself how can he be able to prescribe them to another? If a man does not

keep himself from covetousness, if he shall be polluted with idolatry and be judged as if he were a Gentile... Wherefore, my brethren, I am exceedingly sorry both for him, and for his wife; to whom God grant a true repentance. And be ye also moderate upon this occasion; and look not upon such as enemies, but call them back as suffering, and erring members, that ye may save your whole body: for by so doing, ye shall edify your own selves” (vv. 2-3, 6).

Just as Paul had instructed Timothy (1 Tim. 2:1-3), Polycarp now told the Philippians to “Pray for all the saints: pray also for kings, and all that are in authority; and for those who persecute you, and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross; that your fruit may be manifest in all; and that you may be perfect in Christ” (Philipp. 4:12).

As Polycarp wrapped up his letter, he took care of some general business. He told the Philippians he had letters from them and from Ignatius to bring to Ignatius’ home church of Antioch. Polycarp wrote that he will send someone or will take the letters to Antioch himself (v. 13). Polycarp was also sending Ignatius’ letter to the Smyrnaeans to Philippi to be read there along with his own letter (vv. 14-15).

Philippi was much closer to Rome, and was on the main east-west highway across Macedonia, the Egnatian Way. News from Rome arrived at Philippi before it reached Smyrna. So Polycarp asked if they knew what had become of Ignatius. “What you know certainly of Ignatius, and those that are with him signify to us” (v. 16).

“Be ye safe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and in favour with all yours. Amen,” concluded Polycarp.

He sent his letter and the letter of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans to Philippi by the hand of Crescens and his sister (Philipp. 4:17-19).

### **Polycarp Battles Roman Bishop over Passover**

“Among the Gentiles the churches in Asia remained the most faithful to the word of

God. We pick up the story of the true church in the lives of such men as Polycarp and Polycrates. They were called the ‘Quartodecimani’ because they kept the true Passover celebration instead of Easter” (Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 15).

In the year 154, when Polycarp was about 85 years old, he journeyed nearly 900 miles to Rome to verbally battle the bishop there, who was teaching the brethren to observe the pagan celebration of Easter instead of Passover.

“While at Rome, Polycarp discussed with the Roman bishop (Anicetus) the matter of the introduction of the pagan Easter in place of the Passover.

“Irenaeus (the historian) continued: ‘for neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe it’—the Passover—‘because he had always observed it with John the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the apostles, with whom he associated; and neither did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, who said that he was bound to follow the customs of the presbyters before him’ (Quoted from Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chap. 24, in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1).

“Notice that bishop Anicetus had no scriptural grounds—he determined to follow the ‘customs’ of men!—Easter Sunday!” (Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 16).

Polycarp returned to Smyrna, his mission a failure. He may have persuaded some people and conversions may have followed. But the Roman bishop remained unconvinced and the tide of Roman Catholicism was slowly drowning the truth.

“The steady progress of the heretical movement in spite of all opposition was a cause of deep sorrow to Polycarp so that in the last years of his life the words were constantly on his lips, ‘O good God, to what times thou spared me, that I must suffer such things!’ ” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., “Polycarp”).

“Such things as Anicetus—who claimed he was the human head of the Catholic Church of God—and pagan Easter, being observed all over in the churches claiming to

be ‘Christian.’ These Polycarp *had* to allow. For indeed, there was nothing he could do to stop it. Perhaps he did not see *clearly* that this apostasy was never part of the True Church—but was a conspiracy that wormed its way into local congregations to gain a following after itself” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 14).

### Irenaeus a Pupil

Just as Polycarp had been a pupil of Apostle John, he now had pupils of his own. One was a native of Smyrna named Irenaeus.

“He had sat at the feet of Polycarp on the hills high above Smyrna, while the old graybeard spoke of St. John and remembered the stories of Jesus.” Irenaeus would later, while still a young man, travel to Lyons, France, and serve as presbyter in the church there. (*The Fathers of the Western Church* by Robert Payne, p. 31).

### Polycarp is Martyred

“Not many months apparently after Polycarp’s return from Rome a persecution broke out in Asia. A great festival was in progress at Smyrna. The proconsul Statius Quadratus was present on the occasion, and the asiarch Philip of Tralles was presiding over the games. Eleven Christians had been brought, mostly from Philadelphia, to be put to death. The appetite of the populace was inflamed by the spectacle of martyrdom. A cry was raised ‘Away with the Atheists. Let search be made for Polycarp’” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., “Polycarp”).

Polycarp, upon hearing that people were seeking to apprehend him, followed the advice of others and escaped to a country cottage. He was discovered by a poor slave-child, who betrayed him under torture. Polycarp was arrested and brought back into the city of Smyrna.

“From this circumstance, and having dreamed that his bed suddenly became on fire, and was consumed in a moment, he concluded that it was God’s will he should suffer martyrdom. He therefore did not at-

tempt to make a second escape. Those who apprehended him were amazed at his serene countenance and gravity. After feasting them, he desired an hour for prayer, which, being allowed, he prayed with such fervency, that his guards repented that they had been instrumental in taking him. He was, however, carried before the pro-consul..." (King, pp. 17-18).

When he arrived at the proconsul, the asiarch and those with him did what they could to save the old man's physical life, not realizing they were tempting him to lose eternal life. "They asked him what harm there could be in saying 'Caesar is Lord' and burning a few grains of incense on the altar, and so saving himself. As he was taken to the arena, he heard a voice from Heaven saying, 'Be strong, Polycarp, and quit thyself like a man' (Payne, *Fathers of the Eastern Church*, p. 20).

"Attempts were made by the officials to induce him to recant, but without effect. When he came into the theatre the proconsul urged him to 'revile Christ,' and promised, if he would consent to abjure his faith, that he would set him at liberty. To this appeal Polycarp made the memorable answer, 'Eighty and six years have I served Him and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I speak evil of my King who saved me?' These words only intensified the fury of the mob" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., "Polycarp").

The proconsul tried again to get Polycarp to reconsider, but all Polycarp would say was "I am a Christian."

"Then tell us what it is to be a Chris-

tian," the Asiarch demanded.

Polycarp replied, "It would take a whole day."

"Very well, ask the people whether they will listen for a whole day."

"I have no desire to convince the people," Polycarp replied (Payne, *Fathers of the Western Church*, p. 31).

Meanwhile the people demanded the death of Polycarp. "They clamored for a lion to be let loose upon him then and there. The Asiarch however refused, urging as an excuse that the games were over. When they next demanded that their victim should be burned, the proconsul did not interfere" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., "Polycarp").

"Wood being provided, the holy man earnestly prayed to Heaven, after being bound to the stake; and as the flames grew vehement, the executioners gave way on each side, the heat becoming intolerable. In the meantime the bishop sang praises to God in the midst of the flames, but remained unconsumed. Determined, however, to put an end to his life, the guards struck spears into his body, when the quantity of blood that issued from the wounds extinguished the flames. After considerable attempts, they put him to death, and burnt his body. Twelve other Christians who had been intimate with Polycarp were soon after martyred" (King, p. 18).

Polycarp was the 12th martyr to die in Smyrna. The date was Feb. 22, 156 (Payne, *Fathers of the Eastern Church*, p. 20).

We have completed our study of John's three pupils. In our next chapter we will continue our chronological study of the church as a whole in the second century.

# 25

## The Nazarenes and Ebionites

70

**W**hile the disciples of John—Papias, Ignatius and Polycarp—were conducting church business in Asia and Syrian Antioch, what was happening to the headquarters church which had fled Jerusalem for Pella?

They continued to call themselves “The Way” or the “Church of God” but the Jews gave them another name: “Nazarenes.” This is the same name used in the Bible to refer to Paul and the true church (Acts 24:5). They probably were called this because they followed the Nazarene Jesus (Bruce, pp. 213-214).

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes the Nazarenes as “an obscure Jewish-Christian sect... they dated their settlement in Pella from the flight of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, immediately before the siege in A.D. 70;... Jerome (Ep. 79, to Augustine) says that they believed in Christ the Son of God, born to the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, rose again, but adds that, ‘desiring to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other’... while adhering as far as possible to the Mosaic economy as regarding circumcision, sabbaths, foods and the like, they did

not refuse to recognize the apostolicity of Paul or the rights of heathen Christians (Jer., Comm. in Isa., ix, 1)” (“Nazarenes,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. xix, p. 319).

### Nazarenes Keep Sabbath

The Presbyterian professor Hugh Smith, in his church history, described the Nazarenes thus: “Abhorred and publicly execrated by the Jews for their attachment to Christianity, and despised by Christians for their prejudice in favour of the Mosaic law (the Sabbath), they were peculiarly oppressed and unfortunate. Traces of this sect appear as late as the fourth century, being joined by what is known as the Ecesaites, a mixture of Judaism and Christianity” (*Hugh Smith’s History*, p. 72, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 65).

“Dr. Francis White, Lord Bishop of Ely, mentions the Nazarenes as one of the ancient bodies of Sabbath-keepers who were condemned by church leaders for that heresy; and he classes them with heretics, as Morer has done (*Decline and Fall*, Chap. 15). Yet the Nazarenes have a peculiar claim to

our regard, as being in reality the apostolic church of Jerusalem, and its direct successors” (Dugger and Dodd, pp. 65-66).

The Nazarenes languished for more than 60 years (until about 130) in solitude and obscurity in the little town of Pella, beyond the Jordan. Members frequently journeyed to Jerusalem. Because they were considered Jewish by the Romans, Nazarenes were allowed to worship freely in Jerusalem with the Jews.

“Until after the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) Christians had been regarded as members of the Jewish faith. They were thus tolerated by Rome. Toward the end of the century, however, they were first deemed to be a menace—small but insidious—to the Imperial sovereignty” (*Selected Readings in the History of Civilization* compiled and edited by Richard H. Paige, p. 51).

The Jews, too, as a whole, considered early Christians to be part of them. “There were good reasons for Jewish toleration and even qualified approval of Christian Jews. The Christian Jews were regarded as a sect within Judaism, rather than members of a rival faith, for they observed the Law strictly and displayed unusual devotion to the Temple [before its destruction]—the outward marks of religious loyalty from the standpoint of Judaism. Furthermore, their zeal for the coming of a future Messiah could not but win approval of other religious-minded Jews, although their claim that they already knew who the Messiah was must have taxed the forbearance of non-Christian Jews” (Purinton, p. 224).

### Christianity Made Illegal

“During the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), confiscation of property and banishment of Christians took place from time to time. By this time, at least, the Roman government was fully aware of the existence of Christianity as an obstinate and annoying religious minority group. However, during the first century and a half of Christianity there was no official policy of general persecution. Government action was based upon the policy

of ‘rescripts.’ Christianity was considered a crime, but its adherents were not hunted down and cases were considered on an individual basis. Action was not taken against Christians until a report to the emperor had been made and his reply (rescript) had been received in connection with each particular situation” (Purinton, pp. 240-241).

### Persecution Under Trajan

C. Plinus Secundus (the younger Pliny) was governor of Bithynia and Pontus, the area between Galatia and the Black Sea early in the second century. During his second period in office (A.D. 111-112), he wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan in Rome, asking if he were properly punishing Christians.

“Pliny had at first taken summary action against Christians in his province, in the exercise of the very wide discretion which belonged to his proconsular *imperium*. But as further instances of Christianity were brought to his notice, he began to wonder if he was following the correct procedure. Nothing in his past experience helped him here, and there was no statute against Christians which his expert legal assessors could quote to him so as to set his doubts to rest. Accordingly, he consulted the emperor, as he did on many matters...” (Bruce, p. 422).

### Pliny Writes to Trajan

Pliny wrote: “It is a rule, Sire, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts, for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or of guiding my uncertainty? Having never been present at any trials of the Christians, I am unacquainted as to the method and limits to be observed in examining and punishing them. Whether therefore, any difference is to be made with respect to age, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and adult; whether repentance admits to a pardon; or if a man has been once a Christian, it avails him nothing to recant; whether the mere profession of Christianity, albeit without any criminal act, or only the crimes associated therewith

are punishable; in all these points I am greatly doubtful.

“In the meanwhile the method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians, is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians, if they confessed I repeated the question again, adding a threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed; for I was persuaded, that whatever the nature of their creed, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved chastisement. There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation: but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried thither.

“These accusations from the mere fact that the matter was being investigated, began to spread, and several forms of mischief came to light. A placard was posted up without any signature, accusing a number of people by name. Those who denied that they were Christians, or had ever been so, who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites with wine and frankincense to your statue (which I ordered to be brought for the purpose, together with those of the gods), and finally cursed the name of Christ (none of which it is said, those who really are Christians can be forced into performing), I thought proper to discharge. Others who were named by the informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion formerly, but had now quitted it (some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago). They all worshiped your statue, and the images of the gods, and cursed the name of Christ.

“They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt or their error was, that they met on a certain fixed day before it was light and sang an antiphonal chant to Christ, as to a god, binding themselves by solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and

then reassemble to partake of food—food of an ordinary innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, called deaconesses. But I could discover nothing but depraved and excessive superstition.

“I therefore thought it proper to adjourn all further proceedings in this affair, in order to consult with you. For the matter is well worth referring to you, especially considering the numbers endangered: persons of all ranks and ages, and of both sexes, are and will be involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and countryside. Nevertheless it seems still possible to check and cure it. The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented, and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are again revived, while there is a general demand for sacrificial animals which for some time past have been met with but few purchasers. From hence it is easy to imagine, what numbers might be reclaimed from this error, if the door is left open to repentance” (Paige, pp. 51-53).

### Trajan Replies to Pliny

The Emperor’s response was brief:

“My dear Secundus: You have followed the correct procedure in investigating the case of those who have been charged before you with being Christians. Indeed, no general decision can be made by which a set form of dealing with them could be established. They must not be ferreted out; if they are charged and convicted, they must be punished, provided that anyone who denies that he is a Christian and gives practical proof of that by invoking our gods is to be discharged on the strength of his repudiation, no matter what grounds for suspicion may have existed against him in the past.

Anonymous documents which are laid before you should receive no attention in any case; they are a very bad precedent and quite unworthy of the age in which we live" (Bruce, pp. 424-425).

"Between the reign of Trajan and the year 250, persecution is better understood as a response to pressure from the Emperor's subjects than as his own initiative, enforced from above.

"Indeed, the Emperor did more to protect the Christians than stamp them out. When Emperor Trajan replied to inquiries from his governor Pliny, he ruled that Christians must be given a proper trial before their own accusers and that judges must not give weight to anonymous attacks. This reply, issued c. 110, was essentially confirmed by the Emperor Hadrian in 122/3 when the 'provincials,' perhaps the provincial council of Asia, petitioned his governor for greater license. The ruling set the legal framework for Christians' trials and gave them no mean protection. Legally, Christians were 'not to be hunted out.'" (Fox, p. 423).

However, there were cases when Christians were being illegally hunted down. "The ban on 'hunting' could never be absolute. When persecution threatened, Christians tended to withdraw or hide, and without some informed pursuit, their leaders would never have been found at all" (Fox, p. 424).

### Marcus Leads Members Astray

Under Emperor Hadrian (117-138), the Roman government became fed up with rebellion on the part of the Jews. "The emperor founded, under the name of Aelia Capitolina a new city on Mount Sion, to which he gave the privileges of a colony; and denouncing the severest penalties against any of the Jewish people who should dare to approach its precincts, he fixed a vigilant garrison of a Roman cohort to enforce the execution of his orders." The Nazarenes—as well as the Jews—were no longer allowed in Jerusalem (or "Aelia Capitolina," as it was now called by the Romans)!

To get around this ban, the Nazarenes

elected Marcus, a Gentile man, as bishop. He was most likely from Italy or some Latin province. Marcus persuaded most of the Nazarenes to give up God's laws—to "renounce the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and prejudices they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian, and more firmly cemented their union with the [Roman] Catholic church."

The Nazarenes—some of whom were undoubtedly members of God's church—left God's way and commands which they had kept from A.D. 70 to beyond 170. They allowed a pagan leader to bewitch them—to lead them from truth into error (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon, abridged by Frank C. Bourne, pp. 224-225).

### The Smyrnaean Era

This time period in the history of the Church of God is a bleak one. Notice how Christ described this time in prophecy to John:

"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are [spiritual] Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:9-10).

This era was one of persecution and martyrdom. Though physically poor, the brethren who remained faithful were spiritually rich. Many, like Ignatius, were brave in their martyrdoms, causing conversions among the torturers and spectators.

### Polycarp's Contemporary

A contemporary of Polycarp was an early church writer named Justin, who lived in Palestine six miles from the city of Samaria (Eusebius, p. 86). He was not a minister, but

135

a layman (*The Early Church* by Henry Chadwick, p. 99).

It is difficult to determine if Justin was a member of the Church of God. He was trained in Greek philosophy before becoming a Christian and never gave up some of his philosophical beliefs. There is some indication that he kept Sunday instead of the Sabbath. But he also upheld many of the beliefs of the apostles and of the church today, and he was martyred for being a Christian. Dugger and Dodd, in their history of the Church of God, name him among the early church writers (Dugger and Dodd, p. 63).

With this caution in mind, let us not brush aside this famous and prolific writer of the second century. Let's look at his life, writings, beliefs and martyrdom. Though he may not have been a true Christian himself, he may have been influenced by them.

### Justin's Early Life

Justin Martyr was born A.D. 103 in Samaritan territory to Greek parents. As a young man he went to Ephesus to study (Chadwick, pp. 74-75; King, p. 18).

Justin began studying with a Stoic tutor, for Stoicism was the most popular philosophy at that time. He then moved on to a teacher of Aristotle. Justin became disillusioned with this teacher when he became overly anxious about his fee. Justin then went to a Pythagorean and finally to a teacher of Plato.

### Justin's Conversion

"But while meditating in solitude on the seashore Justin met an old man who refuted the Platonic doctrine of the soul, and proceeded to tell him about the prophets of the Old Testament who foretold the coming of Christ. Justin was converted, but did not understand this to mean the abandonment of his philosophical inquiries, nor even the renunciation of all that he had learnt from Platonism" (Chadwick, p. 75). His conversion happened about 133, when he was 30

years old (King, p. 18).

Justin wrote an "elegant epistle to the Gentiles" to convert them to his newly acquired faith. He also used his talent as a philosopher to convince Jews of the truth of Christianity and spent a lot of time traveling (King, p. 18).

### Justin's Writings

Justin moved from Ephesus to Rome, where he kept a public school. Soon after the year 151 he wrote an *Apology or Defense* of Christianity to Emperor Antoninus Pius. In this work Justin described some of the thoughts that went through his mind when he was converted:

"I myself found satisfaction in Plato's teaching, and used to hear the Christians abused, but when I found them fearless in the face of death and all that men think terrible, it dawned on me that they could not possibly be living in wickedness and self-indulgence. For how could a self-indulgent or licentious person who took pleasure in devouring human flesh greet death with a smile, as if he wanted to be deprived of the things he loved most? Would he not rather strive by all means to prolong his present existence indefinitely, and keep out of sight of the secular authorities, rather than give himself up to certain death?" (Eusebius, pp. 161-162).

Notice how Justin described Christian living in *Apology*: "Before we became Christians we took pleasure in debauchery, now we rejoice in the purity of life; we used to practise magic and sorcery, now we are dedicated to the good, unbegotten God; we used to value above all else money and possessions, now we bring together all that we have and share it with those who are in need. Formerly, we hated and killed one another and, because of a different nationality or custom, we refused to admit strangers within our gates. Now since the coming of Christ we all live in peace. We pray for our enemies and seek to win over those who hate us unjustly in order that, by living according to the noble precepts of Christ, they may

152

partake with us in the same joyful hope of obtaining our reward from God, the Lord of all" (*Apology*, I, 14, translated by Charles Norris Cochrane in *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 221).

This work, which displayed "great learning and genius," led the emperor to publish an edict in favor of the Christians (King, p. 18).

155

A few years later, perhaps about the time Papias was martyred (155) Justin reissued this work, together with a supplement, commonly called his *Second Apology*, in a critical moment in the history of the church in Rome when it had been harassed by City Prefect Lollus Urbicus.

156

### Germanicus Martyred

The martyrdom of a young Christian named Germanicus at this time caused a number of other people to be converted. When he was delivered to the beasts on account of his faith, he behaved with such courage that several pagans became converted to the faith which inspired such fortitude. Others became so enraged by the conversion of these pagans that they cried he merited death. These also demanded the death of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (King, p. 17).

Germanicus and Polycarp were both martyred about 156.

160

### Belief in Millennium Extant

In the 160s it was not unusual for Christians to believe that Christ would return soon to set up a millennial rule on the earth. According to one chronology, it was fewer than 40 years away—it would occur by the year 200 (Fox, p. 405).

### Justin Writes Again

About 160 Justin authored another work. "The *Dialogue With Trypho the Jew* was written after the first *Apology*, probably about 160, but is presented as an account of a discussion which Justin had with Trypho about 135" (Chadwick, p. 75).

### Justin's Beliefs

160

"Justin vigorously rejected pagan myth and cult as gross superstition infected by evil, but gave the most positive welcome possible to the classical philosophical tradition." He claimed the God of Plato was the God of the Bible. Socrates perceived corruption in the old religion and was hounded to death by the Athenians, serving as a model for Christian martyrs.

Justin felt Plato correctly taught "that the soul has a special kinship to God, that man is responsible for his actions, and that in the world to come there is judgement and justice." But Justin did not believe in the myths of immortal soul or transmigration.

He knew it was "very hard to find God without special help."

Justin understood that Christ was separate from God the Father, while Catholic belief at that time made the two Beings one. "The Son-Logos is necessary to mediate between the supreme Father and the material world. Justin therefore insists that the Logos is 'other than' the Father, derived from the Father in a process which in no way diminishes or divides the being of the Father, but in the manner in which one torch may be lit from another. He is Light of Light.... Justin insisted that Christ was not a mere man but was also God; at his birth he had been worshiped by the Magi, and there could be no question of a holy life being rewarded by elevation to divine rank" (Chadwick, pp. 75-77, 86-87).

"Justin was well aware of the existence of Gnostic heresies, and wrote a (lost) treatise refuting them. He believed in the free will of man, and was therefore critical of the Gnostic doctrine that salvation depends on a predestination which is indifferent to moral virtue... Justin stressed that the creation is the supreme work of God, acting through the Logos as mediator; that in the incarnation the Logos assumed a complete manhood, body, soul, and mind, and Christ 'truly suffered' in his passion; above all, that the destiny of man hereafter is not a deliverance of an immortal soul from the bondage of a

physical frame, but is 'resurrection,' which Justin interpreted in the most literal way. Accepting the Apocalypse of John as authoritative and inspired, Justin understood the Christian hope to mean the expectation that Christ would return to a rebuilt Jerusalem to reign with his saints for a thousand years" (Chadwick, pp. 77-78).

Justin referred to many books of the Bible, including Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts and many of Paul's epistles.

Though Justin had a lot of truth, he apparently kept the wrong day of the week. "He stated that the 'Memoirs of the Apostles,' called the Gospels, were read every Sunday in the worship of the church along with the Old Testament [*Apology I*, pp. 66, 67]" (Tenney, p. 407).

There also is an indication that Justin believed he would go to heaven when he died, as we shall see when we discuss his martyrdom.

The weekly Eucharist, as described by Justin, was similar to the annual Passover in God's church:

"After readings from 'the memoirs of the apostles' and from the Old Testament prophets, the president (evidently the bishop) preached a sermon, at the end of which everyone stood for a solemn prayer ending in the kiss of peace. Then bread and 'a cup of water and of wine mixed with water' were brought to the president who 'to the best of his ability' offered a prayer of thanks to the Father through the Son and Holy Spirit, concluding with the people signifying their ratification by the word *Amen*.... The Communion followed at which each person partook of the bread and wine distributed to them by deacons, and received it not as common food for satisfying hunger and thirst, but as the flesh and blood of Christ. Finally pieces of the sacred bread were taken round to the sick and those in prison" (Chadwick, pp. 261-262).

The church was made up of the people of God who had been baptized and "born again," Justin believed. "The church, which... owes its being to Christ and whose union with Christ is in the end to be made complete, is

in the meantime the people of God.... Repentance is therefore required as a precedent condition. The candidate must be cleansed from sin before he is able to enter the church.... Entrance into the church is by a new birth; it is the bestowal of a new life.... The teaching of the church must be in accordance with apostolic tradition" (Durell, pp. 140, 141, 142, 144).

### Death of Justin

About A.D. 165 Justin entered into contests with Crescens, a "celebrated cynic philosopher." Justin's arguments were so powerful, and yet so disgusting to Crescens, that the latter made up his mind to have Justin killed.

Justin's second *Apology* gave Crescens an opportunity to prejudice the emperor against Justin. The emperor had Justin and six companions arrested. The prisoners were commanded to deny their faith and sacrifice to pagan idols. They refused. Justin and his friends were then scourged and beheaded (King, p. 18).

Prior to his martyrdom, Justin was interrogated by Rusticus, the prefect of Rome.

Rusticus said to Justin, "I order you to obey the gods and submit to the Emperor."

Justin replied, "I see no wrong in submitting to Christ."

"What are your doctrines?" asked Rusticus.

"Our belief in one God, and Jesus Christ his son, foretold by the prophets, Christ being the herald of salvation and teacher of the good disciples; and since I am a man, I cannot speak further of God's boundless divinity."

"How do you assemble?" asked Rusticus.

"Where each man chooses, and where we can," Justin replied. "The God of the Christians is not circumscribed by space."

"Are you a Christian?"

"Of course."

After more questions, Rusticus asked Justin, "So you believe you will go to heaven and receive your reward when you die?"

Justin answered, "I not only believe it,

but I know it and am fully persuaded of it.”

“Then I shall give you the opportunity to find out.”

“Do as you will,” retorted Justin. “We are Christians and will not sacrifice to idols.”

Prior to his decapitation, Justin said, “We desire nothing more than to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ; for this gives us salvation and joyfulness before his dreadful judgment seat, at which all the world must appear” (Payne, *Western Fathers*, pp. 32-33).

### Passover, Old Testament Supported

True Christians at this time were still keeping Passover on 14th of the first month of God’s sacred calendar. And they had not thrown away the Old Testament, as many false Christians throughout history have. The Old Testament was important to them.

“The second-century churches of Asia held the Christian *Pascha* [Passover] to celebrate the passion, resurrection and exaltation of Christ, on the same day as the Jewish Passover. (This was probably the general custom of the earliest Christians.) Some of their opponents believed that Sunday was the only appropriate day to end the fast that preceded *Pascha*, and accused them of Judaizing, labelling them ‘*Quartodecimans*’—‘fourteenthers.’ (Passover fell on the fourteenth day of the month *Nisan*.)

“Jews keenly resented the Christians’ claim that the Old Testament belonged to them exclusively since they alone understood it aright. Christians followed the example of Jesus and the apostles, and accepted the Old Testament as inspired and authoritative Scripture. They normally used the Greek *Septuagint* version of the Old Testament” (*Eerdman’s Handbook to the History of Christianity*, Dr. Tim Dowley, ed., p. 101).

“Early Christianity arrived with very distinctive roots. Grafted onto the Old Testament, it was not easily smothered, not even by the established ground cover of the pagan towns” (Fox, p. 22).

“Most of the Gnostics rejected the entire Old Testament, at least in any straightforward meaning. They blamed the inferior God of the Old Testament for creating the evil material world.

“Early Christians went to exaggerated lengths to make the Old Testament into a Christian book speaking everywhere about Christ and his church. Their interpretations of Scripture often kept to the historical pattern of promise and fulfillment, shadow and substance, which the New Testament writers largely used.

“Melito of Sardis travelled to Palestine in about A.D. 170 to investigate the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures” (Dowley, p. 101).

### The Ebionites

Meanwhile, what happened to the Jerusalem Church which had fled to Pella?

Not all had followed Marcus. “As for the remnant of Jewish Christians, their subsequent history is but scantily documented. Some maintained relations with the Catholic Church, like the Nazarenes whom Jerome knew at Beroea (Aleppo) in Syria; these may represent a dispersion from the early church of Damascus. Others, and these perhaps the majority, maintained their existence as the church of Jerusalem in dispersion, alienated alike from orthodox Jews and catholic Christians. They called themselves ‘the poor’—*ha’ebyonium*, the ‘Ebionites’ of the Greek and Latin Fathers. The Church of Jerusalem in apostolic times used this designation of itself, and so did the Qumran community” (Bruce, p. 391).

“It was with contempt that the faithful few—truly a ‘little flock’—were called Ebionites or ‘paupers’ in reference to their supposed unbelievable stupidity or naivete in believing the Bible. They clung to the Law of God! The world has nothing in common with anyone who believes *in* obeying God. The world calls that *stupid!*

“The large *professing* Christian church, founded by Simon Magus, now branded them ‘heretics.’ Even the name ‘Nazarene’ was considered too honorable for them now! They

still kept their headquarters at Pella, and spread themselves into villages near Damascus. There is also a record of a small congregation in Beroea, now called Aleppo. Traces of Ebionites may be discovered as late as the 4th century.

“Among the people east of Jordan, Ebionite *views* lingered until the Islamic conquest in the 7th century” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 15).

Bruce, obtaining information from Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Origen, said this branch of “Jewish Christianity” was probably called Ebionites “to denote not only their economic status (which was depressed enough) but also their ideal of humble piety. As early as some parts of the Old Testament psalter poverty and piety are regular companions, and Matthew’s Gospel conveys the true connotations of Jesus’ beatitude on ‘the poor’ (Luke 6:20) by expanding it to ‘the poor in spirit’ (Matt. 5:3).” The name, said Bruce, was a “Graecized form which derives from the Hebrew self-description as *ha’ebyonim*, ‘the poor’ ” (Bruce, p. 271).

## 177

### Christians in France Persecuted

About the time of Justin’s martyrdom, Christians were being put to death in southern France (then called Gaul): “Under Marcus Aurelius (161-180), there fell that bloody persecution in Southern Gaul which claimed countless victims from the Christian Church at Lyons (177)” (*Outlines of Church History* by Rudolf Sohm, p. 12).

Christians were arrested in Lyons and Vienne, a town 20 miles down the Rhone River, in June 177. They were brutally tortured as they waited in prison for the day of mass execution, set for Aug. 1 of that year (Pagels, pp. 101, 102, 119).

“This [Aug. 1] was a holiday to celebrate the greatness of Rome and the emperor. Such occasions required the governor to display his patriotism by sponsoring lavish public entertainment for the whole population of the city. These obligations burdened the provincial officials with enormous expenses for hiring professional gladiators,

boxers, wrestling teams, and swordsmen. But the year before, the emperor and the Senate had passed a new law to offset the cost of the gladiatorial shows. Now the governor could legally substitute condemned criminals who were non-citizens, offering the spectacle of their torture and execution instead of athletic competitions—at the cost of six aurei per head, one-tenth the cost of hiring a fifth-class gladiator, with proportionate savings for the higher grades. This consideration no doubt added incentive to the official zeal against Christians, who could provide, as they did in Lyons, the least expensive holiday entertainment” (Pagels, pp. 102-103).

“During this period the terrors of persecution raged in France, particularly at Lyons, where the torture to which many Christians were put almost exceeds description. Even the servants and slaves of opulent Christians were racked and tortured, to make them accuse their masters and employers.

“At Lyons, some of the martyrs were sewn up in nets, and thrown on the horns of wild bulls. Indeed, so far did the malice of the pagans proceed, that they set guards over the bodies, lest the friends of the deceased should get them by stealth” (King, pp. 18-19).

### Letter Describes Persecution

A letter was sent from Gaul to Asia and Phrygia. It described some of the ordeals that Christians were going through.

It began, “The servants of Christ at Vienne and Lyons in Gaul to our brothers in Asia and Phrygia (most of the Gallic converts were emigrants from these areas) who have the same faith and hope of redemption as we: peace, grace, and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord...

“The severity of our trials here, the unbridled fury of the heathen against God’s people, the untold sufferings of the blessed martyrs, we are incapable of describing in detail: indeed no pen could do them justice. The adversary (Satan) swooped on us with all his might, giving us a foretaste of his

advent, which undoubtedly is imminent (referring to 2 Thes. 2:7-9). He left no stone unturned in his efforts to train his adherents and equip them to attack the servants of God, so that not only were they debarred from houses, baths and the forum: they actually forbade any of us to be seen in any place whatever" (Eusebius, pp. 193-194).

The letter told how certain members rose from ranks as "unshakable pillars," drawing attention away from the weaker members of the church. "These charged into the fight, standing up to every kind of abuse and punishment, and made light of their heavy load as they hastened to Christ, proving beyond a doubt that the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared with the glory that is in store for us.

"To begin with, they historically endured whatever the surging crowd heaped on them, noisy abuse, blows, dragging along the ground, plundering, stoning, imprisonment, and everything that an infuriated mob normally does to hated enemies. Then they were marched into the forum and interrogated by the tribune and the city authorities before the whole population. When they confessed Christ, they were locked up in the gaol (jail) to await the governor's arrival."

When they were taken before the governor, a church member named Vettius Epagathus, who "had scrupulously observed all in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord and was untiring in service to his neighbour, utterly devoted to God, and fervent in spirit," felt the judgment on Christians was more than he could bear. He asked permission to speak in their defense, to prove there was nothing godless or irreligious among them. The crowd around the tribunal howled Vettius down. "The governor dismissed his perfectly reasonable application with the curt question, 'Are you a Christian?' In the clearest possible tones Vettius replied, 'I am.' And he, too, was admitted to the ranks of the martyrs."

The rest of the people fell into two groups, the letter explained. Some were ready to be martyred and "made full confession of their testimony with the greatest eagerness." Oth-

ers were spiritually "flabby" and in no condition to face the strain of a struggle to the death.

As the arrests went on day after day, all of the leading church members—"those who had done most to build up our church life"—were martyred.

Also arrested were heathen domestic servants who had belonged to Christians. Afraid of being tortured, the servants falsely accused Christians of eating their own children at banquets and of having incest between sons and mothers. When these rumors spread, even unconverted family members who had shown restraint toward Christians now raged like wild beasts at them. "So was proved the true saying of our Lord: 'the time will come when whoever kills you will think he is doing a service to God' (John 16:2)."

Other martyrs included Sanctus, a deacon from Vienne; Maturus, who had recently been baptized; Attalus, who was a church pillar and native of Pergamum; and Blandina, a woman who was severely tortured.

Sanctus was beaten, bruised and burnt until he was bent, swollen and bloody. A few days later he was placed on the rack a second time. The wicked men felt he would be defeated by the rack now that his body was swollen and inflamed. "However, nothing of the sort happened: to their amazement his body became erect and straight as a result of these new torments, and recovered its former appearance and the use of the limbs; thus through the grace of Christ his second spell on the rack proved to be not punishment but cure."

"Blandina was filled with such power that those who took it in turns to subject her to every kind of torture from morning to night were exhausted by their efforts and confessed themselves beaten—they could think of nothing else to do to her. They were amazed that she was still breathing, for her whole body was mangled and her wounds gaped; they declared that torment of any one kind was enough to part soul and body, let alone a succession of torments of such ex-

treme severity. But the blessed woman, wrestling magnificently, grew in strength as she proclaimed her faith, and found refreshment, rest, and insensibility to her sufferings in uttering the words: 'I am a Christian: we do nothing to be ashamed of.'

Another woman, Biblis, denied Christ at first. But she was put on the rack and forced to say wicked things about Christians. "But on the rack she came to her senses.... She flatly contradicted the slanders: 'How could children be eaten by people who were not even allowed to eat the blood of brute beasts?' From then on she insisted that she was a Christian, and so joined the ranks of the martyrs."

Many Christians were thrown into filthy prisons and put in stocks, where some died quickly and others lived on.

Those who denied Christ gained nothing. They were imprisoned, accused of murder and punished twice as severely as Christians. They were called cowards by the heathen and suffered from guilty consciences.

Later, Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina and Attalus were taken from jail to the amphitheater to face wild beasts. Maturus and Sanctus again were taken through a whole series of punishments including whippings, maulings by beasts. The punishments culminated with their being forced to sit in an iron chair over a fire which roasted their flesh and suffocated them with the strong, unpleasant smoke of their burning flesh.

Blandina was hung on a post and left as food for the animals. When they did not harm her, she was returned to jail.

Attalus was paraded around the amphitheater with a placard on which was written: "This is Attalus the Christian," while the crowd screamed angry epithets at him. But when the governor discovered Attalus was a Roman citizen, he ordered him to be put back in jail with others about whom he had written Caesar for instructions.

Caesar issued a command for those who denied Christ to be released. Christians were to be tortured to death.

At the inauguration of a pagan festival the prisoners again were put on parade

before the crowds. Once again they were examined. This time the Roman citizens who claimed to be Christians were beheaded. Christians who were not Roman citizens were thrown to the wild beasts.

Attalus and a physician named Alexander were thrown to the beasts. Alexander was born in Phrygia but had lived many years in Gaul. He was a doctor and was "known to nearly everyone for his love of God and his boldness of speech." But it was his boldness of speech while confessing Christ which got him thrown to the beasts.

[Fox adds this about Alexander: "...He was not without a share of the charisma of the Apostles. Presumably, he worked miracles of healing" (Fox, p. 329).]

Blandina and a 15-year-old boy named Ponticus were brought into the amphitheater on the last day of sports. They were tortured in many ways and, while the boy was encouraged by Blandina's example, he died first. "After the whips, after the beasts, after the griddle, she was finally dropped into a basket and thrown to a bull. Time after time the animal tossed her.... Then she, too, was sacrificed, while the heathen themselves admitted that never yet had they known a woman to suffer so much for so long."

The bodies of Christians who had suffocated in jail were thrown to the dogs. The remains were not allowed to be buried. The pagans jeered at these charred and torn bits of human bodies and cried, "Where is their God?" and "What did they get for their religion, which they preferred to their own lives?" They believed that by refusing burial they were denying Christians their opportunity to be in the resurrection (Eusebius, pp. 192-203; Pagels, pp. 101-104).

When it was all over, almost 50 Christians had lost their lives in the two-month ordeal (Pagels, p. 104). What resulted from this trial on the Church of God? Was the church stamped out? Of course not! Martyrdom actually caused growth in the church. Spectators were so moved by the conviction of the martyrs that many were converted (Pagels, p. 121).

### Irenaeus Becomes Bishop of Lyons

The 90-year-old bishop of Lyons, Pothinus, was martyred at this time. He was succeeded by Irenaeus, a well-known “apostolic father.” Though he may not have been a member of the true Church of God, Irenaeus, in his youth, had listened to Polycarp (Eusebius, p. 208).

His writings reflected truth handed down from the time of the apostles: “Although Irenaeus stands at a distinct distance from primitive Christianity, remnants of the archaic period can still be observed in his work....

“Irenaeus was a likable person.... His strength lay in moderation. All excess and fantasy were alien to his practical disposition. Sobriety was the foremost characteristic of this righteous man, though it did not keep him from believing in chiliasm (the doctrine that Christ will reign for a thousand years on earth). ‘Like Polycarp, Irenaeus was a peace-loving soul who was most disinclined to cause division for the sake of minor differences’ (H. Ziegler: *Irenaeus, The Bishop of Lyon* (1871), p. 20)” (*The Heretics: Heresy Through the Ages* by Walter Nigg, p. 74).

“Bishop Irenaeus and his followers insisted that there could only be one church, and outside of that church, he declared, ‘there is no salvation.’ Members of this church alone are orthodox (literally, ‘straight-thinking’) Christians. And, he claimed, this church must be *catholic*—that is, universal” (Pagels, p. xxiv). Apparently God’s true church and the Roman imitation both claimed to be universal, or catholic. But Irenaeus appears to have kept the Passover and would later be shocked when the bishop at Rome insisted everyone keep Easter or else not call itself catholic!

Irenaeus lived from about 130 to 202. He wrote many works including five books called *Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So Called*, in which he attacked Gnosticism.

Book II of this work tells us that miracles were still occurring in the church in the

second century. “Some drive out demons really and truly, so that often those cleansed from evil spirits believe and become members of the church; some have fore-knowledge of the future, visions, and prophetic utterances; others, by the laying on of hands, heal the sick and restore them to health; and before now [though no longer occurring], as I said, dead men have actually been raised and have remained with us for many years” (Eusebius, pp. 209-210).

Irenaeus flourished about 170. His writings show no question that the books of the New Testament, which were then being canonized, were authoritative (Tenney, p. 407).

Irenaeus understood man’s true destiny: to be born into the family of God. “There is a magnificent optimism in the theology of Irenaeus and its faith that by redemption man could rank higher than an angel” (Fox, p. 331).

We will discuss the remainder of Irenaeus’ life and writings after we examine Melito, bishop of Sardis, who wrote in the 170s.

### Melito, Bishop of Sardis

A contemporary of Irenaeus was Melito, bishop of Sardis. He was a “champion of orthodoxy and upholder of apostolic tradition,” making it likely that he was a true minister in the Church of God. He was a prolific writer but only fragments remain (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., “Melito,” p. 95).

“Melito, bishop of Sardis (circ. 160–180), wrote an essay “On the Church” and another “On the Lord’s Day.” Neither of these has come down to us, but it is perhaps fair to infer from them the fact of his writing them that he had a high sense of the place of the church in the scheme of salvation and of the church’s disciplinary authority” (Durell, p. 179).

Melito kept the Passover, understood Jesus was the God of the Old Testament and the One who created all things under the direction of God. He knew Christ was the Passover Lamb and while on the earth was

both man and God. Much of his writings describe the irony of the Creator being crucified by his creation; and the God of Israel being killed by his own people; yet living again so He could give life to his murderers.

### Melito Writes About Passover

In his book, *Melito On Pascha*, Melito described the mystery of Passover—that is, Christ being the Lamb. He asked the question in verse 32:

“Tell me, angel, what did you respect?

The slaughter of the sheep or the Life of the Lord?

The death of the sheep or the model of the Lord?

The blood of the sheep or the Spirit of the Lord?”

Melito supported God’s Law in verse 39: “...and the decrees of the gospel were proclaimed in advance by the law.”

Later, Melito described how Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and David were all types of Christ:

“Therefore if you wish to see the mystery of the Lord, look at Abel who is similarly murdered,

at Isaac who is similarly bound,

at Joseph who is similarly sold,

at Moses who is similarly exposed,

at David who is similarly persecuted,

at the prophets who similarly suffer for the sake of Christ.

Look also at the sheep which are slain in the land of Egypt,

which struck Egypt

and saved Israel by its blood” (vv. 59-60).

Beginning in verse 81 Melito explained how Jesus was the God of the Old Testament:

“O lawless Israel, what is this unprecedented crime you committed, thrusting your Lord among unprecedented sufferings,

your Sovereign,

who formed you,

who made you,

who honored you,

who called you ‘Israel’?

But you did not turn out to be ‘Israel’;

you did not ‘see God,’

you did not recognize the Lord.

You did not know, Israel,

that he is the firstborn of God,

who was begotten before the morning

star,

who tinted the light,

who lit up the day,

who divided off the darkness,

who fixed the first marker,

who hung the earth,

who controlled the deep,

who spread out the firmament,

who arrayed the world,

who fitted the stars in heaven,

who lit up the luminaries,

who made the angels in heaven,

who established the thrones there,

who formed man upon the earth.

It was he who chose you and guided you from Adam to Noah,

from Noah to Abraham,

from Abraham to Isaac

and Jacob and the twelve patriarchs

It was he who guided you into Egypt,

and watched over you and there sustained you.

It was he who lit your way with a pillar

and sheltered you with a cloud,

who cut the Red Sea and let you through and destroyed your enemy.

It is he who gave you manna from heaven,

who gave you drink from a rock,

who legislated for you at Horeb,

who gave you inheritance in the land,

who sent out you to the prophets,

who raised up your kings.

It is he who came to you,

who healed your suffering ones,

and raised your dead

It is he that you outraged;

it is he against whom you sinned;

it is he that you wronged;

it is he that you killed...” (vv. 81-86).

Melito shortly afterward described how Christ was killed:

“Just so he has been lifted up on a tall tree,

and a notice has been attached to show who has been murdered.

who is this? To say is hard, and not to say is too terrible.

Yet listen, trembling at him for who the earth quaked.

He who hung the earth is hanging;  
he who fixed the heavens has been fixed;  
he who fastened the universe has been fastened to a tree;  
the Sovereign has been insulted;  
the God has been murdered;  
the King of Israel has been put to death by an Israelite right hand.

O unprecedented murder! Unprecedented crime!

The Sovereign has been made unrecognizable by his naked body,  
and is not even allowed a garment to keep him from view.

That is why the luminaries turned away,  
and the day was darkened  
so that he might hide the one stripped bare upon the tree,  
darkening not the body of the Lord  
but the eyes of men.

For when the people did not tremble, the earth quaked;

when the people were not terrified, the heavens were terrified;

when the people did not tear their clothes, the angel tore his;

when the people did not lament, the Lord thundered out of heaven  
and the Highest gave voice.

Therefore, O Israel,  
you did not quake in the presence of the Lord,

so you quaked at the presence of foes;  
you were not terrified in the presence of the Lord...

you did not lament over the Lord,  
so you lamented over your firstborn;  
you did not tear your clothes when the Lord was hung,

so you tore them over those who were slain;

You forsook the Lord,  
you were not found by him;  
you did not accept the Lord,  
you were not pitied by him;  
you dashed down the Lord,

you were dashed to the ground.

And you lie dead,  
but he has risen from the dead  
and gone up to the heights of heaven”  
(vv. 95-100).

As Melito neared the conclusion of his work *On Passover*, he announced that Christ is the Passover Lamb who must be eaten for salvation:

“ ‘Come, then, all you families of men who are

compounded with sins  
and get forgiveness of sins.

For I am your forgiveness,  
I am the Pascha of salvation,

I am the lamb slain for you;  
I am your life,

I am your light,  
I am your salvation,

I am your resurrection,  
I am your king.

I will raise you up by my right hand;

I am leading you up to the heights of heaven;

there will I show you the Father from ages past’ ” (v. 103).

Several fragments remain from Melito’s other writings. Most of these cover the same material as *On Pascha*. They describe how Christ was both man and God, and how Christ was a fulfillment of the ram which Abraham sacrificed in Isaac’s place.

But some fragments describe the church and persecution it was undergoing.

In one fragment of Melito’s writings, we read, “Melito, bishop of Sardis, after many of the things which are also produced by the same Justin, says: We are not devotees of stones which have no sensation, but we are worshipers of the only God who is before all and over all, and of his Christ who is the Word of God before the ages, and so forth” (Fragment 2, p. 65).

In a book to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Melito wrote of persecution against the church:

“Something that has never happened at all before, the race of the godly is persecuted, being harassed by new decrees throughout Asia. For the shameless informers and lov-

ers of other men's goods are taking advantage of the ordinances to commit robbery, by night and day plundering those who do no wrong....

"If it is at your command that this is done, let it count as rightly happening! A king would not ever purpose wrong, and we are glad to win the prize of such a death. The only petition which we make to you is this, that you first personally acquaint yourself with those whose actions cause such strife, and fairly decide whether they deserve death and punishment or safety and peace. But if in fact you are not the source of this decision and this new ordinance, which is not fit to be used even against barbarian enemies, then far more we implore you not to leave us suffering such public pillage" (Fragment 1, vv. 4-6, p. 63).

Marcus Aurelius was emperor from 161 to 180. This would put Melito's writings most likely in the 170s, about the time his contemporary, Irenaeus, was most active.

### Irenaeus Remembers Polycarp

In a letter *To Florinus*, Irenaeus referred to his associations with Polycarp.

"When I was still a boy I saw you in Lower Asia in Polycarp's company, when you were cutting a fine figure at the imperial court and wanted to be in favour with him. I have a clearer recollection of events at that time than of recent happenings—what we learn in childhood develops along with the mind and becomes part of it—so that I can describe the place where blessed Polycarp sat and talked, his goings out and comings in, the character of his life, his personal appearance, his addresses to crowded congregations. I remember how he spoke of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord; how he repeated their words from memory; and how things that he had heard them say about the Lord, his miracles and his teaching, things that he had heard direct from the eyewitnesses of the Word of Life (1 John 1:1), were proclaimed by Polycarp in complete harmony with Scripture. To these things I listened

eagerly at that time, by the mercy of God shown to me, not committing them to writing but learning them by heart. By God's grace, I constantly and conscientiously ruminate on them..." (Eusebius, pp. 227-228).

### Three Types of Ebionites

"Eusebius, whose chief theme was to justify and eulogize Emperor Constantine and the church of Constantine's choice, copied much of his information about the early True Church from Hegesippus, not really telling the true story of either.

"We know but little of Ebionite history. Because their own writings have perished, our information must come from their enemies. And here, clearly, truth is well-tempered with lies!

"Eusebius claims they rejected the virgin birth and pre-existence of Christ, and the writings of Paul. But this was not true at all. The next age of God's True Church—revived in the place where migrating Ebionites disappear—accepted these truths! Their very distinguishing name became *Paulician*!

"It was the elaborate theology of Catholicism and Gnosticism which most of the 'Ebionites' rejected! The interminable *arguments* whether God is one person or three—whether Jesus Christ was God *or* man (He was both—God in the flesh)! And a false version of 'Pauline' theology which claims the Law was abolished!" (*Correspondence Course* Lesson 49, pp. 15-16).

Among this first group of Ebionites could be found members of the Church of God. They were described by Justin as "Jewish Christians—those who practised circumcision and other requirements of the Jewish law but at the same time shared Justin's general view of the person of Christ" (Bruce, p. 391).

A second group called "Ebionites" was a "rigid splinter group" that was indeed antagonistic to Paul. This group of carnal-minded Jews could plainly see Christ was no ordinary man but never forgave Paul for having put Gentiles on the same level as

180

Jews and offering them salvation. Irenaeus, writing about 180 in the area of France, noted that this group used only the Gospel of Matthew (*Correspondence Course* Lesson 49, p. 16).

This group, according to Justin, “believed Jesus to be a man of ordinary descent, who was chosen by God to be Messiah... they also regarded Jesus’ ministry mainly as that of a second Moses; he was in their eyes, not only the prophet like Moses mentioned in Deuteronomy but also the reformer and purifier of the Law, who came to remove from it the unworthy accretions as the sacrificial ritual and to emphasize and apply its true and inward meaning. They refused to acknowledge Paul as a true apostle of Christ; to them the chief of the apostles was James the Just” (Bruce, p. 392).

A third group known as “Ebionites” had accepted Gnostic doctrines. As the second century came to an end, members of this group had exchanged the “simple creed of Jesus Christ for a strange blend of Christianity and Essenism.” Some members of this group became called “Elchasites” after their leader, a false prophet, who led them astray with his demonic visions.

“In every age the Church has its unconverted ‘members.’ But there were a few faithful, who really constituted the church” (*Correspondence Course* Lesson 49, p. 16).

### Christians in India

About the year 180 a minister named Pantaenus left Alexandria, Egypt, on a missionary journey to India. When he got there, he was surprised to find Christians “who already claimed to trace back to St. Bartholomew. They owned a copy of Matthew’s Gospel in ‘the Hebrew script’ which the Apostle was supposed to have left with them” (Fox, p. 278).

Why was this Gospel in Hebrew, when Matthew had written it in Greek? And why would Bartholomew had gone to India when the apostles were sent to the lost ten tribes of Israel?

Some of the Israelites had migrated to

India (*The “Lost” Ten Tribes of Israel... Found!* by Steven M. Collins, p. 315). And Bartholomew and the other apostles who went there brought the Gospel and other Scriptures translated into Hebrew so these Israelites could read them in their own language!

“ ‘Hebrew letters’ may refer to Syriac script, and we cannot rule out an early Syriac translation of the Gospels *for use in the East*” (Fox, p. 278, emphasis added).

### Hegesippus Becomes Catholic

Among the Ebionites at the tail end of the second century was the writer Hegesippus, from whom Eusebius gathered much of his material.

Hegesippus yearned to follow the crowd—the world. He copied the example of Marcus (the Nazarene from Pella), and left the church to become a famous Catholic. “Determined to find the majority [of people] right, he convinced himself by finding throughout the empire in every city the same (false) doctrines taught and mislabeled ‘Christian.’ He it was who originally drew up the list of Roman bishops, on whom Anicetus and his successors—down to the Pope today—based their claim to be successors of a Peter” (*Correspondence Course* Lesson 49, p. 15).

### Attacker of Heresies

About 190 Irenaeus wrote his 5-volume work against heresies. In his forward, Irenaeus wrote his purpose for writing: the “unmasking and refutation” of heretical doctrines. “We want not only to show the beast but wound it from all sides,” he declared (Nigg, p. 75).

He promised to “set forth the views of those who are now teaching heresy... to show how absurd and inconsistent with the truth are their statements... I do this so that... you may urge all those with whom you are connected to avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ” (Pagels, p. xvii).

190

Gnosticism and Docetism were attacked. Irenaeus said the Gnostic view of two Gods—one (evil) Creator and the other (good) God—led to polytheism. He believed in monotheism: “the same God spoke in the Old Testament and the New” (Nigg, pp. 77-78).

“The idea that Christ’s appearance had been in a phantom body was shared by almost all Gnostic thinkers, for it was indissolubly connected with their condemnation of matter as evil. Irenaeus contended that this view attacked the very root of Christianity. If Jesus had suffered and died only in appearance, and if in reality Simon of Cyrene had been crucified in his place, then the whole redemption of man had taken place only in appearance....

“Matter, he held, was not something to be shunned, but a creation of God which had its own purposes. ‘The perfect man,’ he said, ‘is the intimate union of the soul, which receives the Spirit of the Father, with the flesh, which is created in the image of God’” (Nigg, pp. 78, 79).

Irenaeus used both Old and New Testaments in his arguments as well as church tradition. He called the church by its true name: “Church of God” (Nigg, pp. 76, 77).

Irenaeus accused the Gnostics of fraud, trying to pass off their own ideas as “apostolic.” He wrote that the Gnostic followers of Valentinus “put forth their own compositions, while boasting that they have more gospels than there really are.... They really have no gospel which is not full of blasphemy. For what they have published... is totally unlike what has been handed down to us from the apostles” (Pagels, p. 20).

### Victor Demands Easter Worship

Gnostics did not provide the only confrontation for Irenaeus. The bishop at Rome, Victor, shocked him in 190 when he demanded that Christians celebrate Easter instead of Passover:

“As noted earlier, Irenaeus insisted that all churches throughout the world must agree on all vital points of doctrine, but even he was shocked when Victor, Bishop of Rome,

attempted to move the regional churches toward greater uniformity. In 190, Victor demanded that Christians in Asia Minor abandon their traditional practice of celebrating Easter on Passover, and conform instead to Roman custom—or else give up the claim to be ‘catholic Christians’” (Pagels, p. 120).

### Polycrates Argues for Passover

As we come to the last decade of the second century, we come to another pillar of the Church of God—Polycrates. We mentioned earlier that he and Polycarp were called “Quartodecimani” because they kept Passover instead of Easter.

About 190 Victor, bishop at Rome, attempted to “cut off whole churches of God, who observed the tradition of an ancient custom”—the true Passover (Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 16).

Irenaeus was not the only one to object to Victor’s decree. A group of bishops from Asia met with Polycrates to discuss the matter. Polycrates wrote to Victor and to the Roman Catholic Church this defense. “The letter embodying the decision arrived at was drafted by Polycrates, but it derived its authority from the fact that the bishops assembled gave their consent to it” (Durell, pp. 184-185).

Polycrates wrote:

“We for our part keep the day [Passover] scrupulously, without addition or subtraction. For in Asia great luminaries sleep who shall rise again on the day of the Lord’s advent, when he is coming with glory from heaven and shall search out all his saints—such as Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who sleeps in Hierapolis with two of his daughters, who remained unmarried to the end of their days, while his other daughter lived in the Holy Spirit and rests in Ephesus. Again there is John, who leant back on the Lord’s breast, and who became a sacrificing priest wearing the mitre, a martyr, and a teacher; he too sleeps in Ephesus. Then in Smyrna there is Polycarp, bishop and martyr; and Thraseas, the bishop and martyr

from Eumenia, who sleeps in Smyrna. Need I mention Sagaris, bishop and martyr, who sleeps in Laodicea, or blessed Papirius [possibly Papias?], or Melito the eunuch, who lived entirely in the Holy Spirit, and who lies in Sardis waiting for the visitation from heaven when he shall rise from the dead? All these kept the fourteenth day of the month as the beginning of the Paschal festival, in accordance with the Gospel, not deviating in the least but following the rule of Faith. Last of all I too, Polycrates, the least of you all, act according to the tradition of my family, some members of which I have actually followed; for seven of them were bishops and I am the eighth, and my family have always kept the day when the people put away leaven. So I, my friends, after spending sixty-five years in the Lord's service and conversing with Christians from all parts of the world, and going carefully through all Holy Scripture, am not scared of threats. Better people than I have said, 'we must obey God rather than men' " (Eusebius, pp. 230-231).

Polycrates later referred to the bishops who were with him at Ephesus and shared in the truth about Passover: "I could have mentioned the bishops who are with me and whom I summoned in response to your request. If I write their names, the list will be very long. But though they know what an insignificant person I am, they approve my letter, knowing that I have not frittered away my long life but have spent it in the service of Christ Jesus" (Eusebius, pp. 231-232).

Victor did not take kindly to Polycrates' response! This bishop at Rome was trying to establish himself as "head honcho" of the entire church. God's church never was headquartered at Rome, where the Catholic Church—Satan's counterfeit—put down roots.

"Thereupon Victor, head of the Roman church, attempted at one stroke to cut off from the common unity all the Asian dioceses, together with the neighboring churches on the ground of heterodoxy, and pilloried them in letters in which he announced the total excommunication of all

his fellow-Christians there" (Eusebius, p. 232).

Victor desired to excommunicate from the Catholic church congregations which never belonged to it in the first place!

"Victor of Rome's intervention turned out to be successful in the sense that his view was eventually to prevail [among Catholics]. But it was a long time before those who kept [Passover] on the fourteenth day (nicknamed Quartodecimans) died out. The group still existed in the ninth century despite the vigour with which church councils deplored them. It was impossible in so weighty a practical question for diversity to be allowed, but there can be little doubt that the Quartodecimans were right in thinking that they had preserved the most ancient and apostolic custom. They became heretics simply by being behind the times" (Chadwick, p. 85).

"Polycrates came from that area in which Paul spent most of his time—in Asia Minor, near Ephesus. This is also where John spent his last days. *Here we have Christians still remaining true to the faith!*

"Here is proof that both the apostles to the circumcision and Paul, the special apostle to the Gentiles, taught the true church to observe the Passover on the 14th day of the first month of God's sacred calendar. Chrysostom, who wrote several centuries after the apostles, admitted that 'formerly it (the Passover) prevailed also at Antioch' from where Paul began many of his apostolic journeys.

"But the Church as a whole never repented of leaving its first love for the truth of God. Jesus was now to fulfil his warning: 'I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place' (Rev. 2:5).

"Thus ended the first age of the church, typified by the 'Church at Ephesus.'

"The prophesied 'Church at Smyrna' arises next. Its people appeared physically poverty-stricken—yet it was spiritually rich and alive, though *suffering through persecution*. This pictures God's Church during the next three centuries under the persecuting power of the Catholic-dominated Roman Empire" (Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 16).

## 200

**Theodotion Revises Old Testament**

About A.D. 200, an Ebionite named Theodotion from Ephesus revised earlier translations of the Old Testament into Greek. “His translations of Daniel gained universal acceptance in place of the poorly done original Septuagint version” (*Correspondence Course* Lesson 49, p. 16).

**Symmachus Translates Scriptures**

Another Ebionite was a man named Symmachus. He also translated or revised a Greek version of the Old Testament, but his was included later in Origen’s *Hexapla*—a Bible with six translations running side-by-side. Because of Symmachus, the Ebionites sometimes were called Symmachians (Bruce, p. 392).

Eusebius, a Catholic historian who did not understand the truth of God, wrote this of Symmachus: “Of these translators it should be observed that Symmachus was an

Ebionite. The adherents of what is known as the Ebionite heresy assert that Christ was the son of Joseph and Mary, and regard him as no more than a man. They insist also that the law ought to be kept more in the Jewish manner, as I mentioned earlier in this history. Pamphlets also by Symmachus are still extant, in which he inveighs against the Gospel according to Matthew, apparently in order to bolster up his heresy” (Eusebius, pp. 256-257).

Symmachus also was known for his commentaries on Old Testament books (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 16).

As we have already mentioned, traces of Ebionites can be found into the seventh century in the areas of Trans-Jordan, Syria and Egypt (Bruce, p. 392).

God’s church was not snuffed out with the end of any particular movement given a name by the world. God’s people fled from one persecuted spot to another. Christ promised the gates of hell would not prevail against his church!

# 26

## The Church of God in the Third Century

201

**A**s we enter the third century (A.D. 201-300), we see the “baton” of church history passed from the era characterized by the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7) to the second era, characterized by the church at Smyrna (vv. 8-11).

This was to be a time of great persecution. And indeed, it was.

Notice Christ’s prophecy to John:

“I know your troubles; I know that you are poor—but really you are rich: I know the evil things said against you by those who claim to be [spiritual] Jews, but are not; they are a group that belongs to Satan! Do not be afraid of anything you are about to suffer. Listen! The Devil will put you to the test by having some of you thrown into prison; your trouble will last ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:9-10).

True Christians—those who were members of the true Church of God—were persecuted by the Roman government. So were members of the false, counterfeit Christian church. But true Christians received additional persecution. They were persecuted by the false Christians as well as by the Roman government.

### Government Suspicious of Christians

201

Why did the Roman government, which was tolerant of many religions, persecute Christians?

“Christianity was at odds with the whole spirit of Roman civilization and Imperial government. The most serious specific charges brought against the Christians were that they were stubborn and consistent law-breakers, that they refused to discharge the duties of citizens toward the state, and that they were organized in illegal, seditious societies. These charges were well-founded. Christians, strict monotheists as they were, were forbidden to take part in the emperor-worship which was the patriotic duty of all citizens. A Christian could not accept public office or serve in the army without violating his principles, as both demanded participation in certain official and, to the Christian, idolatrous ceremonies. The attitude of Christian men and women toward the whole governmental system, so closely bound up with paganism, was one of suspicion if not actual hatred, and in any case they felt they owed their first loyalty to a higher fatherland

than the worldly Empire.

“Such an attitude in individuals was sufficiently dangerous, but it was made more objectionable by the compact and efficient organization of the Church. In nearly every community the Christians had a strong corporate organization under recognized bishops. They were in constant communication with other churches throughout the Empire. Christianity was becoming a state within and opposed to the Empire which no autocratic ruler could afford to ignore. As their numbers increased, especially after the beginning of the third century when they were joined by many members of the upper classes, the Christians became an ever greater menace to the state.

“During the third century, the Christians were alternately persecuted and tolerated, according to the policy of various emperors. From each persecution they emerged with numbers greatly diminished but their organization still intact, and at the first sign of toleration, the apostates—as deserters were called—returned and with them came new converts, won over by the example of martyrs. Despite the persecution, [false] Christianity was growing stronger and more popular. It was also becoming more inimical to the government and hence more dangerous” (*Western Civilization, Vol. 1, From the Origins through the Seventeenth Century* by Robert Edward Herzstein, p. 72).

Christians tried to be separate from the pagan society around them. But it was difficult. Even something so commonplace as borrowing money required the borrower to swear oaths by the pagan gods to their creditors (Fox, p. 218).

Women did not experience the freedoms they have today in Western society. Roman society was divided into many pagan cults. “Family cults helped to define the circle of family membership: wives were expected to follow their husband’s family cults” (Fox, p. 83).

And yet, it is likely that women made up a clear majority of the churches in the third century (Fox, p. 330).

Women were still barred from church

leadership. They served as deaconesses but they could not teach.

“The good Christian woman was told to renounce makeup and jewelry, fine hairstyles and elegant shoes.” Some cut their hair short and wore men’s clothing. Nobody forced these women to pass as men and the bishops tried to stop them but “the simple truth was that women could not wander at large in a male pagan world unless they disguised their sex” (Fox, p. 372).

The Christian ideal for women, especially in false Christianity, became to live life as a virgin. “In its origin, motivation and practice, this esteem for virginity was something entirely new. It owed nothing to pagan example or the ‘mood of the times.’... To become a Christian was to live with this constant evidence of striving for perfection. Nothing in pagan religiousness compared with it.” Though some Christian women strove for perfection, the majority probably did not. “How could a woman remain virtuous when the whole organization of her social existence conspired against her? She had only to go to the public baths, where men and women bathed naked together” (Fox, p. 373).

School children did not get away from pagan influence either. “The gods were also a persistent presence in schools. Their festivals were school holidays and their cults a companion to the rhythms of the school year” (Fox, p. 83). This has not changed much in 1800 years. Today, we see our school years punctuated by holidays of pagan origin and true Christian children are expected to participate in the activities along with the others. Children who don’t participate may be considered odd and ostracized by their peers.

During the third century, Christians were persecuted under Emperor Severus in 202, Maximinus in 235, Decius in 250 and under Aurelian in 272 (*Lincoln Library of Essential Information*, p. 592).

Not all persecution ended in martyrdom: “...it takes two to make a martyr, and many people agreed to a bargain instead: the richer Christian, the more he had to lose

and also the more he had to offer. Bribery, therefore, became a recognized art of Christians who stood in fear of their lives: around 200, Tertullian alluded to whole churches who had bought their way out of danger...” (Fox, p. 434).

Roman governors were not always anxious to spill blood. “Sometimes they banished Christians instead of killing them; sometimes they sentenced them to work in mines and quarries, where they served, their heads half shaven, under constant threat of the lash” (Fox, p. 434).

### **Tithing, Firstfruits Practiced**

How was the ministry supported? How did the church care for its poor, fatherless and widows?

“The bishop, ultimately, dispensed the charity. He allotted funds to the widows, orphans and deserving poor. He also paid the clergy their shares... However, both the bishop and the clergy depended upon the good will of the laity for funds in the first place.... At first they were supported by a ‘dividend system,’ financed by the total of their Christians’ offerings: the sum seems to have been paid monthly, and a bishop’s share was probably twice as big as an Elder’s. The offerings included first fruits from crops and produce: Christian polemic against the letter of the Mosaic law did not extend to its rules on first fruits and tithes: tithes, on one view, were payable to minor clerics, widows, paupers and virgins. The notion of fixed clerical salaries was considered an outrage as late as c. 200, in both Rome and Asia. It was the shocking practice of Christian sectarians and heretics” (Fox, p. 505).

### **Death of Irenaeus**

We conclude our discussion of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, with a note that he “was a zealous opposer of heresies in general, and wrote a celebrated tract against heresy, which had great influence at that time. This zeal in favour of Christianity pointed him out as an object of resentment to the em-

peror; and he was accordingly beheaded in A.D. 202” (King, p. 19).

### **Persecuted in Africa**

“The persecution about this time extended to Africa, and many were martyred in that part of the globe; the principal of whom was Perpetua, a married lady of about twenty-six years of age, with an infant child. She was seized for being a Christian. Her father, who tenderly loved her, went to console her during her confinement, and attempted to persuade her to renounce Christianity. Perpetua, however, resisted every entreaty. This resolution so much incensed her father, that he beat her severely, and did not visit her for some days after; and, in the meantime, she and others who were confined were baptized.... On being carried before the proconsul Minutius, she was commanded to sacrifice to idols: refusing, she was ordered to a dark dungeon and deprived of her child” (King, pp. 19-20).

Prisons were not pleasant places. “They (the jailors) crowded their prisoners and denied them regular food: the prison staff used to burgle much of the charity which Christians brought to the cells. Hunger and fear were joined by sleeplessness and a general mood of expectation, because a long imprisonment for its own sake was rare and expensive punishment in an ancient town. Every inmate was awaiting trial and sentence in a setting which was hot, cramped and dark” (Fox, p. 400).

Perpetua, Revocatus, Satur, Saturninus and Secundulus were all executed by wild beasts or by beheading in March A.D. 205 (King, p. 20).

We have no way of knowing if the martyrs we read about who call themselves Christian were of the true Church of God or members of the great false church. If they were false Christians, they still give us insight into what was happening to members of the true church. What happened to these martyrs more than likely also happened to members of God’s church. Reading about the lives and deaths of some of these people

gives us an idea of what the brethren in God's church were going through.

## 205

### Ministers Defend the Truth

Some of the early church writers, such as Hegesippus and Irenaeus, stressed the idea that the church had a continuous chain of bishops leading back to the Apostles. The idea has merit. Bishops were made by the laying on of hands of other bishops.

The idea of an unbroken chain of bishops was not used to defend the authority of the bishop so much as to defend the orthodoxy of doctrine. (The false church also used this idea as it eventually developed the idea of a succession of Roman popes.)

"In the early third century, Hippolytus then emphasizes the transmission of the Spirit from Apostles to bishops, with the implication that the latter are special guardians of the truth" (Fox, p. 506).

### Tertullian Defends Christianity

About this time, a Roman theologian from Carthage in North Africa defended the Christian religion. He has been called an "apostolic father" like Irenaeus and Justin, but we have no proof he was a member of the Church of God.

*The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, says of Tertullian (c.150-c.230): "He wrote many theological works. Some of his opinions departed from the main course of Christian thought, and the Montanists are sometimes called Tertullianists" (*The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, William Bridgewater, editor in chief, "Tertullian," p. 1256).

We have mentioned already in this chapter some of the false charges made against Christians. Many non-Christians believed these tales which circulated freely throughout the Roman Empire. The following comments are excerpts from Tertullian's *Apologetics* or *Defense of Christians* which he addressed to the Roman Senate. In this work he refutes many of the charges made against Christians in his day.

"No (Christian) feels shame, or regret, except of course that he was so late in becoming one. If he is defamed, he rejoices, if he is prosecuted, he does not defend himself; if he is questioned, he at once confesses, if he is condemned, he returns thanks. What evil can there be in this which has none of the characters of evil?..."

"(Other criminals) have every opportunity of answering and cross-questioning, since it is not even legal that persons should be condemned entirely undefended and unheard. But the Christians alone are not permitted to say anything to clear themselves of the charge, to uphold the truth, to prevent injustice in the judge. The one thing looked for is that which is demanded by the popular hatred, the confession of the name, not the weighing of a charge. Whereas, if you were inquiring into the case of some criminal, you would not be satisfied to give a verdict, immediately on his confession of the crime of homicide or sacrilege or incest or treason, to speak of the charges levelled against us, unless you also demand an account of the accessory facts, the character of the act, the frequency of its repetition, the place, the manner, the time, who were privy to it, who were accomplices in it. In our case no such procedure is followed..."

"Again, many people are so blinded with prejudice that even when they are bearing witness to a man's excellence, they mingle with it a taunt against the name of Christian. 'So-and-So is a good fellow, were it not that he is a Christian.' So another says, 'I marvel that a philosopher like So-and-So should have so suddenly turned Christian.' No one reflects whether the fact that So-and-So is good or wise is due to his Christianity, or the fact that So-and-So is a Christian results from his being wise and good..."

"We are called abominable from the sacrament of infanticide and the feeding thereon, as well as incestuous intercourse, following the banquet... either prove the fact, if you believe it, or refuse to believe it, you who have not proved it..."

"You accuse us of refusing to worship the gods.... We cease to worship your gods, from

the moment we learn that they are no gods, and therefore not to be worshiped....

“‘But to us they are gods,’ you say. If that be so, how is it that you on the contrary are found impious, sacrilegious, and irreligious towards your gods?

“...when I turn to your literature, whence you derive instruction in practical wisdom, and the duties of gentlemen, what ridiculous situations do I find! Gods engaged like pairs of gladiators and fighting desperately together on account of the Trojans and the Achaeans, Venus wounded by an arrow from a human hand... Mars reduced almost to a shadow by thirteen months in chains.... Such stories ought never to be revealed if true; if false, ought never to have been invented, among really religious people....”

Tertullian described the Christian’s attitude toward the emperor. It was similar to the attitude Paul instructed Christians to have in Roman 13:1-7 and 1 Tim. 2:1-2. “...We invoke on behalf of the safety of the emperors a God who is everlasting, a God who is real, a God who is living.... But why should I say more about the religious attitude and the loyalty of the Christians towards the emperor? We are bound to look up to him as the one whom our Lord has chosen. I should be justified in saying: the Caesar is more ours (than yours), as having been appointed by our God. Accordingly, as he is mine, I work more for his safety, since I not only ask it from Him who is able to grant it, or because I who ask it am such as one as deserves to obtain it, but also because by lowering the greatness of the Caesar as compared with that of God, I commend him more to God...” (Paige, pp. 63-67).

## 230

### Earthquakes Cause Persecution

Christians were blamed for many problems in the pagan world. Even catastrophes of nature were blamed on Christians because it was believed their actions displeased the gods.

“In the 230s, earthquakes in inland Asia [Minor] caused another bout of persecution” (Fox, p. 552).

### Persecution Under Maximus

A persecution was raised against Christians under Emperor Maximus (or Maximinus) in 235. In Cappadocia, President Semiramus “made great efforts to exterminate the Christians from the kingdom. While this persecution continued, numerous Christians were slain without trial, and buried in indiscriminate heaps: sometimes fifty or sixty being cast into a pit together” (King, p. 21).

### Time of Peace

From 238 when Maximus died until 249, the church was free from persecution (King, p. 21).

“During this time of peace, when persecutions were at a low ebb against the church, it seems that little progress was made by the true saints in broadening the fields of labor, or strengthening the resources that they already possessed. However, with the renewed persecutions, evangelistic efforts were again energetically pursued, and the gospel was carried into whatever new fields the fleeing members of the church happened to find refuge. Wherever they fled they carried with them the true doctrines, the true name, and the commandments of God, as well as the faith of Jesus, which were their heritage from the original Church of God at Jerusalem” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 69).

Members of the true Church of God fled from persecution and were scattered all over the world. “Some fled in vain, being captured by their enemies, and lost their lives for the gospel’s sake” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 68).

### Origen Edits the Hexapla

The last of the “apostolic fathers” to be discussed in this book is Origen, who lived from 185 to 254. He most likely was not a member of the Church of God. He was a Christian philosopher who “taught with great acclaim in Alexandria and then Caesarea” (*Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, “Origen,” p. 927). Alexandria, Egypt, was the home of a great seminary in the false church.

235

But Origen was important in putting the New Testament books into the canon. "He divided the sacred books into two classes, the *homologoumena*, which were undoubtedly genuine and which were accepted by all the churches, and the *antilegomena*, which were disputed and not accepted by all the churches. The former included the Gospels, thirteen epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John, Acts, and the Apocalypse. The latter consisted of Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, and Jude. In the same class he placed [the books of] Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, and the Gospel of Hebrews" (Tenney, p. 408).

Origen also had a great interest in the Old Testament. He edited six Greek and Hebrew versions, placing them side-by-side on the page and naming this work the *Hexapla*. One of those versions was translated or revised by Symmachus, an Ebionite.

In addition to these works, Origen wrote numerous commentaries on books of both Old and New Testaments.

In the early summer of 248, Origen was writing a refutation against the pagan Celsus' book which attacked Christianity. He wrote that when Christians are held responsible "for the strife which has now reached such a pitch," they will no longer be safe from persecution. His writings were somewhat prophetic. Within a year persecution had broken out in Alexandria (Fox, p. 451).

### Alexandrian Riots

Riots erupted in Alexandria about this time. "We do not know exactly when these riots began, but in late 248 or early 249, without any Imperial prompting, pagans began to persecute the city's Christians" (Fox, p. 451).

249

### Persecution of 249

In the year 249, Emperor Decius began a persecution against Christians. He was jealous of the progress Christianity had made. The pagan temples were nearly forsaken while the (false) Christian churches were

crowded with proselytes. The heathen, in general, were ambitious to enforce the imperial decrees for torture and martyrdom. The murder of a Christian was a merit that was coveted. Martyrs were innumerable at this time.

This attack was against the *general membership* of the church. (In a later attack, Satan would attack its *leaders*). "The attack was begun by the Emperor Decius (249-251). He gave orders for a *general* persecution of Christians. The authorities all over the empire were to interfere against the whole body of the Christians, officially, that is, without waiting for any special charge against them, and compel them to sacrifice. A fearful time followed, which claimed countless martyrs" (Sohm, p. 16).

This was a turning point in church history. Up to now, persecution had usually originated among the pagans in their scattered cities. Now we see persecution coming as a result of royal edict, "a change which brought the dangers and evasions into many more Christians' lives" (Fox, p. 450).

Decius required that everyone possess a certificate showing he or she had sacrificed to the gods before special commissioners. Several of these certificates have been preserved by the dry, sandy climate of Egypt. These certificates were used in a deliberate attempt to catch people, and were the gravest attack on the church up to this time. Many property owners left Christianity at this time. And the church considered those who had sacrificed as well as those who did not, but were able to buy certificates from friendly commissioners, as no longer Christians (Chadwick, p. 118).

"Everyone cowered in terror. At once, many of the more conspicuous Christians were affected: some stood forward in fear; others were brought along by their public business; others were dragged on by people around them. They were called by name and approached the unholy sacrifices, many of them pale with terror. The edict reached Alexandria in January 250, and within four days, a soldier had been sent to hunt down Dionysius. Similar orders were being car-

ried out in Asia by mid-February, and by mid-March they were well underway at Carthage. The text had not singled out Christians or their leaders for special attention, but the commissioners knew where to look. Many of the bishops went promptly into hiding, leaving their flocks to cope for themselves. On a kinder view, they may have thought that their deaths would weaken their churches' resistance and cripple their recovery. Pagan Emperors were not accustomed to cults with clearly defined leaders who wielded such authority, and in 250, the lesson was well learned. Seven years later, the next persecuting edict singled out the churches' leaders for arrest" (Fox, pp. 454-455).

Origen was tortured and imprisoned. He was released under Emperor Gallus following the death of Decius, and spent his remaining days in Tyre (King, p. 22).

The persecution under Decius most likely affected the true church as well the false church. At the same time as this attack from without, Satan also attacked God's church from within:

"Many errors had about this time crept into the Church: the Christians were at variance with each other, and a variety of contentions ensued among them" (King, p. 21).

"At the beginning of the persecution, under Decius, about 248... 'Each was bent on improving his patrimony: forgetting what believers had done under the apostles, and what they ought always to do, they brooded over the arts of amassing wealth. The pastors and deacons equally forgot their duty, works of mercy were neglected, and discipline was at the lowest ebb. Luxury and effeminacy prevailed. Metricious arts in dress were cultivated. Fraud and deceit were practiced among brethren. Christians could unite themselves in matrimony with unbelievers, could swear, not only without reverence, but without veracity [truth]; with haughty asperity they despised their ecclesiastical superiors; could rail one against another with outrageous acrimony, and conduct quarrels with settled malice; even many

bishops, who ought to be guides and patterns to the rest, neglecting the peculiar duties of their stations, gave themselves to secular pursuits; deserting their places of residence and their flocks, they traveled through distant provinces in quest of gain, gave no assistance to the needy brethren, were insatiable in their thirst of money, possessed estates by fraud, and multiplied usury' —*Townsend's Abridgment*, p. 110, Ed. 1816" (Dugger and Dodd, pp. 70-71).

God's truth became watered down as the church, generally speaking, became materialistic in the middle of the third century.

"Thousands of Christians lapsed and offered sacrifice, and many others bribed the commissioners, an act which added greatly to the edict's popularity among the class that had to enforce it: 'there is nothing to be feared in the laws,' Cyprian [bishop of Cathage] wrote, 'because what is for sale is not feared'" (Fox, p. 457).

### Pagan Oracles Cause Persecution

Christians, as well as Jews, were still winning converts at this time, in spite of the persecution. Sometimes unconverted mates went to the oracles of Apollo, their pagan god, for advice in dealing with a partner who had deserted paganism for the truth.

"Porphyry also knew that a distressed husband had asked an oracle how to best dissuade his wife from Christianity. Apollo held out little hope: it was easier, he said, to write on water or fly like a bird than to shift a woman from such impiety.... Apollo found the Jews' religion easier company than the Christians'."

These oracles also were a source of persecution: "Oracles united respect for [pagan] 'ancestral practice' with a strong awareness of the awe and potential anger of the gods. These attitudes, as we shall see, underlay the cities' persecution of the Christian 'atheists.' When the oracles diagnosed divine anger, they prescribed archaic rites of sacrifice and hymns for an appeasement by their clients, but Christians, in these same cities, could not participate in these divine 'com-

249

250

mands.'... By 250, the connection between oracles and persecution is clearly attested" (Fox, pp. 258-259).

### Pionius Arrested and Martyred

We have records of the trial of a Christian martyr named Pionius who was arrested at this time. Pionius had a hero: Polycarp. He had never met Polycarp but had served as a copyist in the church and had copied his story on paper. "The details of Pionius' trial light up the place of the Christians and martyrs in a great third-century city. They create the particular picture which brings the generalities to life" (Fox, pp. 461, 473).

In the cool month of February 250, Pionius and his companions walked through the double gates into the city square of Smyrna. The colonnades were packed with "Greeks, Jews and women" celebrating a holiday.

"Pionius and his fellow prisoners were arrested by a group of pagans who were led by Polemon, a temple official in Smyrna. 'You know, of course,' about the Emperor's edict,' said Polemon, 'and how it bids you to sacrifice to the gods.' 'We know the edicts of God,' replied Pionius, 'in which he bids us to worship him alone'" (Fox, pp. 461, 463).

Pionius used his upcoming martyrdom to make a case for the church. After entering Smyrna's agora in chains, he halted and addressed the crowd, "You men who boast of the beauty of Smyrna and take pride in Homer, the son as you say, of Meles..." His introduction was similar to any flattery offered by a visiting dignitary. He then went on to quote the *Odyssey*, just as Paul had quoted from pagan writers while in Athens.

Pionius warned the Jews who were in the crowd not to gloat if Christians lost their nerve, for both Christians and Jews were but mortals, and Christians were being treated unjustly. The Jews should look back at their own shameful history of sins recorded in the Old Testament. They had killed the prophets and Christ. They should not judge the church by Christians who lapsed from their faith but by the ones who stood

firm in the face of martyrdom.

Pionius was convinced that Christ's return was imminent. He told the holiday crowd how he had seen the coming wrath with his own eyes.

He told the officials, "I wish I could persuade you to be Christians." Roaring with laughter, they replied, "You can't make us willing to burn alive." Pionius responded, "It is far worse to be burned when you are dead." Pionius used the charred and grotesque burned ruins of Lydia, which had suffered destruction from volcanic activity, as an example of God's punishment. Smyrna's own hot springs, he said, were a hint of God's lake of fire to come.

"The pagans, he knew, blamed earthquakes and natural hardships on the impiety of the Christians and the anger of their gods. Not at all, said Pionius. These hardships were a foretaste of God's coming punishment, provoked by pagan sin." To prove that God punishes wickedness, Pionius reminded the pagans of their hero Deucalion, and the Jews of Noah. Both were tales of great floods. (Fox, pp. 473-476).

Pionius then stated his own position: He "refused to worship the so-called gods and bow down to the golden idol." His words were followed by silence from the crowd so he repeated them.

After a period of silence the crowd began to demand an assembly in the theater. According to Pionius' diary, "they wanted to hear more." The theater in Smyrna held 16,000 spectators who could look north across the stage to see the gulf and sea as its backdrop. But the officials feared a riot could occur in the theater. A famine had been occurring in Smyrna and the people were hungry for bread. At this time of year (late February) the old supply of wheat was about gone and the new crop was not yet ready to harvest.

Pionius was taken to the city prison. The city officials had more to fear from hungry citizens angry over lack of bread than from one chained Christian elder. "They begged him to be sensible, and even came down to the prison to implore him to give in. It was all

most revealing. When Pionius finished his speech, pagans stood forward and begged him to yield 'because we love you and your life is so valuable for its character and virtue' (Fox, pp. 477-478).

In prison, Pionius found Christians lapsing from their faith. Christians in Smyrna had accused each other and had torn the church apart with quarrels. For his part, Pionius was resolved to stand firm.

In his next speech, he attacked the Jews who were trying to win converts of the Christians in their crisis. He said once Christians joined a synagogue they would be taught slanderous tales about Jesus and his resurrection. He used the story of Saul and the witch of Endor as a proof. "The witch, he argued, had not conjured up the dead Samuel, but had produced a demon who wore Samuel's, likeness. If sorcery had failed to bring back the prophet Samuel, how could it possibly bring back Christ?" In this speech it is evident that Pionius "had known the Jewish Scriptures in his early years" (Fox, pp. 479-480).

Pionius was certain he would die. He was confident it would be on the same day as his hero, Polycarp. There is good reason to believe his premonitions came true. "A Christian prisoner could only be put to death by a Roman governor.... Capital justice was confined to the bigger cities of a province and only reached them when the Roman governor arrived as a circuit judge on tour.... Smyrna, naturally, was such a centre, lying on the governor's way north from his provincial seat at Ephesus" (Fox, pp. 483-484).

Pionius remained in prison for two weeks until the governor arrived in Smyrna shortly before "a great Sabbath"—probably the Jewish feast of Purim which coincided with the multi-day pagan festival. This explains why there were so many pagans and Jews in the agora when Pionius was arrested.

The Roman governor was Quintilianus. When he arrived in Smyrna in early March, he sentenced Pionius to death. Pionius was shortly thereafter crucified.

In mid-April Quintilianus went from Smyrna to Pergamum where he presided

over the burning of a bishop, a deacon and a church lady. The pagans had been anxious to get the fire started before the April rains came (Fox, p. 491).

### Church Status

The church at the middle of the third century was still a small flock. When we read figures describing it, we cannot be sure if they are describing the true church, the false church or both. Nevertheless, note this description:

"The Christians were a small minority, hardly known in the Latin West or the underbelly of Northern Europe.... They were not only concentrated in the bigger cities, but they were prominent in towns of varying rank and degree; they used the living literary languages, but not, so far as we know, the many local dialects. Their centre of gravity lay in the humbler free classes.... There were Christians in the army and in the Imperial household, though, so far as we know, no more than one, perhaps two, Christian senators. Women of all ranks were conspicuous and there was a notable presence in some churches of women of high status.... It [Christianity] tended to spread vertically, not horizontally, from older teachers, from a Christian parent or a Christian head of household" (Fox, pp. 311-312).

Do not get the idea that nearly everyone was becoming Christian (either true or false) in the empire. In 250 there were still plenty of pagans in Pontus to enforce persecution against Christians (Fox, p. 537).

### Sabbath Observed

"The holy Sabbath was still observed in the true church in this century, and was greatly retained by many of the sects which had sprung up in this and the preceding centuries.

"Novatian, who wrote about A.D. 250, prepared a treatise on the Sabbath, which is not extant. There is no reference to Sunday in any of his writings."

Novatian also upheld the 10 Command-

250

ments, saying they were enforced before Moses. The giving of the Commandments on Mt. Sinai was a refreshing of Israel's memory following the nation's stay in Egypt (Dugger and Dodd, p. 72).

251

### Miracles Still Occurring

Miracles were still occurring in the church:

"From A.D. 251 to 300, miracles were still performed in the church, Mosheim tells us, although less common than in previous years, and the church, he says, never wielded a sharper weapon against its enemies than the holy lives of its members" (*Wharey's History*, p. 42, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 70).

"The renewed zeal of the true followers of Christ, however, was accomplished by an increase among the number of apostate Christians, the multiplicity of sects, and the growth of false doctrine, and the lowering of the true Christian standard. The breach between the true Church of God and the sects was widening, and the churches were taking form, which eventually materialized in the Roman Catholic church and the Greek Catholic church" (Dugger and Dodd, p. 70).

### Schisms in Church

"Persecution always scattered Christians, and in the 250s, we know of many who withdrew to the countryside in order to escape it. At the same date, schisms began among Christians themselves, and again, the 'true' Christian minorities tended to withdraw from their fellow Christians in order to keep their sect alive" (Fox, p. 280).

As a congregation of the true church slipped from the truth into false Christianity, God kept the truth alive by bringing a small "minority" out of the larger group and preserving his truth in them! This, we will see, has happened over and over throughout the history of the Church of God.

### Church in Armenia

Records have recently brought to light the

fact that Christians were thought to be prominent in the company of the king of Armenia in the mid-third century (Fox, p. 281).

Armenia was home for many of the lost 10 tribes of Israel after Parthia was defeated by the Persians in 226. The Persians "took offense at the religious practices of the Parthians" (including the true church) so many Parthians fled to Armenia where other tribes of Israel had already settled. Christianity, which was preached among the Parthians by the apostles and others, remained among them as they fled to Armenia (Collins, pp. 319-320, 322).

The Israelites already in Armenia also had heard the Gospel preached among them. "Armenia had already been evangelized by Christianity. ... five apostles (Bartholomew, Thaddaeus [Judas], Simon the Canaanite, Andrew and Matthias) had evangelized Armenia.... Since many Parthians and Semites fleeing to Armenia were Christians, it is not surprising that Armenia developed an early tradition of Christianity" (Collins, pp. 323, 325).

### Attack on Church Leaders

When Decius died in 251, Emperor Gallus provided two years of peace before fresh edicts were issued against Christianity in 253. But it was Emperor Valerian (253-260) who attacked the church most strongly after Decius. "In 258 he commanded that all bishops, priests, and deacons of the Church, together with all Christian senators and judges, should be condemned to death, if they refused to recant. By this time there was a method in the attack. It was aimed at destroying, not, as under Decius, the whole body of Christians (this had at length proved impracticable), but the organization of the Church, together with every one of the higher ranks who belonged to it. The formless undisciplined masses that remained would, it was hoped, be powerless to uphold Christianity. In Carthage the bishop Cyprian, in Rome the deacon Laurentius... and with them many others, fell victims to this persecution." The edicts of persecution were re-

253

258

pealed under Emperor Gallienus, who succeeded his father, Valerian, in 260 (Sohm, p. 16).

It was under this persecution of Gallus that Christians services and places of meeting were attacked for the first time (Fox, p. 422).

“In summer 257, the Emperors Valerian and Gallienus sent a rescript to their provincial governors and ordered that bishops and elders should be punished and that no Christians should hold a meeting or enter one of the ‘cemeteries.’ If they did, they should be put to death. In summer 258, a second Imperial letter was published; it enlarged on the matter and specified the penalties of death, exile and forced labour for Christians in various higher classes.... For the first time, Christians were not merely obliged to compromise. Their worship and common life were threatened with extinction.... When the second Imperial letter was publicized, the penalties were made harsher: Church leaders were to be martyred, not exiled. However, the sequel suggests there was little popular support for the demand....

“In the persecutions of 257/8, Christian leaders were rounded up by troops under the governor’s authority, not by the local cavalry and police of the cities themselves” (Fox, pp. 550-552).

Fortunately for the Church of God, Emperor Valerian was captured and killed by the king of Persia. His son and former partner, Gallienus, ordered that churches and cemeteries be returned to Christians. “[W]e have no knowledge of martyrdoms, as opposed to Christian fictions of them, between 260 and the 290s. When we then find Christians being martyred, they are soldiers in the army. The charge against them is not their religion and their refusal to sacrifice, but their refusal to serve in the ranks, an offence which was punishable on other grounds” (Fox, p. 553).

### **Persians Persecute True Church**

The Christians, called at one time the Nazarenes, were stamped out of Persian territory

in the 280s. Most of the true Christians had already fled to Armenia by this time. Any who remained behind were probably killed or exiled.

“In a famous inscription, the chief Magus of the Persian court later told how ‘demonic’ teachings had been destroyed in the Persian Empire (c. 280-293), including those of the ‘Nazareans and Christians,’ terms which seem to refer to two different types of Christian.” Was the inscription referring to true and false Christians? Or was it describing two types of true Christians? Fox thinks perhaps the latter: “The neatest explanation is that the ‘Nazareans’ were native Aramaic-speaking Christians converted inside the Persians’ Empire by some unknown type of contact, whereas the ‘Christians’ were royal imports, originally prisoners from Greek-speaking towns” (Fox, p. 281).

### **Religious Toleration**

When Emperor Diocletian assumed the throne A.D. 284, persecution against Christians was minimized.

“The new system of policy, introduced and maintained by the wisdom of that prince, continued more than eighteen years, to breathe the mildest and most liberal spirit of religious toleration.” Diocletian concentrated on “active labours” of war and government instead of “speculative inquiries” into Christianity. He was not a man who liked great innovation. Neither was he full of zeal or enthusiasm, though he “maintained an habitual regard for the ancient deities of the empire.”

Diocletian’s wife, Priscia, and daughter, Valeria, had leisure to “listen with more attention and respect to the truths of Christianity, which in every age has acknowledged its important obligations to female devotion.”

Many of the top people in the government and household of Diocletian were Christians, reminding one of the times of Queen Esther or Daniel, when God’s people were close to the heathen ruler of an empire. Perhaps some of these people were members

of the Church of God. But it seems unlikely. With the strong influence of the false church at Rome, it seems more likely that God's church would have been scattered in other parts of the empire with few, if any, members in Rome.

Nevertheless, Lucian, Dorotheus, Gorgonius and Andrew were four eunuchs who attended Emperor Diocletian and governed his household. They claimed to be Christians and "protected by their powerful influence the faith which they had embraced. Their example was imitated by many of the most considerable officers of the palace, who, in their respective stations, had the care of the Imperial ornaments, of the robes, of the furniture, of the jewels, and even of the private treasury; and, though it might sometimes be incumbent on them to accompany the emperor when he sacrificed in the temple, they enjoyed, with their wives, their children, and their slaves, the free exercise of the Christian religion. Diocletian and his colleagues frequently conferred the most important offices on those persons who avowed their abhorrence for the worship of the gods, but who had displayed abilities proper for the service of the state" (Gibbon, pp. 287-288).

285

### Spiritual State of the Church

During this period of peace and safety, the church suffered great spiritual backsliding.

"From 262 until 299, Christians were then left alone in a time of quiet which has often been seen as a time of expansion, the age of Christian 'triumph' before Constantine.... After 260 there were no persecutions to revive fears of an imminent End: Christians were more than ever at risk to boredom, that powerful enemy of religious commitment" (Fox, p. 556).

The entire book of Judges tells a similar story: Israel forgets her God, God sends punishment (or persecution), Israel repents and is saved, and during the period of peace which followed, she forgets her God again. Persecution has a way of binding God's people together and bringing them closer to God. In

times of peace and religious freedom, God's people tend to turn their minds from spiritual to material things.

We need to remember that God's church is a microcosm of the world. Its members are called from all over the world, and suffer from the same problems that afflict society. When we read of problems and persecutions suffered by the false church, it is probable that God's church suffered from similar problems and persecutions.

Note what was happening in the last decade and a half of the third century:

"Prosperity had relaxed the nerves of discipline. Fraud, envy and malice prevailed in every congregation. The presbyters aspired to the episcopal office, which every day became an object more worthy of their ambition. The bishops, who contended with each other for ecclesiastical pre-eminence, appeared by their conduct to claim a secular and tyrannical power in the church; and the lively faith which still distinguished the Christians from the Gentiles was shown much less in their lives than in their controversial writings" (Gibbon p. 288).

### Maximilian: An Early Conscientious Objector

Not everyone in the Church of God lapsed into worldliness. One young man stood firm on the law of God in 295. He refused to be part of the Roman army and thus be part of a murdering machine. His story is one of the first conscientious objectors in the history of the church.

This story holds interest because history records many "Christians" in the army of Rome. Yet here is a young Christian man whose beliefs would not allow him to serve. Were the Christian soldiers false Christians and this young man of the true church? It's possible.

Maximilian was not yet a soldier. He was the son of Fabius, a veteran, and could therefore be called upon to enlist. On March 12, 295, at the age of 21, he was called up, together with his father, to report at Theveste in Numidio before Cassius Dio, the proconsul.

295

Even though his father had served in the army, Maximilian felt army service was wrong for a Christian. It is possible he disagreed with his father about military service. But it is more likely that his father changed his opinion after his service was completed.

“The proconsul begin the interrogation by asking Maximilian his name.

“‘Why do you as my name? I cannot be a soldier for I am a Christian.’

“The Proconsul took no notice and ordered that he should be inspected medically and measured to see if he was suitable as a recruit.

“‘I cannot be a soldier; I cannot do evil; I am a Christian.’

“The Proconsul repeated the order to measure him. It was done and an assistant announced— ‘Five feet and ten inches.’

“‘Mark him,’ continued the Proconsul. A conscript, when he had been accepted, was stamped on the flesh with a red-hot iron with the initial of the emperor, and a leaded seal carrying the imperial effigy was hung around his neck.

“Maximilian only replied, ‘I cannot be a soldier.’

“Marveling at his obstinate refusal, the Proconsul became angry.

“‘Be a soldier, or die.’

“‘I cannot be a soldier. Cut off my head; I cannot be a soldier of this world. I must serve only under my God.’

“‘Who has given you these ideas?’

“‘My soul and he who has called me.’

“The Proconsul then turned to the boy’s father: ‘Persuade your son,’ he ordered. But the father did not want to enter into the matter, for, almost certainly, he approved of his son’s resolution.

“He replied, ‘He has a mind of his own; he knows what he is doing.’

“The Proconsul turned once more to the son.

“‘You must be a soldier and accept the seal’ (of the emperor).

“‘I will not accept it. I already have the seal of Christ, my God.’

“‘I will send you straight to your Christ.’

“‘Do it immediately. It will be my glory.’

“‘Mark him,’ ordered the Proconsul. The assistants took hold of him but he fought back shouting:

“‘I will not receive the seal of the world. If you put it around my neck I will break it, for I put no value on it. I am a Christian; I cannot carry a leaden seal around my neck for I already carry the sacred seal of Christ.’

“The Proconsul continued to insist and urged that many of the soldiers were Christians.

“‘In the sacred company of our lords Diocletian and Maximian, Constantinus and Maximum [i.e., Galerius] there are Christian soldiers and they are not afraid to fight.’

“‘They do what they think is right. As far as I am concerned I am a Christian and cannot do evil.’

“‘Do those who fight in our armies do evil therefore?’

“‘You know what they do.’

“Further persuasion and threats of death failed to move the conscript. The Proconsul then had his name canceled on the register and turning to him pronounced sentence:

“‘Since *indevoto animo* [with disloyal spirit] you have refused military service you will be punished as an example to others.’

“He then read the sentence from the book— ‘Maximilian, who has been found guilty of insubordination by not accepting military service, will be punished by the sword.’

“Maximilian replied, ‘*Deo gratias.*’

“He was taken immediately to the palace of execution and when he arrived there turned to the other Christians and said, ‘My dearest brethren, hasten with all your strength and desire to gain the vision of God and to merit a similar crown.’ Then smiling, he asked his father to give his new uniform as a conscript to the executioner. He was immediately beheaded. A matron called Pompeiana had the body transported on her own litter to Carthage where it was buried near the tomb of St. Cyprian. His father, Victor, returned home full of joy and thanking God for what had happened” (*The Age of Martyrs: Christianity from Diocletian to*

*Constantine* by Giuseppe Ricciotti, pp. 37-38).

## 298

### Centurion Refuses to Serve

Indeed, as Proconsul Cassius Dio told Maximilian, there were many “Christians” in the Roman army. Perhaps they just accepted their lot in life or perhaps their conversion was not so deep as to prevent them from participating in army activities. Or perhaps they were converted to false Christianity which has permitted its members to fight horrible wars through the years.

Not all soldiers continued once they were converted. We have the story of Marcellus, a centurion who had served for many years, who suddenly could not take it anymore.

The month was August, the year was probably 298. The place was Tingis (modern-day Tangiers) at the extreme west of Mediterranean Africa.

The birthday of Maximian was being celebrated and soldiers were required to adore the gods or abandon their military careers. This “screening process” used by the army made it obligatory that all soldiers participate in the normal pagan functions of the ceremony.

Instead of offering incense before the idols, the centurion Marcellus flung his belt to the ground before the legionary eagles and exclaimed, “I am a soldier of Jesus Christ.” He threw away his staff, the symbol of a centurion and declared, “If to be a soldier means sacrificing to gods and emperors,

behold I cast away my staff and belt and do not wish to serve.”

This was serious both because of the public display and because of his high rank. Marcellus was arrested and jailed until Oct. 30, when he appeared before Agricola for trial. He was asked if he indeed said and did what had been reported. Marcellus admitted he had.

“What madness was it that made you refuse the military oath and speak in such a way?” Agricola asked.

“Among those who fear the Lord there is no madness,” replied Marcellus.

Later Marcellus was asked if he threw away his arms. He replied, “I did. It is not right for a Christian who serves in the army of the Lord Christ to serve also in worldly armies (or troubles).”

The interrogation ended and Agricola pronounced sentence:

“Marcellus who served as an ordinary centurion publicly refused to take the oath; said that it was foul and has uttered words full of madness referred to in the report of the Prefect; we order that he be executed by the sword” (Ricciotti, pp. 39-40).

Except for these and similar military reports, there was little persecution during these last days of the third century.

Good times don’t last forever. Neither do times of peace. In the next chapter, which will discuss the fourth century (A.D. 301-400), we shall see how this period of peace came to an end—it is reminiscent of the times of Queen Esther.

# 27

## Fourth Century: A Time to Flee

301

**T**he fourth century dawned with Christians experiencing freedom of religion under Emperor Diocletian (284-305). Many in Diocletian's household claimed to be Christians, and offices high in government were given to Christians, provided they showed proper service to the state.

The emperor held a lenient attitude toward Christians but two of his associates, Maximian and Galerius, hated their name and religion. Galerius experienced success in the Persian War. With high hopes and good reputation, he approached Diocletian in the palace of Nicomedia and spent the winter of 302-303 discussing the fate of Christianity.

"The experienced emperor was still inclined to pursue measures of lenity; and though he readily consented to exclude Christians from holding any employments in the household or the army, he urged in strongest terms the dangers as well as the cruelty of shedding the blood of those deluded fanatics" (Gibbon, p. 289).

### **Smyrna Era's 10 Years of Trouble**

Christ foretold that the Church of Smyrna

would suffer persecution "10 days." A prophetic "day" means a "year" and the Smyranean church era did, indeed suffer severe persecution for ten years, beginning in 303.

Galerius received permission to summon a small council composed of members from the civil and military departments of the state. Following secret dialogues, the council desired to destroy Christians—calling them a threat to the empire. The council persuaded the emperor to allow persecution beginning at the Roman festival of Terminalia.

In the early dawn of Feb. 23, 303, the praetorian praefect, accompanied by several generals, tribunes and officers of revenue, broke down the doors of the church at Nicomedia. They rushed into the sanctuary and searched in vain for some visible objects of worship. When they couldn't find any, they settled for burning volumes of Holy Scripture (Gibbon, p.289-290).

"The edict affected churches, writings, and the Christian people, but did not contain any penalty of death. Christians, even if they held important posts, were to be stripped of all their privileges and put to the torture. They were forbidden to defend themselves

303

302

303

on any charge in the public courts or to make official complaints of injuries, adultery, or theft. If they were slaves, they lost the right of emancipation. The churches were demolished and the sacred books burned” (Ricciotti, p. 42).

It took just a few hours for the praetorian guard to use pick axes to level the church at Nicomedia. The next day—Feb. 24—the edict was posted to give legal backing for the previous day’s events.

Before long some daring Christian pulled down the edict and tore it to pieces. His name is unknown. He was arrested, tortured over a slow fire and burned alive. “The heads of the Christian community, however, did not approve of what he had done. Remembering earlier persecutions, they urged the people to remain calm and either to hide or to seek safety in flight. They realized only too well how foolish and dangerous it would be to meet force with force and they feared that many of their people might not be ready to face the heroic death of a martyr” (Ricciotti, p. 43). Daring Christians helped preserve the Bible at this time by hiding the sacred Scriptures or taking them with when they fled (Ricciotti, p. 73).

The church at Nicomedia was dismantled “and the next day an edict was posted declaring that all churches were to be destroyed, all Bibles and liturgical books surrendered, sacred vessels confiscated, and all meetings for worship forbidden. A few months later a second edict (apparently confined to the East) ordered the arrest of the clergy, but the prisons would not accommodate so many and in the autumn an amnesty was granted on condition of sacrifice. Not until 304 were all of the citizens of the Empire required to sacrifice on pain of death, but this also was in practice limited to the East” (Chadwick, p. 121).

The ten years of persecution prophesied in Revelation to come upon the Smyrna Era had begun. “The last general persecution came under Diocletian and his successors and lasted from A.D. 303 to 311” (Purinton, p. 247). Other sources say it lasted to about 313.

“In that same year, 303, two new edicts were published at Nicomedia, which brought fresh troubles on the Christians. The first ordered that all heads of churches should be imprisoned; the second allowed them their freedom if they would sacrifice to the gods and commanded that all kinds of tortures should be inflicted on those who refused” (Ricciotti, pp. 46-47).

### Books Attack Christians

Two books were published in 303 attacking Christians. One was anonymous. Its author appeared intent on making money and attracting attention from those in power. He praised the leaders for conducting the persecution, called on Christians to repent and return to paganism but offered little argument against Christian beliefs. This writer probably made little impression on anyone.

A more effective work was the book, *A Friendly Discourse on Truth (Directed) to the Christians*, written by Hierocles, who may have been an apostate Christian. “The work is not a fierce, death-dealing attack, but an attempt by friendly persuasion to invite Christians to conform to the official beliefs of the Empire.... Considerable knowledge of Christian doctrine is shown in the book which, according to Eusebius... was derived from earlier anti-Christian polemics rather than from the immediate consultation of Christian writings.... Hierocles’ book was, no doubt, a cause of great alarm for the Christians who, at this very time, were undergoing the worst of the persecution” (Ricciotti, pp. 31-32).

These writings were typical of most that attack God’s true church. They accuse God’s people of belonging to “cults” or some nonofficial religion but cannot argue with its true doctrines. Often one attacker gets his material from previous writers who have attacked the church and they seldom read or consider the actual writings of God’s church itself!

### Edicts of 304

“Persecution came and went in varying

bursts of ferocity. At the very start, a fire in the imperial palace was unjustly blamed on the Christians in Nicomedia and led to a string of martyrdoms among Christians in the imperial household. The first eight months were severe, leading up to an edict for the arrest of church leaders. Then, in November, they were released; in spring 304 another edict commanded sacrifice to the gods by all the inhabitants of the East. Once again, enforcement was haphazard in the absence of accurate registers.... Western Christians were asked to surrender their Scriptures and were deprived of their meeting places” (Fox, p. 596).

The hand of Galerius could be seen in the edict of persecution issued in spring 304 “for it was the expression of what he had obviously long wanted to do. ...this law of 304 was directed against all Christians without distinction. Any Christian, whatever his age, sex, or position, was now obliged to offer sacrifice to the gods” (Ricciotti, p. 51).

### **Christians Flee, Hide, Trick**

The reign of terror was acute in Nicomedia from the beginning. “In other places, the persecution gradually became more and more harsh and extreme severity became the law with the edict of 304.... There seemed little safety in flight when the Roman Empire extended over almost the whole world. Many did abandon everything and turned fugitives.... During the persecution of Maximin Christians fled in great numbers toward the five districts of the upper Tigris which bordered on Armenia Minor. These had passed to the Roman Empire after the victory of Galerius over the Persians, but local governors still ruled the land. Here the Christians had increased greatly in numbers and were not molested in any way. The Armenian Christians received with open arms their brethren who fled from Roman persecution....

“Those who did not leave the Empire and did not hide themselves defended themselves and their faith as best they could. Some resorted to trickery of varying degrees

of courage to deceive the police. The simplest method was to buy a witnessed document which testified that they had duly offered incense to the idols.... Another way was for the Christian to send a pagan slave or friend to offer the incense for him....

“There was a little town in Phrygia where the whole population including the ‘curator’ and the municipal magistrates were all Christians. Everyone refused to offer incense and they fled to the shelter of their church. This made it simpler for the Roman officers to dispose of them—they burned the church with the Christians, men, women, and children inside....

“During the persecution of Maximin it was the custom to go along the streets calling the people out of their houses according to a prepared list and then to put out search parties for those who did not answer the call. When the roll call was finished everyone was taken off to the nearest pagan temple to offer incense....

“Some magistrates were more interested in making apostates than in destruction and death.... They put their victims to torture but in small doses over a long period in hope that this painful repetition would sap the moral strength of the patient and lead him to surrender; they cared for the wounds and bruises of one day so that the pain of opening them again the following day would be more excruciating” (Ricciotti, pp.77-79).

### **Victoria Questioned**

We have record of a “noble and beautiful” young woman named Victoria, who was interrogated at this time. Her brother, Fortunatianus, tried to convince the proconsul that she was crazy and not responsible for her actions. She should be released to his care. The proconsul was tired and bored of all the interrogations he had conducted, and would have granted the request but for appearances he had to conduct a rapid interrogation.

He passed over the other women and questioned Victoria privately in the presence of her brother. “She affirmed that she

was a Christian, that she was and always had been quite sane. The Proconsul disregarded such mad statements and asked her whether she would like to go away in peace with her brother. But Victoria replied, 'I do not wish to go with him for I am a Christian and my brother is he who observes the commandments of God.' ...The proconsul sent her back to prison with her chosen brothers to await execution" (Ricciotti, pp. 97-98).

Victoria's response seems to indicate there were still true Christians who kept the commandments of God A.D. 304.

### Persecution in Pontus

Pontus, on the south shore of the Black Sea, was the scene of terrible persecution.

"Terrible to hear were the agonies suffered by those (Christians) of Pontus. Some had sharpened reeds thrust under their fingernails; others had boiling lead poured over their backs and their most vital parts burned in this way; still others suffered in their private parts tortures which are shameful, callous, and impossible to describe; these torments were inflicted by noble judges who respected the law; they made show of cruelty as if it were a wise virtue and in a wretched competition for new tortures attempted to beat their rival judges as if they were striving for a prize [*Hist. Eccl.*, vii, 12, 6-7]" (Ricciotti, pp. 121-122).

### Women in Thessalonica Flee

When the edict was published in Thessalonica demanding that the Scriptures be handed over to the authorities and destroyed, three sisters hid their copies in their house and fled to the mountains. Their names had symbolic meaning: Agape (charity), Irene (peace) and Chione (snow).

After spending some time wandering in the hills, they returned home where they were arrested and brought before Dulcitus, governor of Macedonia. Four other Christians, three women and a man (Cassia, Philippa, Eutichia and Agatho), also were brought before the governor toward the end

of March, 304.

Dulcitus began by making a general complaint: "What madness is this of yours that you will not obey the most religious commands of our emperors and Caesars?" He then asked Agatho, the only man, "How is it that you did not follow the custom of those who are consecrated to the gods and take part in the sacred rites?"

Apparently Agatho had been "consecrated to the gods" in some fashion—perhaps he was a former pagan priest. He answered the governor, "Because I am a Christian."

Dulcitus continued, "You still persist in your purpose today?"

"Yes, without any change," Agatho replied.

Dulcitus turned to the women. "And you, Agape, what have you to say?"

"I believe in the living God and do not wish to have anything but good deeds on my conscience."

All of the women answered similarly. Eutichia was heavy with child so Dulcitus asked her, "Have you a husband?"

"He is dead," she replied.

"When did he die?"

"About six months ago."

"By whom are you bearing this child then?"

"By the man whom God gave me."

"How then do you find yourself with child if you tell me your husband is dead?"

"No one may know the counsels of the omnipotent God. This is the will of God."

Dulcitus apparently did not believe Eutichia's pregnancy was so far advanced. He felt she had remarried, most likely a Christian man, and he wanted her to reveal his name. He said to her, "I beg you, Eutichia, to put away this madness and to think once more like a rational being. What do you say? Will you obey the royal edict?"

"I most certainly will not obey it for I am a Christian, a servant of the omnipotent God."

"Since Eutichia is with child let her be kept for a time in prison," Dulcitus ruled. Roman law protected expectant mothers.

However, after she gave birth she was martyred.

The governor asked Chione, "Have you in your possession any treatises or parchments or books of the impious Christians?"

"We have nothing; the present emperors have taken away all that we had."

Dulcitius saw his efforts were useless. He wrote out and pronounced sentence. "Since Agape and Chione had rebelled against the edict of the Augusti and the Caesars by practicing the execrable Christian religion they were condemned to be burned alive. The judge then added that Agatho, Cassia, Philippa, and Irene were to remain in prison at his pleasure. The two condemned women were burned at the stake" (Ricciotti, pp. 122-124).

A little while after this trial police discovered boxes and other containers in Irene's house which held considerable quantities of Scripture. They found "parchments, books, small codices and pages of writing." All these had been gathered from individual Christians and hidden before the three sisters fled to the mountains.

Why had Chione told her judge that she had no Scriptures? Had she lied? No. It may be that one of the other sisters had prepared the hiding place without informing Chione. Or perhaps she believed earlier searches of her house had turned up the Scriptures.

Whatever the case, now that they had been found, Irene was brought again before the Dulcitius. He told her how obstinate she had been, since Scriptures were indeed found in her house and she had been so tranquil while her sisters had been executed. He would forgive her of all if she would eat meat which had been sacrificed to the gods.

"My answer is no," Irene replied, "by the omnipotent God who created the heaven and earth, the sea and all things that exist. The dreadful punishment of eternal fire is specially reserved for those who have denied Jesus, the Word of God."

Dulcitius asked her who had persuaded her to hide the Scriptures in her home. She told him it was God who required us to love him to death and to allow ourselves to be

burned to death rather than hand them over.

"Who besides yourself knew that these things were hidden in your house?" the governor asked.

"No one else, as God sees me, except the omnipotent God who knows all things; other than he, nobody. We consider our own people worse than our enemies for we fear they may betray us. Therefore I showed them to nobody." The expression "our own people" refers to members of their household.

"Where did you hide yourselves last year when the edict was published?" Dulcitius asked. He was hoping to uncover Christians still in hiding.

Irene, wishing to protect other Christians, gave a vague answer: "Where God wished. We remained under the open sky, as God is our witness, on the mountains."

"With whom did you live?"

"In the open air. Here and there on the mountains."

"Who provided you with food?"

"God, who provides for all."

"Did your father know of this?"

"No, by the omnipotent God! Indeed he was not privy to our plans and knew nothing about them."

"Who then of your neighbors knew what you were doing?"

"Ask these people on the spot if any of them knew where we were."

"After you came down from the mountains, as you maintain you did, did you read these writings in the presence of anyone?"

"They remained in our house and we did not even dare to bring them out. This was a great distress to us for we could not occupy ourselves over them as we had been in the habit of doing from the beginning until last year, when we had to hide even those."

Dulcitius saw it was useless to prolong the interrogation. He wanted Irene's punishment to last longer than her sisters'. So he sentenced her to be exposed naked in the brothel under guard. This punishment failed, because no one approached her or said anything wicked to her. Finally, she was burned to death April 1, 304 (Ricciotti, pp. 124-126).

## 304

**Hiding Christians Captured**

In northern Illyria is the city of Lauriacum. In 304, “in the full cry of the persecution the governor Aquilinus came to Lauriacum to search out the Christians who were hiding in the mountains and the surrounding caves. He captured forty of them whom he kept for a long time, and whom he placed under torture” (Ricciotti, p. 141).

**Former Prostitute Interrogated**

In Italy we find the story of a former prostitute named Afra who was arrested in 304 for being a Christian. She was a prospective member; she was not yet baptized. Her judge was Cajus.

Cajus told Afra that it was more pleasant to be alive and happy than to die in torment. Afra replied that she had committed enough sin when she did not know God and refused to add another one to her already long list.

Cajus insisted: “Get along to the capitol and sacrifice.” He was speaking of a regional capitol, not Rome.

“My capitol is Christ whom I keep before my eyes; to him every day I confess my crimes and my sins,” she responded.

“From what I understand you are a prostitute. Sacrifice therefore, for you cannot be of the God of the Christians.”

“My Lord Jesus Christ said that he had come down from heaven for sinners. The Gospels indeed show that a prostitute bathed his feet with tears and had her sins forgiven her.”

“Sacrifice for then you will be as acceptable to your clients as before and they will give you much money,” said Cajus.

Afra said she had already unburdened herself of the money which had been so tainted the Christian poor would not accept it.

“You have lost any chance of Christ thinking you worthy of him. You have no proof for saying that he is your God for he does not recognize you.” Cajus’ words show the high opinion pagans had for Christians,

although they had no intention of following their moral teachings.

“I do not deserve to be called a Christian as you so rightly point out; but the mercy of God which judges not according to merit, but in conformity with his own mercy, has allowed me the honor of his name,” replied Afra.

Later, Cajus demanded, “Sacrifice, or else I will have you tortured and then burned alive.”

“The body with which I have sinned will accept the torments but I will not stain my soul with the sacrifices of the devil.”

Cajus pronounced sentence: “Afra, public prostitute, who has professed herself a Christian and that she does not wish to offer sacrifice, is to be burned alive.”

The condemned woman was taken to an island in the river which flowed near the city. She was stripped and tied to a stake. She prayed and cried with her eyes lifted to heaven as wood was piled around her and set afire. With her last words she thanked Jesus Christ and offered herself as a sacrifice to Him. Her martyrdom probably occurred August 7, 304 (Ricciotti, pp. 142-143).

**Constantine Becomes Emperor**

The Roman Empire was ruled by two “Augusti” at this time, each with his own assistant Caesar. Diocletian and his Caesar, Galerius, ruled east of the Adriatic Sea. Maximian and his Caesar, Constantinus (father of Constantine), ruled the West.

The persecution against the church was stronger in the East under Diocletian. “In Gaul, Britain and Spain, Constantinus did not go beyond destroying some churches; no one was executed” (Chadwick, pp. 121-122).

Constantinus died at York July 25, 305, and the soldiers proclaimed his son, Constantine, emperor. The new emperor worshiped the “unconquerable sun” as his father had done but there was Christian influence in his home. He had a half-sister named Anastasia. The name came from the root word *anastis*, which meant *resurrection*.

### Sculptors Refuse to Make Idol

There were five very able Christian sculptors who had been sent to forced labor in the quarries of Sirmium. Because of their famed craftsmanship, Emperor Diocletian came to the quarry and asked the five to make him some decorative works of stone, including some statues of winged victory and some cupids.

“The sculptors carried out this assignment to the satisfaction of the highest Augustus. They were ornamental objects without any idolatrous significance and the Christian consciences of the artists were at ease working on them.”

Diocletian then ordered them to make a statue of the god Aesculapius, which was clearly to be used for worship. The Christians refused. Diocletian led a quick trial for the five and had them closed like corpses in boxes of lead and thrown into the river, probably Nov. 8, 305 (Ricciotti, pp. 138-139)

### Galerius Replaces Diocletian

In the East, where most of God’s church could be found, there was a minor bloodbath. Diocletian retired from public life in 305 and turned over rule to the Christian-hating Galerius and his Caesar, Maximin Daia.

Galerius “now pursued his own course unhindered in his Eastern Empire. From this moment there began in the East the first really bloody persecution of the Christians, a persecution no longer checked by any scruple. It was insane butchery. The Christians were to be compelled to sacrifice by fair means or foul. The food exposed for sale in the market-places was drenched with sacrificial wine, in order that the Christians might be made sacrificers in this way. A tremendous tumult went through the length and breadth of the empire. Even actual resistance was made in some place” (Sohm, p. 18).

What was Galerius’ motive? Why did he persecute Christians so? “The first motive was the Caesar’s mentality which had conceived a profound hatred for Christianity

under the influence of his mother, the Corybantic priestess. Other motives could be found in the frequent complaints of pagan priests and haruspices [minor priests who practiced divination, especially from the entrails of animals killed in sacrifice] whose business had been damaged by the growth of Christianity. Finally, to all this should be added the open encouragement of pagan polemic writers who, either by natural inclination or with the desire of gain and honor, put their hopes in Galerius” (Ricciotti, pp. 30-31).

At first the pagan writers encouraged Galerius in private to begin the persecution. But as soon as the persecution broke out, they circulated their writings to support and justify the campaign. “It seems that among them we shall now find apostate Christians” (Ricciotti, p. 31). Former Christians were encouraging the persecution against Christians!

### Egyptian Christians Persecuted

Eusebius tells us that the persecution in Egypt was particularly ferocious:

“There thousands and thousands of people, men with their wives and children, who despised temporal life according to the teaching of our Saviour, suffered all kinds of death. Some, after bearing the iron hooks, the racks, the whips and other torments innumerable and terrible to hear were finally consigned to the flames; others were drowned in the sea. Still others bravely offered their heads to the executioner, died under torture, or expired from hunger. Some were crucified in the manner used for criminals, and others even more cruelly were fixed to the cross with their head down and left to die of hunger’ (*Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 8)” (Ricciotti, pp. 100-101).

The persecution was exceptionally bloody in and around Thebes. Some were scraped with shells instead of iron hooks all over their bodies until they died. “Women were tied by one leg and hauled up in the air by winches; they were left hanging upside down completely naked.... Some died tied to trees

and stumps. Strong trees were bent together by winches until they met at the top; a leg of the martyr was fixed to each tree and then the trees were allowed to spring back to their former position. This torture had been discovered to tear the sinews of the limbs of those who suffered it. And all these deeds were practiced not for a few days or for a short time, but for years. Sometimes ten were killed at the same time, sometimes twenty or more; at other times not less than thirty and sometimes nearly sixty. Once in the space of one day a good hundred men with women and children were all executed after having endured various tortures" (Ricciotti, p. 103).

One day there were so many beheadings that the blade became so dull that it killed by its weight instead of its sharpness. The executioners became exhausted and had to take turns. But through all this the Christians remained joyful. They sang hymns and offered thanks to God until their last breath (Ricciotti, p. 103).

## 306

### Trial of Phileas

Phileas, bishop of Thmuis, a city east of Alexandria in Egypt, was brought to trial in 306. He was a man of high regard, a public servant with a pagan wife and children, showing he had been converted since his marriage for he would not have married a pagan after his conversion. He was young, noble and rich.

He was brought before Culcianus, prefect of Egypt. The hall was filled with friends and relatives who did not want Phileas martyred.

"Are you now able to see yourself more clearly and to free your mind of this madness which has seized on it?" began Culcianus.

"I have never been mad and am quite sane now," replied Phileas.

"Very well then, sacrifice to the gods."

"I will not sacrifice."

"Why?"

"Because the Scripture says that he will be uprooted who sacrifices to the gods except to God alone [soli Deo]."

"All right then, sacrifice to the god Sol [deo Soli]." The prefect was playing on the two Latin words. The god Sol was the sun god.

"I will not sacrifice," responded Phileas, "for God does not wish such immolations. He says that he does not want holocausts of lambs, or bulls or offerings of flour."

"What kind of sacrifices does your God like?" asked the prefect.

"Purity of heart, sincere faith, and truth."

"Well then, sacrifice!"

"I will not sacrifice. I do not know how to."

"Didn't Paul sacrifice?"

"No."

"Moses sacrificed anyway."

"The Jews were commanded to sacrifice to one God only in Jerusalem. They sin now when they celebrate their feasts in other places."

"Enough of this double talk. Sacrifice."

"I will not stain my soul."

"Can we throw away our soul?"

"Both soul and body."

"This body perhaps?"

"This body."

"The body will rise again?"

"Yes."

"Surely Paul denied Jesus Christ?"

"No."

"But he was a persecutor. Was he not uneducated and a Syrian who only spoke in his native tongue?"

"He was a Hebrew, spoke Greek, and was the wisest of men."

"You will be saying soon that he was wiser than Plato."

"Not only wiser than Plato but than all the philosophers. In fact he argued with and convinced very wise men. If you like, I will explain his teaching to you."

"The gods forbid. Sacrifice!"

"I will not sacrifice."

"Because of your conscience?"

"Yes."

"Then what about your duty to your wife and children?"

"My duty to God is more important. The Scripture indeed says, 'Thou shalt love the

Lord God who has made you.’”

“Which god?”

“The God,” replied Phileas, lifting up his hands to heaven, “who made the sky and land, the sea and everything which is in them. He is the Creator and Author of all things visible and invisible, the Unspeakable one who alone exists and remains for ever and ever, Amen.”

Phileas was again commanded to sacrifice.

“I will not sacrifice. I prefer to save my soul. Not only Christians save their souls but even pagans. I give you the example of Socrates. When he was taken to his death although his wife and children were there he did not try to avoid his sentence but willingly accepted death. And he was an old man.”

Phileas asked a favor of Culcianus. “Use your authority and follow your instructions.”

“You wish to die without reason?” asked Culcianus.

“Not without reason. It will be for God and his truth.”

Phineas was finally granted his wish (Ricciotti, pp. 104-109).

## 307

### Christians Condemned to Mines

“As time went on, the Christians for the most part showed no signs of giving in and since even the pagans began to be heartily sick of the continual slaughter, the penalty for death was frequently commuted to that of forced labor in the mines. In this way at any rate, the Christians would help the treasury” (Ricciotti, pp. 80-81).

This happened about the year 307. The mines were always in desolate country and the Christians received nothing more than the bare necessities. Usually the workers were mutilated. Often the tendon of their left foot was cauterized so if they attempted to escape they could not get far before being caught. Their right eye was cut out and the wound seared with a hot iron. Some young boys were castrated (Ricciotti, p. 81).

When a governor came to visit the mines at Phoenice in Palestine, he felt the conditions

of the prisoners were too easy. He informed Emperor Maximin, who had the Christians transferred elsewhere, some to Cyprus, some to Lebanon and some to other places in Palestine. Four of the most important Christians were burned alive, including the bishops Nilus and Pelus. There were 39 who were found too weak to work. They had been spending their time in prayer and “pious exercises” but now were beheaded. Among them were the lector John and the bishop Silvanus (Ricciotti, pp. 82-83).

### Pamphilius imprisoned

In November 307 Pamphilius was imprisoned by Urbanus, governor of Palestine. The Christian refused to sacrifice to pagan gods so he was tortured by having his sides torn with metal hooks. He was then sent back to prison where he remained for a couple of years. While there, he wrote five books of *Apologia of Origen* with the help of Eusebius. Eusebius later added a sixth book.

Pamphilius was imprisoned with Valens, an aged deacon from Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem), who was learned in sacred Scripture, and Paul from Jabne, whose arms were scarred from red-hot irons with which he had been tortured for his Christian faith (Ricciotti, 110, 112).

### Two Daring Women

In Palestine women were just as daring as their Christian menfolk. A woman of great courage was among the Christians arrested in 308 for reading Scriptures and sent to the mines. She was a virgin and her judge threatened to send her to a brothel. “She sprang up like a lioness and quite soundly denounced the ‘tyrant,’ the emperor, who saw fit to entrust the government of his provinces to idiots like the one sitting there on the judgment seat. She was flogged and then strung up and her sides were torn with iron hooks” (Ricciotti, p. 114).

While this torture was taking place, Valentina, a native of Caesarea, yelled from the crowd, “How long are you going to tor-

## 308

ture my sister so cruelly?” She was arrested and taken into the middle of the hall. When she was bodily dragged to the pagan altar in hopes of forcing her to sacrifice to the pagan deities, “she dealt a number of well-directed kicks and pushed over the altar with everything on it and the tripod with the fire. The judge was furious and after this new rebel had been tortured he condemned her to be burned alive with her sister. It was July of 308” (Ricciotti, p. 115).

### Saved from Wild Beasts

Christians and pagans were thrown to wild beasts in a Tyre arena. The beasts pounced upon the pagans and tore them apart but did not touch the Christians. “And if one of the animals sprang towards them, it seemed to be pushed back by divine power and at once went away from them. This went on for a long time and produced no little wonder among the spectators.” A wild bull tossed the pagans in the air and wounded them so severely they were left half-dead. “When the bull rushed against the holy ones (the Christians) with all the fury and menace he suddenly stopped and could approach no nearer but pawed the ground and tossed his horns here and there breathing anger and fear toward those who were goading him with hot irons. He had been stayed by Divine Providence and could inflict no harm on the martyrs.” When the beasts left the Christians unharmed, men stepped in and slaughtered God’s people with the sword. Their bodies were not buried but were flung upon the sea (Ricciotti, pp. 116-117).

### Three Rich Women Flee

In Syrian Antioch—once home base for Apostle Paul—there lived three rich, beautiful and well-known women. The mother, Dommina, was a zealous Christian and had raised her daughters, Berenice and Prosdocke, in the same religion.

When persecution against Christians became intense in Antioch, the three women fled for Edessa, a city across the Euphrates

River which had offered a home and refuge for Christians for many years.

Their absence was noticed and the pagans brought pressure to bear against the husband of Dommina. “Probably during the intensification of the persecution under Maximin, search was instituted for individual Christians, and relatives were forced to reveal their hiding places. The husband was persuaded to talk and he betrayed his wife and daughters” (Ricciotti, pp. 118-119).

The husband himself accompanied the soldiers to Edessa to bring back his wife and daughters. During the return to Antioch, the women probably thought long and hard about the tortures and “certain loss of chastity” that awaited them. When they had the opportunity to fling themselves into a river in an attempt to escape, they did so (Ricciotti, p. 119).

### Julitta the Widow Wronged

Another rich Christian woman was Julitta the widow, who lived in Caesarea in Cappadocia. Laws did not protect widows much in those days and one of the principal citizens of the area extorted her property through fraud and dishonest means. She took him to court in an attempt to recover her losses.

The man, however, complained to the judge about the procedure of the trial. He said Julitta should not be heard until she had made the customary act of worship to the gods and had renounced the Christian faith. The law gave no rights to Christians and her case would be thrown out.

The judge ordered that incense and fire be immediately brought and that Julitta should make an offering. She flatly refused, saying, “You may take my life as well as my possessions; I will lose my body before my mouth will utter any impiety against God my Creator.”

Becoming angry, the judge ordered her to offer incense. She replied, “I am the handmaid of Christ.”

Given the choice of sacrificing or dying by fire, Julitta chose the latter was martyred soon afterward (Ricciotti, p. 121).

## Ten Years of Persecution

We cannot tell the story of every martyr who suffered during this 10-year persecution. Whole books have been written about them. We have space here only to have highlighted some examples of the tortures and trials God's people went through during the Smyrna Era's "10 days of tribulation."

"Furious persecutions raged. Some were broiled to death on gridirons after being cruelly scourged, and their wounds washed in brine. Others were thrown to wild beasts, and some starved to death. These persecutions lasted approximately ten years. This is the period of persecution prophesied by our Savior, in Rev. 2:9, 10, where he said they would have tribulation ten days (ten years) and admonished them to be faithful unto death and he would give them a crown of life. This Smyrna period corresponds to the time of Diocletian" (Dugger and Dodd, p. 74).

God revealed a principle of using a day to represent a year in Numbers 14:34.

"This prediction has been completely misunderstood by most people. Most everyone has sought to apply it to the wrong church [the Catholic Church]! Eusebius (Hist. VIII, 15, 16) mentions that the ten years were fulfilled in the last great pre-Constantine persecution (that of Diocletian and Galerius) in 303-313.... In the Eastern Roman Empire it lasted 10 years. That is where God's people were" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 5).

"Throughout the ten-year period of the persecution, their [the leaders of the Eastern and Western Roman Empire] plotting and campaigning against each other continued without intermission. The seas were unnavigable, and wherever people sailed from they could not avoid being subjected to outrages of every sort: they were racked, and had their sides torn open, and were interrogated with the aid of an endless variety of tortures, on the pretext that they might be enemy agents; finally they were subjected to crucifixion or to punishment by fire.... On them, too, fell the famine and pestilence that followed" (Eusebius, p. 351).

## Pamphilius Executed

Pamphilius, Valens and Paul had been imprisoned in Palestine in 307, as we have already read. Three years later, Feb. 16, 310, when the three prisoners were executed, eight others were martyred with them: five Egyptians, Porphyrius, Seleucus and Theodulus. Eusebius, in his history, adds a twelfth martyr named Julian.

The bodies of the martyrs remained exposed for four days and nights. Soldiers guarded the bodies to keep away Christians who might have wished to bury the bodies. The guards were given orders not to molest any birds or animals who might come to eat the dead flesh. Yet during this whole time not one bird or animal disturbed the bodies of the martyrs. Finally Governor Urbanus' anger died down and he removed the guards. Christians came and buried the bodies (Ricciotti, pp. 112-113).

## Christ Strikes Galerius

Jesus Christ used pestilence to save his church. He afflicted the emperor until he relented in the persecution of the Church of God. "After four long, melancholy, fearful years (306-310), Galerius, in sore sickness, recognized that he must draw back" (Sohm, p. 18).

"The real changes in the Empire came the following year (311) and were most unexpected. As early as March of 310 the senior Augustus Galerius complained of bad health, certainly caused by evil living. A sore which first appeared on the sex organs, began to spread despite all the efforts of the doctors; weakening hemorrhages alternated with fitful improvement and the sick man sank frequently into delirium. The more the doctors cut, the larger and deeper grew the ulcer. When medical action failed and the surgeons had done their best, the gods were called in. Aesculapian Apollo seemed even less effective than surgery, for his state became much worse, his bowels began to putrefy, and all the lower part of his body started to decay and filled with worms.

310

311

## 311

“...Sufficient to say that the stink of the decaying imperial flesh filled the palace and spread to the neighborhood....

“Galerius was desperately in need of help and he began to think that if the gods of his own empire could not help, perhaps something might be got from the God of Christianity” (Ricciotti, pp. 150-151). This may have been suggested to Galerius by a Christian doctor who told him he could do nothing to cure the disease for it had been sent by God.

“The intensity of Galerius’ feeling is shown by the edict he issued on 30 April 311 when he was dying in great pain. He explained that he had tried to persuade the Christians to return to the religion of their forefathers, but ‘many persisted in their determination’ and now he grants them toleration and the right of assembly, in return for which they are begged to pray for his health and for the defense of the state” (Chadwick, p. 122).

Galerius lived only a few days after publishing the Edict of Toleration.

“In all the territories of the Empire, however, the edict had a wonderful effect.... Christians began once more to hold public meetings and celebrate services. The prison doors were opened; Christians came out from dungeons and passed through the streets singing the praise of God; the survivors of the forced labor camps returned to their houses in triumph. And it was not just the Christians who rejoiced; the pagans themselves who witnessed with surprise so sudden and unexpected a change joined in the common happiness and, as it was said, ‘proclaimed the God of the Christians great and true’” (Ricciotti, p. 153).

Without worrying about the rules of succession in the tetrarchy, Emperors Licinius and Maximin hurriedly took over the territories Galerius had ruled. Maximin occupied Asia Minor (Ricciotti, p. 154). Maximin continued persecuting Christians.

### Famine of 311-312

In addition to persecution, Christians suf-

fered from famine as well. A severe famine struck in 311-312.

Eusebius reported that normal winter rains did not fall and “without warning famine struck, followed by pestilence and an outbreak of a different disease—a malignant pustule, which because of its fiery appearance was known as a carbuncle. This spread over the entire body, causing great danger to the sufferers; but the eyes were the chief target for attack, and hundreds of men, women, and children lost their sight through it” (Eusebius, p. 365).

Yet Christians let their light shine through this trial. “During the great famine of 311/2, the richer pagan donors were said to have given abundantly, but then hardened their hearts for fear they would become beggars too. The Christians, however, would offer the last rites to the dying and bury them and distribute bread to all others who were suffering from hunger” (Fox, p. 591).

### Maximin Continues Persecution

Galerius’ death did not end persecution. “In 312, inspired pagan petitions poured in on Maximin Daia, asking him to suppress the ‘novelty’ of the disloyal Christians” (Chadwick, p. 122).

Emperor Maximin was no stranger to persecuting Christians. In 311 he had promised favors to pagans who persecuted Christians (Fox, p. 585).

Maximin, emperor in the East beginning in 312, was horribly superstitious. He did nothing without consulting oracles and divinations. Eusebius wrote: “The result was that he devoted himself to the persecution against us with more vehemence and determination than his predecessors, ordering temples to be built in every city and the sacred precincts which had gone to ruin with the lapse of them to be carefully restored; he appointed priests of idols in every locality and city.... From that time on he tortured and oppressed not one city or district, but the provinces under him, whole and complete” (Eusebius, p. 349). He exacted gold, silver and goods, amassing great wealth for

## 312

himself. During his drunken orgies he gave orders he regretted the next day when he was sober.

Christian men “endured fire and sword and crucifixion; wild beasts and submersion in the sea; severance of limbs and branding; stabbing and gouging out of eyes; mutilation of the entire body; and, in addition, starvation, fetters, and the mines—they were prepared to endure anything for religion’s sake, rather than give to idols the reverence due to God. As for the women, schooled by the divine word, they showed themselves as manly as the men. Some underwent the same ordeals as the men, and shared with them the prize of valour; others, when dragged away to dishonour, gave up their souls to death rather than their body to that dishonour” (Eusebius, pp. 349-350).

Maximin sought to blacken the character of Christians. “He forbade the Christians to restore their ruined churches and even to hold their meetings in cemeteries; the reasons given were, however, connected with public order and morals....

“To take away the good name of Christians, the so-called ‘Acts of Pilate’ were widely circulated; these were a very coarse collection of attacks on the person of Christ. The book had probably been compiled some time before this, perhaps at the beginning of the persecution but had remained unknown. Maximin saw to its diffusion both by giving away a large number of copies free and by having it publicly read and explained; it was also made an obligatory subject in the schools (cf. *Hist. Eccl.*, ix, 5, 1). The methods were not new and they are still in use.

“Another ancient method of attack (and still not out of date) was to expose the debauchery practiced at Christian meetings” (Ricciotti, p. 178).

### **Maximin Invades Armenia**

In addition to famine and persecution, the Church of God endured pestilence and war during the reign of Maximin.

The emperor waged war against the Armenians, who had been allies. He tried to

force them from their Christian beliefs and to worship Rome’s pagan idols. Remember, the lost 10 tribes of Israel were now inhabiting Armenia and many had been converted to Christianity since the original apostles had first preached to them.

The Armenians “were for the most part fervent Christians and therefore could not have been pleased with the persecution in the lands of Maximin. The precise reason for expedition is not known—there were probably several reasons. It is well known that the Armenians received fugitives from persecution; perhaps they had also sent help to those who remained in the Empire” (Ricciotti, pp. 180-181).

The legions and emperor became worn out in the war and famine that wasted away the empire. The Church of God, though protected by Jesus Christ through this time, undoubtedly suffered from the famine. A single measure of wheat cost 2,500 Attic drachmas, equivalent to \$2,500 in U.S. dollars in the 1960s. Hundreds of people died in city and rural areas. Rural registries that once contained names of many residents suffered almost complete obliteration. Rich people sold valuable possessions for small amounts of food. Others ruined their health by chewing cattle fodder or died from recklessly swallowing poisonous plants. Women begged in the streets.

“Some people, shrunken like ghosts and at death’s door, tottered and slipped about in all directions till, unable to stand, they fell to the ground; and as they lay face down in the middle of the streets, they implored passers-by to hand them a tiny scrap of bread, and with their life at its last gasp they called out that they were hungry—anything else than this anguished cry was beyond their strength. ...in the middle of public squares and narrow streets dead and naked bodies lay about unburied for days on end.... Indeed some even became food for dogs” (Eusebius, pp. 365-367).

“In all this distress and upheaval only the Christians, persecuted in the past and now once more, did what they could to help their enemies. They buried the abandoned

bodies, for they had been the temples of God; they collected and distributed the few victuals they could find, for those dying of hunger were the children of God. The pagans who saw this could not believe their eyes, and moved by their good works—far more deeply than any philosophical arguments—lauded their mercy and gave praise to their God” (Ricciotti, p. 180).

### Constantine Becomes a Catholic

Meanwhile, in the West, in 312, Constantine was at war to gain sole power.

“At this time Constantine was officially a pagan.... He was not a thinker searching out philosophical truth; he preferred tangibles; he was a man of action and in the political field he turned out to be a fine organizer.... His first influence was that of his father, Constantinus, and his mother Helena. His father was a tolerant pagan who never showed any dislike for Christianity. His mother was certainly a pagan while she was living with her son, though she possibly showed even then some predilection for Christianity” (Ricciotti, p. 160).

In his search for power, Constantine invoked the mighty aid of the Christian God “and was not disappointed.” This caused him to take up the cause of Catholicism.

That same year Maximin Daia and Licinius battled in a civil war for rulership in the East. Maximin Daia was defeated. In February 313, Constantine and Licinius met in Milan and agreed on a policy “of religious freedom for all, Christians and pagans alike, and on the restoration of all property, whether belonging to individual Christians or to churches as corporations” (Chadwick, p. 122).

“This agreement did not guarantee toleration for Christians. It did not make Christianity the Imperial religion. It did promise freedom of worship; it guaranteed legal equality with other religions; and it ordered the restoration of church property seized during the recent persecution” (Purinton, p. 287).

A letter to a prefect describes this agreement:

“When we, Constantine and Licinius, Emperors, met at Milan in conference concerning the welfare and security of the realm, we decided that of the things that are of profit to all mankind, the worship of God ought rightly to be our first and chiefest care, and that it was right that Christians and all others should have freedom to follow the kind of religion they favored; so that the God who dwells in heaven might be propitious to us and to all under our rule. We therefore announce that, notwithstanding any provisions concerning Christians in our former instructions, all who choose that religion are to be permitted to continue therein, without any let or hindrance, and are not to be in any way troubled or molested. Note that at the same time all others are to be allowed the free and unrestricted practice of their religions... that each should have freedom to worship God after his own choice; and we do not intend to detract from the honor due to any religion or its followers. Moreover, concerning the Christians, we before gave orders with respect to the places set apart for their worship. It is now our pleasure that all who have bought such places should restore them to the Christians, without any demand for payment” (Purinton, p. 287).

“Although he [Constantine] was not officially a Christian, he was very friendly toward them. He became a true catechumen only in the last days of his life, while earlier he had been a sympathizer with [Catholic] Christianity, waiting for death to approach his bed before deciding to receive baptism....

“Despite all these favors toward Christianity, Constantine remained the head of the paganism of the Empire for he kept the title and office of *pontifex maximus*. It is true that this was now merely a formal title and that Constantine was anything but zealous in exercising the corresponding office.... He chose to make the change (from paganism to Christianity) gradually.... Although the sympathies of Constantine for Christianity became more obvious with time, this did not mean that his pagan subjects were going to imitate him. They could remain in their

idolatry provided the peace of the Empire was not disturbed...” (Ricciotti, pp. 196-197, 201-202).

Emperor Constantine’s leanings toward Catholicism marked a turning point in the history of Europe and the Catholic Church. The Catholics were no longer persecuted by the government (though they freely persecuted “heretics”) and the Catholic Church became involved in this world’s politics.

Constantine never fully comprehended Christian doctrine. He had supposedly seen a cross emblazoned in the sky with the words, “By this conquer.” He was sure that his battle victory was a gift from the God of Christians, not caused by foolish decisions made by the opposing forces. It required very little change for Constantine to change his beliefs from the “unconquerable sun” to the “unconquerable Son.” False Christianity today shows evidence of a strange mix of sun worship and Son-worship. It celebrates the birth of the Son not when Christ was born (in early autumn) but when the sun is reborn with longer days (around Christmas). It celebrates the rising of the Son by worshiping at the rising of the sun Easter morning. And instead of keeping God’s fourth commandment to remember the Sabbath (the *true* Lord’s Day—Matt. 12:8), false Christianity worships on *Sunday*.

Freeing false Christianity from government persecution—and, in fact, giving it the government’s seal of approval—was a clever attempt by Satan to destroy God’s church. In the past, there were two choices for Christians: Remain true and be persecuted, possibly martyred; or deny Christ, worship pagan Roman gods and live. Now Satan offered a third choice: Deny the true Christ, worship the false Christ of the Catholics and avoid persecution. They could still feel like they were Christians, still take the name of Christ, but be free from persecution. Certainly this was a temptation for some in God’s church in the early fourth century!

Jesus Christ had warned that real persecution would come from religion, not from government: “Watch out, for there will be men who will arrest you and take you to

court, and they will whip you in their synagogues.... How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! Imposters! You make fine tombs for the prophets, and decorate the monuments of those who lived good lives... so I tell you: I will send you prophets and wise men and teachers; you will kill some of them, nail others to the cross, and whip others in your synagogues, and chase them from town to town” (Matt. 10:17; 23:29, 34).

Pseudo-religious men fear for their positions of influence over others. They especially persecute the Church of God because it has God’s truth, which convicts them of sin.

During the ten years of persecution in the eastern Roman Empire, the true church was not stamped out. God’s church was not stamped out of the Empire until the false church, under Constantine, gained power to persecute others (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 5).

### Dr. Arius Preaches Truth

The most talented, intellectual and spiritual power of the fourth century was a true man of God named Dr. Arius. He “was the central figure against which the evil and polluted minds of western Roman bishops were directed.... Like the Apostle Paul, he traversed the then-known world, propagating truth, and denouncing error. He was a staunch observer of the seventh-day Sabbath; he held the Lord’s Supper once a year on the 14th of Abib, as did all the Jewish Christians, and most of the members of the Eastern churches. He believed in the one God, and Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, and contended that the Holy Spirit was a power sent forth from God, entering into hearts and lives of Christians, transforming them into servants of God, of which he himself was a living example” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 77).

Arius had been born in Africa, and was described as “a person of tall stature and engaging manner whose face, however, always looked a little melancholy.” He kept “ascetic principles and strict conduct in life”

(Nigg, p. 124).

“Arius was very expert in propaganda. His very physical appearance gave him authority. He was already advanced in years, very tall, with drawn features and a grave, recollected manner. Like the martyr Edesius, he dressed in a manner to recall both the philosopher and ascete wearing a short tunic with sleeves and a small cloak over it. He was gentle in manner, his speech easy and persuasive, and he was obstinate in his opinions. He seems to have possessed great learning in profane matters (cf. Epiphanius, *Haeres.*, 69, 3). His morals were excellent” (Ricciotti, p. 250).

Arius believed in a literal understanding of the Scriptures. While the false church was disputing among itself what and who Christ was—man or God—Arius knew the answer. He was a man—a creature—while He walked the earth. But He had a prior eternal existence (whom the apostle John called “the Word”). Arius also advocated with intense fervor that God the Father and Jesus were one (Nigg, p. 131).

The destiny of man was understood by Arius: “‘indeed we can become sons of God, like Christ,’ so Arius is said to have taught; ‘it is written, “I have fathered and raised up sons...”’” (Fox, p. 602).

## 321

### Sunday Keeping Enforced

Sunday, kept by false Christians in place of the seventh-day Sabbath, was recognized as a legal holiday in the cities of the Roman Empire A.D. 321. In the countryside agricultural work was still permitted on the first day of the week (Purinton, p. 265).

Sunday worship gained more strength at the Council of Nice four years later. “During this time, at the council of bishops and prelates, assembled at Nice [325], among other Ecclesiastical laws, one was passed relative to the Sabbath, stating that all townspeople should rest from their labors on the venerable day of the sun” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 75).

Paganism did not suddenly vanish once Constantine favored Catholicism. “It would

be a great mistake to assume that once Constantine had declared himself in favour of Christianity, Graeco-Roman paganism just vanished overnight. In actual fact, for most of the fourth century, paganism remained a live option for some people, and Christians still had to address themselves to the task of converting Roman citizens to Christ” (*The Church under Siege* by M. A. Smith, p. 70). The greatest resistance to Christianity was in Rome among the Senators and intelligentsia (M. A. Smith, p. 71).

### Arius Moves to Nicomedia

The Catholics became upset with Arius, who was teaching against their false beliefs. They believed in a Trinity. The Catholic bishop Alexander called a council of bishops in Egypt and Libya. A hundred bishops attended and all but two condemned Arius. Arius moved to Palestine where he hoped to find ministers who thought as he did.

About 323 Arius moved to Nicomedia to be near his friend and fellow bishop, Eusebius (not the church historian). Arius did the work of God through a letter-writing campaign: “A letter-writing office was set up there immediately from which letters went out in all directions to find supporters among the bishops of the Empire” (Ricciotti, pp. 250-253)

## 323

### The Nicene Council of 325

In June A.D. 325, Constantine called the first general church council at Nice. It is recorded that 318 bishops attended the council but attendance was not representative of all Christianity.

“The Christian churches, which were flourishing in worldly wealth, were those mainly represented at this council, the humble companies of the poor, not being financially able to travel hundreds and even thousands of miles, were thus prevented from being there. The humble devoted Christians will always be found in larger numbers among the poor than the rich, consequently the voice of the council of Nice was the voice

## 325

of the churches clothed in wealth and splendor, catering to the popular trend of the time” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 79).

“There were so many ignorant bishops that one participant bluntly called the council ‘a synod of nothing but blockheads’ ” (Nigg, p. 127).

“At this council the doctrine of Arius was discussed and settled, resulting in the banishment of the old man, and of Eusebius of Nicomedia. Dr. Arius sponsored the truth of the sonship of Jesus, claiming that he was truly the son of God, begotten by the Holy Spirit, and was not God himself, in the sense as taught by the western bishops...

“Arius, with a large company of other bishops, was banished upon the islands of the sea, following this council, and his writings wherever found consigned to the flames. This was the first victory over the truth by civil legislation” (Dugger and Dodd, pp. 77-78, 79).

The power to persecute others was given to the false church when Constantine established Catholic “Christianity” as the state religion by the Council of Nicea A.D. 325. Constantine then issued edicts favoring Catholicism and anathematizing all others.

“Granted, Constantine was not incensed against solely and especially the True Church. He was against *all* who would not join with the church he had chosen. And that certainly included all that remained of the True Church within the Roman Empire!

“Eusebius, always a supporter of Constantine, explicitly states that Constantine put every other church out of the Roman Empire, or exterminated them—in *his lifetime*, beginning in 325.

“Constantine himself was not a Christian. He was a worshiper of the sun god, who foresaw how political advantage might be reaped by allying himself with ‘Christianity.’ He allied himself with the faction which offered the most immediate benefits—the strongest ally. That faction happened to be reigned over by Sylvester, bishop of Rome. He, too, observed the day of the sun. Sylvester could become head over all Christendom—under the *Emperor*, or course!

“...Thus, by the ‘marriage’ of a popularized form of Roman Samaritanism with sun worship did *Sunday* Christianity become dominant” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, pp. 5-6).

It was at the Council of Nicea where an edict was first made to favor the “venerable day of the sun” as a day of rest. “Up to this time Jewish and Gentile Christians observed the Sabbath according to the commandment, with the exception of a number of bishops in the west, in the sphere of the Roman church, who observed both days” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 78).

Constantine also attempted to do away with proper Passover observance and substitute Easter Sunday in its place. His reasoning? “Let us, then, have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 83).

Not everyone accepted the decrees of the Council of Nicea. To those who continued to follow the Truth, Emperor Constantine wrote the following official letter:

“Victor Constantinus, Maximus Augustus, to the heretics:

“...To speak of your criminality as it deserves demands more time and leisure than I can give... Why not at once strike, as it were, at the root of so great a mischief”—he meant the Truth of God—“BY A PUBLIC MANIFESTATION OF DISPLEASURE?”—by inciting persecution!

Constantine continued: “Forasmuch, then, as it is no longer possible to bear with your pernicious errors, we give warning by this present statute *that none of you henceforth presume to assemble yourselves together*. We have directed, accordingly, *that you be deprived of all the houses in which you are accustomed to hold your assemblies*: and (we) forbid the holding of your superstitious and senseless meetings, not in public merely, **BUT IN ANY PRIVATE HOUSE OR PLACE WHATSOEVER**... Take the far better course of entering the Catholic church.... We have commanded... that you be positively deprived of every gathering point for your superstitious meetings, I mean all the houses of prayer... and that these be made over

325

without delay to the Catholic Church; that any other places be confiscated to the public service, AND NO FACILITY WHATSOEVER BE LEFT FOR ANY FUTURE GATHERING, in order that from this day forward none of your unlawful assemblies may presume to appear in any public or private place. Let this edict be made public" (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book 3, as quoted by Hoeh, *A True History of the True Church*, p. 18).

### Dr. Arius Released

"Arius himself was banished to Illyria. He went into exile without complaint, and it is worth remembering that in the struggle it was Arius who became the persecuted one, suffering for his religious convictions. Since the emperor declared that the decisions of the council were laws of the empire, to side with Arius henceforth became a crime. These measures, it was hoped, would soon destroy the Arian heresy. But such hopes proved a fatal illusion. Violent repression as usual accomplished the opposite of its intention; in the case of Arius it served to spread rather than crush heresy" (Nigg, p. 128).

Sometime after Arius' banishment, a company of bishops who secretly followed Arius were discovered and banished to Gaul.

One of Arius' followers had a sister named Constantina. With her dying words, she recommended her brother to the Emperor. When he was before the Emperor, the follower persuaded him that Arius' sentence was unjust. The Emperor recalled Arius in 330 and tried to have him received into the church at Alexandria but the bishop there would not allow it. However, Arius and his adherents were received into the church at Jerusalem.

330

335

### Pamphlet Battle of Marcellus

Eusebius of Nicomedia continued the work of Arius. He conducted a pamphlet war with Marcellus, bishop of Ancyra.

Marcellus did not believe in the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity with its three

hypostases. He did not believe in the truth that God the Father and Christ were two separate Beings. He stressed that there is only one God:

"He (Marcellus) had long carried on a pamphlet war against the theological tradition of Origen with its strong emphasis on the independence of Father, Son, and Spirit as 'the three hypostases.' To Marcellus the unity of God was prior to all plurality.... Marcellus wanted a strictly Bible theology, based on texts, not on Plato or Origen.... Politically Marcellus was not a powerful figure and therefore did not attract the fire of Eusebius until 335-6. But in 335, immediately after the turbulent council of Tyre which condemned Athanasius [another Arian], Constantine instructed all the bishops in the East to attend the dedication of his new church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and planned that, in the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of his elevation as emperor, the ceremonies should include a splendid reconciliation of all those Arians who had come to submit since the Council of Nicaea. Marcellus declined to soil his conscience by attending, and was at once accused of disrespect to the emperor as well as of heresy. At a Council at Constantinople early in 336 he was deposed. The now usual exile followed" (Chadwick, pp. 135-136).

### Death of Arius

"After Dr. Arius had been released from banishment, and received into membership in the church at Jerusalem, he passed away [about 336—Chadwick, p. 136], but 'his works followed him.' Like the ministry of Paul, the seeds of truth that he had both sown and watered were growing, flourishing, and bearing an abundant harvest of fruit. His banishment and death by no means checked the spread of the truth, but rather scattered it abroad, and inflamed hearts with new zeal" (Dugger and Dodd, p. 80).

"[Arianism] was by no means dead. It continued to spread from the East to the Germanic tribes north of the frontier" (Herzstein, p. 75).

336

## Church of God Flees

“As protector and a favorer of a counterfeit form of ‘Christianity,’ Constantine forced everyone, pagan or Christian, either into conformity—or exile!

“The True Church chose exile!” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 6).

“The history of persecution ends, in this light, as a history of failure: its most positive consequence lies elsewhere, in the history of the Christian Church. Not only did it create the enduring cult of martyrs and intercessors; it split the churches into schisms, as ‘true’ uncompromised brethren refused to serve leaders from the ‘false’ compromised majority. It also scattered the believers more widely” (Fox, p. 601).

Christ had instructed his church to flee when faced with persecution (Matt. 10:23, 24:16, Luke 21:21). The headquarters church at Jerusalem A.D. 69 had been given a special sign—armies encompassing Jerusalem—to signify the time to flee from Judea. But the flight from Jerusalem was just a forerunner of two other great flights of the church. They were prophesied in Rev. 12:6, 14. One prophecy says the church will flee into the wilderness for 1,260 days (years) and the other says the church will flee from Satan for three-and-a-half years. The church had fled once. Now, as Constantine forced one religion upon all people, it was time for the church to flee a second time.

There have been a number of times in the history of the Church of God when its members assumed the return of Christ was imminent. They misunderstood Christ’s response in Matthew 24 as to what would be the sign of his coming. When Jesus answered his disciples, he began by warning of false prophets, wars, famines, disease, earthquakes and persecution (Mt. 24:3-12). These were not the sign of Christ’s return but only the beginning of sorrows (v. 9).

“Eusebius relates that there had been *many false prophets* in the period just before Constantine. Widespread *wars* had nearly torn the Empire apart. And just preceding the religious ‘peace of Constantine’ (pro-

duced by persecution!) were great *famines* and *pestilences*” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 6).

It is highly possible that Church of God members saw these things happening around them and felt Christ would return soon. The church knew it must flee prior to Christ’s return. It perhaps did not know this flight into the wilderness would last 1,260 years!

“The church, called by the world Nazarenes, Waldenses, Puritans, Arians, etc., was shining brightly in many darkened places of Europe, causing the enactment of civil laws, and the waging of bitter persecution against them” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 80).

*Jones’ Church History*, ed. 1837, p. 208 describes the church’s flight into the wilderness from the harlot church seated on the Roman beast:

“Multitudes, however, fled like innocent and defenseless sheep from these devouring wolves. They crossed the Alps, and traveled in every direction, as Providence and the prospect of safety conducted them, into Germany, England, France, Italy, and other countries. There they trimmed their lamps, and shone with new luster. Their worth everywhere drew attention, and their doctrine formed increasing circles around them. The storm which threatened their destruction only scattered them as the precious seeds of the glorious reformation of the Christian Church” (Dugger and Dodd, pp. 100-101).

While the Catholic bishops wrestled among themselves to establish who was the greatest and who should rule over whom, “there dwelt a people untouched by the worldliness of the apostate church, this was the true Church of God, known, it is true, by various man-made names, but among themselves holding to the true name, and the pure unadulterated doctrines advocated by the disciples of the first century...

“Some of the popish writers themselves own that this people never submitted to the church of Rome. One of the popish writers, speaking of the Waldenses, says, ‘The heresy of the Waldenses is the oldest heresy in the world. It is supposed that they first

betook themselves to this place among the mountains, where they existed before Constantine the Great, and thus the woman fled into the wilderness from the face of the serpent.... The people being settled there, their posterity continued (there) from age to age; and being as it were, by natural walls, as well as by God's grace, separated from the rest of the world, they never partook of the overflowing corruption" (Dugger and Dodd, pp. 91-92).

## 340

### Persecution in Persia

The Christian religion, probably including the Church of God, made its way east into Persia and Armenia to its north. The kings and leaders of Persia did not approve of Christianity moving into their territory. But that did not stop churches from becoming established there.

"To the north of Persia, Christianity had become the official religion of Armenia even before it was tolerated in the Roman Empire itself. In the Persian Empire itself, especially in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, there were strong Christian churches well before 300, almost certainly founded by missionaries from Edessa" (M. A. Smith, p. 88). Perhaps some of these churches dated back to the journeys of the original apostles in these areas!

"Our information about these oriental Christians is patchy, and there are many gaps in the story. Their main language was Syriac, and there were probably versions of the Bible in Syriac by the middle of the third century" (M. A. Smith, p. 88).

"Christians in the Persian Empire had to endure many bitter persecutions. It was in Aphraat's time (340-350) that the first great persecution came about.... The Jews in the Persian Empire also helped the persecutors.... The Persian king, Shapur II, first attacked the Christians with crippling taxes, but later extended his activities to demolishing church buildings and arresting clergy. The chief bishop (called the 'catholicos'), Symeon, was brought before the king; and after refusing to worship either the king or the sacred fire of

the Zoroastrians [the official Persian religion] he was beheaded. Many other Christians suffered a similar fate for refusing to deny Christ. Although this persecution eventually lapsed, there were intermittent outbreaks of persecution throughout the fourth century. But they were unable to break the determination of the Christians of the Persian Empire" (M. A. Smith, p. 90).

### Ulfilas Brings Arianism to Goths

The Goths, to the north of the Roman Empire, were probably descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel. As they migrated west into Europe from Armenia and Persia, some brought their Christian religion with them. Among these were members of the true Church of God.

In 341 Eusebius, close friend of Arius and "Arian" bishop of Nicomedia named Ulfilas as "Bishop of the Christians in Gothia." Ulfilas began his ministry north of the Danube River (and outside the Roman Empire) in what is now Germany.

"Eventually, because of persecution, he requested and received permission to take his followers with him into Roman territory south of the Danube. Gibbon says that 'the name of Moses was applied to this spiritual guide who conducted his people through the deep waters of the Danube to the Land of Promise.' Partly as a result of Ulfilas' missionary labors, at any rate, the Goths became and long remained Arian Christians [as opposed to Catholic Christians]. Ulfilas translated the Bible as an instrument for his Christian teaching, and fragments of this Gothic translation survive to the present day. Ulfilas gave the Gothic language its first written expression; as a matter of fact he had to invent the very alphabet he used. Christianity spread rapidly among the Goths, and from one of the branches, the Visigoths, it was communicated to other tribal kingdoms, including the Ostrogoths and Vandals. When these people settled in the Roman Empire, they had already become Christians of the Arian type. It was not until the sixth century A.D. that Teutonic Christians

## 341

adopted the Roman version of Christianity” (Purinton, pp. 301-302).

**350**

### Christians Persecuted for ‘Atheism’

Christians were still persecuted in the 350s by pagans among whom they lived. The superstitious pagans felt weather upsets and other calamities were caused by their gods being displeased with them. Since Christians did not acknowledge the pagan gods, they were persecuted.

“If a god was dishonoured, he might send his anger against the community, in the form of famine, plague or drought. ‘No rain, because of the Christians,’ had become proverbial by the mid-fourth century” (Fox, p. 425).

**361**

### Persecution under Julian

In 361, Julian became sole emperor in the East at Constantinople.

“It was at this point he revealed himself as an ardent pagan. And he set to work to rejuvenate classical paganism, and to discredit and overthrow Christianity. His first move, the recalling of all exiled Christian bishops, did not cause the chaos in the churches for which he hoped. [This move probably aided the true Church of God!] So he followed this up with more cunning moves. Julian tried to avoid persecutions which would make martyrs. Instead, he aimed at making life difficult, if not impossible, for organized Christianity. Pagan temples which had been taken over as Christian churches were to be returned to their owners. Tax exemptions and other privileges which Christians had obtained were withdrawn. Niggling regulations were made governing Christian assemblies, such as one which prohibited a meeting of both men and women in the same building on the grounds of a danger to morality. Julian’s most cunning move, however, was to attack Christians through education. He compelled teachers to teach anti-Christian works” (M. A. Smith, pp. 74-75).

Fortunately, Julian reigned just three

years and many of his regulations against Christians were not enforced. And many Christians found ways to get around those edicts which were (M. A. Smith, p. 77).

### Council of Laodicea

The Sabbath was kept late in the fourth century. Eusebius, in his history of the first century, wrote, “The Sabbath was not dropped by the Church at Laodicea until the year 363.”

In 364, several hundred bishops gathered at the Council of Laodicea. “A law was passed prohibiting Christians to Judaize, i.e., to rest from their work on Saturday, as do the Jews. This law was thought by the bishops necessary because of the rapid gain throughout the Eastern church of Saturday observance” (William James, *On Sacraments And Sabbath*, pp. 122, 123, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 86).

### Arianism Condemned

The Church of God may have been found among the Arians (though all Arians were not of the Church of God). Arianism was strongest in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, so the eastern emperor, Theodosius, sought to crush it. “In 380 he issued an edict threatening all heretics with legal punishment, and the following year he convened at Constantinople the second ecumenical council of the Church, which confirmed the Nicene Creed and condemned Arianism. Further imperial edicts restored all orthodox bishops and forbade Arians to hold services or build churches. Arianism was suppressed by the power of the state. It persisted strongly among the barbarians, but within the Empire its cause was lost.... The legal triumph of the [Catholic] Church over heresy and paganism and its evolution from a persecuted sect to a persecuting state church were complete” (Herzstein, p. 75).

### Edict of Theodosius

In 391 Theodosius passed an edict which

**363****364****380****391**

formally outlawed all forms of non-Christian rites. This affected not just pagans, but all non-Catholic Christians as well! "...it was not only the pagans who suffered. All deviant forms of Christianity were formally outlawed" (M. A. Smith, p. 82).

### Hypsistarians Flee Judea

Late in the fourth century, a body of believers who were apparently the Church of God, fled from Judea. The Bishop of Ely said they were Sabbath-keepers whose "heresy" was condemned by the Catholic Church.

Joseph Bingham, M.A., described them in *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Book 16, Chapter 6, Section 2:

"There was another sect,... 'Hypsistarians,' that is, worshipers of the most high God, whom they worshiped as the Jews only in one person. And they observed their Sabbaths, and used distinction of their meats, clean and unclean, though they did not regard circumcision, as Gregory Nazianzen whose father was one of this sect, gives the account of them" (Dugger and Dodd, p. 92).

Morer, in *Dialogues on the Lord's Day*, p. 67, mentioned this Sabbath- and holy-day-keeping group that avoided circumcision. He said they were called heretics by the Catholic Church. "Yet their [sincerity] and industry were such as gained them a considerable footing in the Christian world" (Dugger and Dodd, p. 93).

### The Origins of the Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is not the true church of God. It does not bear the name "Church of God." It has rejected the holy seventh-day Sabbath and keeps in its place the "venerable day of the sun." Its doctrines are a combination of Christianity and Babylonian Mystery Religion. How did it get its start?

Paul, Peter and Jude, as they wrote their last epistles, all warned about false ministers and false brethren among the true

believers. Some of these held the beginnings of Catholic beliefs.

One tradition says Simon Magus began the Catholic Church. If this is true, we must remember that he was a baptized member of the true Church of God (Acts 8:9, 13). He later went to Rome and led false believers. Later rewriters of history would call the first pope Simon Peter, not Simon Magus.

For most of the first four centuries the true believers and false believers lived side-by-side, both being persecuted for being Christians. The true believers remained a small group and the Catholic believers grew greater in number, probably because they gradually left the truth to become more like the pagan society around them, making it easier to assimilate new pagan members.

When Constantine embraced the Catholic form of Christianity, the small group of true believers was forced to flee or face strong persecution at the hands of people who were once their brothers!

### Summary of the Fourth Century

"The fourth century was a period of astounding growth in the Christian [Catholic] Church. The century opened with the persecution of the Christians, still a small minority of the population, by a pagan emperor. At its close, Christianity [Catholicism] was the sole official religion of the Empire, claiming at least the formal adherence of the great majority of the population, and protected by a Christian [Catholic] emperor who issued laws persecuting pagans and all who departed in any way from the accepted doctrines of the state Church" (Herzstein, pp. 73-74).

God's church persevered through the fourth century. The loyal brethren became fewer in number. "Some apostatized, some were martyred. But *most migrated*—going north and east into Armenia and Cappadocia, the farthest bounds of the Roman Empire. Other Christians found places to hide from Rome far to the west" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, pp. 6-7).

# 28

## The Church of God Survives Fall of Rome

401

**E**arly in the fifth century (A.D. 401-500), Vigilantius, a learned and eminent presbyter of the Christian church, wrote a book attacking many of the Catholic beliefs. “His book, which unfortunately is now lost, was directed against the institution of monks, the celibacy of the clergy, praying for the dead, and to the martyrs, adoring their relics, celebrating their vigils, and lighting up candles for them after the manner of the pagans” (*Jones Church History*, p. 169, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 94).

Though we don’t have a copy of Vigilantius’ work, we do have the details of his beliefs in his own words. These were written down dutifully by the Catholic Jerome, who was a zealous advocate for all the Catholic superstitions, and sought to refute Vigilantius. Jerome called Vigilantius “a blasphemous heretic.”

Vigilantius believed:

“The honors paid to the rotten bones and dust of the saints and martyrs, by adoring, kissing, wrapping them up in silk and vessels of gold, lodging them in their churches, and lighting up wax candles before them, after the manner of the heathens, were the

ensigns of idolatry. That the celibacy of the clergy was a heresy, and their vows of chastity the seminary of lewdness. That to pray for the dead, was superstitious; for that the souls of the departed saints and martyrs were at rest in some particular place, whence they could not remove themselves at pleasure, so as to be present everywhere to the prayers of their votaries. That the sepulchres of the martyrs ought not to be worshiped or their fasts and vigils to be observed; and lastly, that the signs and wonders said to be wrought by their relics and at their sepulchres, served to no good end or purpose of religion” (Jones, p. 169, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, pp. 94-95).

We don’t know for a fact that Vigilantius was a member of the Church of God, though he may well have been.

### Pelagius Preaches

Around the year 400 a man named Pelagius arrived in Rome and stayed until the city was sacked by the Goths in 410. This man did not agree with Catholic beliefs and may well have been a minister in the Church of God. His beliefs fit right in with the church

401

today. Even his life-style befits the ministry in God's church:

"Probably Ireland was his home, but the circumstances of his early life and education are unknown. Pelagius was a monk, though not a priest. He had not, however, joined any monastic group, nor did he live as a hermit; this was nothing extraordinary in the pre-Benedictine age. Carefully dressed and erect of bearing, Pelagius aroused respect in the capital. His gentle nature, his peaceful disposition and quietly superior intellect, soon won him many friends in the city. He had a logical mind, practically inclined, with a strong distaste for farfetched speculation. Consequently, he was not at all drawn to the mystical side of Christianity. Calm and sober, he was averse to all excess...

"Zealously, he set to work preaching against the lukewarm morality that had entered so many Christian circles. Soon the stricter Christians were flocking to his sermons" (Nigg, p. 133).

Pelagius rejected infant baptism taught by Catholicism. "Pelagius could not feel that newborn children really had sins which had to be remitted by the baptismal waters" (Nigg, p. 134).

His disbelief in infant baptism worked as a springboard to attack the false doctrine of original sin, upon which it is based. Pelagius argued that sin was something committed by people during their lives—they weren't born with it.

Pelagius rejected predestination and preached in its place freedom of will. Humanity could choose to live God's way or evilly. He preached free moral agency. He attacked those who claimed God's laws were impossible to keep. He cried with holy earnestness:

"We gainsay the Lord when we say: it is hard, it is difficult, we cannot, we are only men, we are surrounded by weak flesh. O blind folly! O unholy recklessness! We accuse God of a double ignorance: that he appears not to know what he made, and not to know what he commanded, as if he were forgetful of human weakness whose Author he himself is, and has imposed upon man

laws beyond his capacity" (Nigg, pp. 134-135).

Obedience to God's laws was not easy, Pelagius declared. In fact, it was impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit.

"According to Pelagius, the Creator conferred moral authority upon man, and to detract from that authority is to cast doubts upon man's likeness to God.... Man, he held, was a born sophist, always inclined to excuse himself and place the blame for his inadequacies upon God. Pelagius was determined to make such alibis impossible. Endlessly he called upon the neglectful Christian to work for his own salvation, not rely exclusively upon the Redeemer.... Pelagius' heresy was based upon a long and honorable tradition" (Nigg, p. 138).

Pelagius went to Africa and debated his beliefs with the African councils. Augustine, a great Catholic, held such sway over the councilmembers that they condemned Pelagius. Augustine did the only thing he could—he excommunicated him and declared all followers of Pelagius to be heretics.

"Depressed by his experience in Africa, Pelagius went to the East, where he succeeded in winning a number of bishops to his cause. In negotiations at Diopolis the charges against him were quashed" (Nigg, p. 136).

Pelagius went to Jerusalem but it is said that he was expelled from that city because of his doctrines. It is uncertain what happened to him after that. The time and place of his death are not known (Nigg, pp. 136-137).

## Religious Climate of Ireland

Ireland was a good place to be a Christian in the 400s. True Christians fleeing persecution under the Romans or other barbarians found comfort on the "Emerald Isle."

"Before the beginning of the fifth century [401-500], Ireland had become known, in Britain and on the Continent, as a good place for a Christian.... its heathens seemed to have more interest in bludgeoning one another than in molesting Christians, and it was still untouched by the storms that were

tearing at most of Europe. Christians who found their way there, whether out of devotion to one or another of the good bishops, or for safety in this unruffled backwater, or simply from curiosity, found an unexpected climate of serenity and simple piety” (*The Flowering of Ireland, Saints Scholars and Kings* by Katharine Scherman, pp. 88-89).

It was into this climate of religious freedom for Christians that St. Patrick made his mark. But who was Patrick?

### Patrick’s Background

Many have taken for granted that Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, was a Catholic bishop. But surprisingly little truth is known about him because the truth is shrouded in so much legend.

We know for a fact that Patrick was not Irish. His name was not Patrick. And there is a very real possibility that Patrick may not have been Catholic. In fact, he may have been a minister in the true Church of God!

“Much study has been given to Saint Patrick; but little that goes beyond the testimony of his own writings can be accepted as certain” (“Patrick, Saint,” *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1956 ed., Vol. 13, p. 6142).

“The legends of Patrick’s life, mixed inextricably with the truth, are indeed reminiscent of the zestful heroism of an earlier time.... The earlier scribes regarded their subjects with uncritical eyes: the more miracles they could attribute, the higher and holier was the object of their adoration.... Then too, saints were their heroes. They composed their lives, not with the intent to teach, but to entertain the recently converted, the naive new believers still in touch with the old magic. ...each devoted biographer liked to brag of the superior proficiency in holiness of his own saint. Personalities and facts, while they sometimes can be deduced, were unimportant to the chronicler” (Scherman, pp. 83, 86).

“In truth the figure of St. Patrick is just as phantasmal [imaginary] as theirs [the four saints who preceded Patrick in Ireland]. Tradition chose him from among

Ireland’s early missionaries because tradition needed a single hero... on whom to place the halo of the fresh young faith.

“It was not an entirely capricious choice. There must have been a man like Saint Patrick—or several men embodying the one great figure—of remarkable attributes. One cannot now disentangle history from fantasy” (Scherman, pp. 89-90).

Let us try. Let us shine some light on the real Patrick.

Patrick was born about 387 in Bannavem, a town in western Britain. His British name is said to have been Sucat. (He was later given a Latin name, Patricus.) The location of his home town is not known for sure. It may have been in England near Severn estuary or in Scotland near what is now the city of Dumbarton (*World Book Encyclopedia*).

His name, Sucat, comes from the root word for Isaac, indicating that he was a descendent of the lost 10 tribes of Israel. The Scots have continued to carry the name of Isaac and it is very likely that he came from the area now known as Scotland.

“Patrick belongs to the Celtic race, of which the Britons of England, as well as the Scotch and Irish, are a part. The vivacity of the Celtic temperament is equaled by noble courage under danger and by a deep love for learning. The Celts, like the Germans, possess a profound religious fervor which makes them devoted to the faith of their choice. This race once extended all the way from Scythia to Ireland” (Wilkinson, pp. 77-78).

Fortunately we have two of Patrick’s own writings which shed the light of truth on who he was. Unfortunately, his own writings were in crude Latin and can be distorted by translators. Notice the first paragraph of *Confession*, reprinted in *The Steadfast Man* by Paul Gallico:

“I am Patrick, a sinner, most unlearned, the least of all the faithful, and utterly despised by many. My father was Calpornius, a deacon, son of Potitus, a priest, of the village Bannavem Taburniea; he had a country seat nearby, and there I was taken captive” (p. 203).

Now notice the same paragraph reprinted in *Truth Triumphant*: “I, Patrick, a sinner, the rudest and least of all the faithful, and most contemptible to great numbers, had Calpurnius for my father, a deacon, son of the late Potilus, the presbyter, who dwelt in the village of Banavan, Tiberniae, for he had a small farm at hand with the place where I was captured” (p. 79).

While the general meaning is preserved in either translation, the question arises, was Patrick’s grandfather a “presbyter” (or bishop) in the true church or a Catholic “priest”? The context gives a possible clue. Priests were to be celibate. Patrick’s grandfather obviously was not celibate.

## 403

**Patrick’s Conversion**

“When Patrick was sixteen he was taken prisoner in a raid by Niall of the Nine Hostages, king of northern Ireland, and sold to a farmer named Milcho, who lived in Dalaradia, County Antrim” (Scherman, p. 90).

Patrick gave God little thought as a young man. This captivity woke him up. He wrote, “I was then about sixteen years of age. I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity to Ireland with many thousands of people—and deservedly so, because we turned away from God, and did not keep his commandments, and did not obey our priests, who used to remind us of our salvation. And the Lord brought over us the wrath of His anger and scattered us among many nations, even to the utmost parts of the earth, where now my littleness is placed among strangers” (*Confession*, Section 2, Gallico, p. 204).

For six years Patrick served as a slave herding animals on Slemish Mountain. “The ancient mountain is high and lonely, and the boy, though he performed his duties conscientiously, was inspired by the magnificently bleak scenery to contemplation of the God who had been but a faint figurehead in his childhood. He lived on roots and herbs, it is written, and through winter frost and summer rain he prostrated himself day and

night in prayer. Along with his self-taught faith the impressionable young slave absorbed the language and fables of pagan Ireland, and he came to love the country of his enforced exile” (Scherman, p. 90).

Patrick’s *Confession* says he herded sheep. Like David of old, Patrick used his time with the sheep to pray. “But after I came to Ireland—every day I had to tend sheep, and many times a day I prayed—the love of God and His fear came to me more and more, and my faith was strengthened. And my spirit was moved so that in a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and almost as many in the night, and this even when I was staying in the woods and on the mountain; and I used to get up for prayer before daylight... and there was no sloth in me—as I now see, because the spirit within me was then fervent” (Sec. 16, Gallico, p. 207).

Patrick experienced what all of God’s people have when they first learn the truth of God—a first love.

**Patrick Leaves Ireland**

According to his *Confession*, Patrick heard voices in his sleep telling him to leave Ireland and that his ship was ready. He fled from his captivity and escaped on a ship full of pagans. They sailed for three days and then journeyed 28 more days on foot in a deserted land, where they ran out of food.

Finally the captain said to him, “Tell me, Christian: you say that your God is great and all-powerful; why then do you not pray for us? As you can see, we are suffering from hunger; it is unlikely indeed that we shall ever see a human being again.”

Patrick told him, “Be truly converted with all your heart to the Lord my God, because nothing is impossible for Him, that this day He may send you food...” And the pagans came across a herd of swine and killed several of them and ate them. They also found some honey. They offered some honey to Patrick, saying “This we offer in sacrifice.” Patrick noted, “Thanks be to God I tasted none of it” (Secs. 17-19; Gallico, 207-

## 409

208).

It is unclear whether Patrick avoided only the honey or also the pork. At this stage of his conversion he may not have known the truth about unclean meats.

What else happened to Patrick while he was on the continent of Europe is pretty vague. He tells little in his *Confession* except that he was captured and released a number of times. Those writers who would like him to be Catholic say he went to Rome. Patrick makes no mention of such a visit. Legend has it that he learned his Latin at this time, was ordained a priest and commissioned to be the bishop of the Irish. Patrick mentions none of this.

We will continue Patrick's life shortly.

### Sects Keep True Baptism

We do know that several sects existed outside the Roman Catholic Church in the fourth and early fifth centuries. Some, in Africa, were called Donatists, Manicheans, Montanists, Novatianists, and others whose morals excelled those of the Roman Catholic St. Augustine (354-430). Yet, Augustine considered these groups heretics and expressed virulent hatred toward them (*Baptist History* by Orchard, p. 97, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 96).

The groups that were not in communion with either the Greek or the Roman Catholic Churches could be divided into two classes. The first were dissidents who broke away and started their own churches. But the second class never belonged to the Catholic Church. This class dispersed throughout Syria, Arabia, Egypt, Persia, Nubia, Ethiopia, India, Tartary and other eastern countries. In all instances, this class baptized by immersion, as the apostles did and as God's church does today (Orchard, p. 97, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, pp. 96-97)!

### Sabbath Kept

The seventh-day Sabbath was still kept in the fifth century! God's true church has always kept it, but even some in the false

religion refused to give up the fourth commandment. They kept the Sabbath and Sunday. Coleman, in *Ancient Christianity Exemplified*, Chapter 26, Sec. 2, wrote: "The last day of the week was strictly kept in connection with that of the first day for a long time after the overthrow of the temple and its worship. Down even to the fifth century the observance of the Jewish Sabbath was continued in the Christian church, but with a rigor and solemnity gradually diminishing."

Of course, this description applies to the sects and the Roman Catholic church. The true Church of God did not forsake the Sabbath or observe it with less rigor and solemnity (Dugger and Dodd, p. 98).

### Holy Days Observed

Early in the fifth century in Asia Minor the Catholic Bishop Chrysostom bewailed members of the Catholic Church who learned the truth from Church of God members and repented. These former Catholics began to observe the Sabbath and "the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Feast of the Great Expiation" (Bingham's *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Book XVI, Chapter 6, as quoted by Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 19).

### Rome Sacked

The Roman Empire was on its last legs in the fifth century. Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410, but was reconstructed under Pope Innocent I (402-417) (Herzstein, p. 80).

### Sabbath, Holy Days Condemned

True Christians were keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and God's feasts in the 430s. The Catholics saw this as a big enough problem to rule against these observances in the Council of Laodicea.

"In the 430s, the Christian [Catholic] Council of Laodicea ruled in detail against Christian observance of the Jewish Sabbath, their acceptance of unleavened bread

410

430

430

from Jews and their keeping of Jewish festivals" (Fox, p. 482).

### Patrick Returns to Ireland

Patrick eventually returned to his home in Britain. His family welcomed him back and asked him never to leave again.

He described his call back to Ireland, not as a command from a Catholic source but as a supernatural call from God, similar to the vision Paul had in Troas before crossing over into Europe for the first time (Acts 16:19).

In a night vision, Patrick saw an Irishman bringing him letters. When he read one, he heard many voices speaking as one, saying, "We ask thee, boy, come and walk among us once more" (Sec. 23, Gallico, p. 209).

432

In 432 Patrick returned to Ireland with 24 companions. He preached among clan leaders, knowing that was the best way to get to the common man. One of his first visits was to the son of the ruler who had captured him when he was 16!

This son had a Druid priest who prophesied of the coming of Patrick. He told the ruler Patrick would "destroy our gods, overturn their altars.... He will seduce the people and bring them after him.... and his *doctrines shall reign forever*" (Scherman, p. 90-91, emphasis added). If this legend is true and the Druid spoke the truth, then Patrick's doctrines must have been those of the true church.

### Patrick's Life-Style

Throughout much of the history of the Catholic church, its priests have been accused of being haughty and greedy; more concerned with amassing wealth than saving souls. This was one of the causes for the Protestant Reformation.

Patrick does not show a haughty attitude in his writings. He appears to have been very humble, as shown in his first paragraph of *Confession*, quoted above.

"He had not the inclination to be a proper bishop like his Continental brothers, with a seat in an ecclesiastical city. All his life he

preferred to move about, calling himself simply 'resident of Ireland.' Despite his elaborate retinue, his personal life was austere. He slept on stone and said his prayers, night and day, immersed up to his neck in cold water [a fabrication?]. He wore the simplest clothing... He fasted often" (Scherman, p. 96).

When he received gifts, Patrick passed them along immediately to the poor. He joined in manual labor when necessary and traveled by foot until he was too old to do so (Scherman, p. 96).

Scherman assumes Patrick was a Catholic but admits he was not a conventional Roman Catholic priest. "Patrick himself had started the trend, deviating from the Roman model of the inflexible and exacting proselytizer. He followed the ancient customs, he appreciated the pagan tales of Celtic heroism, and he tolerated the eccentricities of a people he loved. Further, he never settled long enough in one place to get around to administering it in the meticulous Roman manner" (p. 97).

"How did Patrick operate? From his own writings, we have hints that he gained the cooperation of the various tribal chiefs in Ireland, on occasion with gifts of money. Then he preached freely, gathering his converts into small groups, and ordaining clergy to pastor them. He mentions with considerable pride that some people of noble birth had been converted. Although it is not certain whether Patrick was a monk or not, he certainly approved of Christians who took on themselves vows to live specially ascetic lives, though in his writings he does not mention the founding of any monastic communities. The inspiration for Irish monasticism seems to have come later on, from people who were fired by the examples of hermits in the Egyptian desert" (M. A. Smith, p. 162).

### Patrick's Teachings

Patrick preached from the Bible to convert pagans. His religion was not hand-me-down from Rome. He admits in his *Confession* that

he was self-taught and his authority was the Bible.

“But Patrick was the first to admit he was not a great scholar, and the only book he knew well was the Bible” (M. A. Smith, p. 161).

“Patrick preached the Bible. He appealed to it as the sole authority for founding the Irish Church. He gave credit to no other worldly authority; he recited no creed. Several official creeds in the church at Rome had by that time been ratified and commanded, but Patrick mentions none. In his *Confession* he makes a brief statement of his beliefs, but he does not refer to any church council or creed or authority” (Wilkinson, p. 83).

Patrick quoted many scriptures in his *Confession* from both the Old and New Testaments.

He uses the word “Trinity” (If this is correctly translated) — “one God in the Trinity of the Holy Name.” But this phrase appears at the end of a long paragraph describing the one and only true God the Father, unbegotten, and his Son, Jesus Christ, who had been with God eternally but was made flesh, was crucified and was resurrected. The Holy Spirit is not represented as a person but as something which is “poured forth” and “is the gift and pledge of immortality” (Sec. 4, Gallico, p. 204).

George T. Stokes, in *Ireland and Celtic Church*, says Patrick did not believe in the Trinity as defined by the Catholic Council of Nicea (p. 12, as quoted by Wilkinson, p. 93).

Patrick taught that Christ would soon return and true believers would be resurrected rulers with Christ: “Jesus Christ is Lord and God, in whom we believe, and whose advent we expect soon to be, judge of the living and of the dead, who will render to every man according to his deeds; and has poured forth upon us abundantly the Holy Spirit, the gift and pledge of immortality, who makes those who believe and obey the sons of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Sec. 4, p. 204).

Patrick taught obedience to the 10 Commandments (notice the previous quote and

that from his second paragraph).

He may also have taught the seventh-day Sabbath. He does not mention the Sabbath or Sunday in his *Confession*. But other sources note Sabbath keeping among early Christians in Celtic Ireland:

“...The Gothic, Waldensian, Armenian, and Syrian Churches, and the Church of the East, as well as the church organization which Patrick founded, largely sanctified Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as the sacred twenty-four-hour period on which God rested after creation. Many also had sacred assemblies on Sunday, even as many churches today have prayer meeting on Wednesday.

“Treating of the Celtic Church, the historian, A. C. Flick writes, ‘The Celts used a Latin Bible unlike the Vulgate, and kept Saturday as a day of rest, with special religious services on Sunday’ [*The Rise of the Medieval Church*, p. 327]” (Wilkinson, p. 95).

T. Ratcliffe Barnett, in *Margaret of Scotland: Queen and Saint*, writes, “In this matter the Scots had perhaps kept up the traditional usage of the ancient Irish Church which observed Saturday instead of Sunday as the day of rest” (p. 97, as quoted by Wilkinson, p. 95).

## A True Saint

Patrick was not an “instant hit” in the Catholic Church. Early popes did not mention him or his success. It was centuries later, after it was realized that the Irish would not forget this man, that he was granted sainthood (Wilkinson, p. 93).

It is very likely that Patrick was used by God to preach the truth. Like Herbert Armstrong 1500 years later, Patrick believed God and used the Bible as his guide. He was a humble teacher who understood much truth.

“Patrick, as we hear him speaking in his own writings, is one man who really merits the title ‘saint.’ Small wonder that succeeding generations in Ireland loaded him with all sorts of fantastic miraculous powers, credited him with appointing hundreds of bish-

ops and made him founder of virtually every Christian community in the land” (M. A. Smith, p. 162).

**451**  
**455**  
**476**

### **Persecution Under the Vandals**

Rome was threatened by the Huns in 451 and once again sacked by the Vandals in 455 (Herzstein, p. 80).

In 476 the barbarian general Odoacer removed the Roman emperor Romulus Augustus at Ravenna and made himself king of Italy. Since the Renaissance, the year 476 has been used as the date of the final collapse of the Roman Empire. At the time, it was not considered so. In fact, not much had changed. The sack of Rome in 410 had had a greater emotional impact on the people (Chadwick, p. 250).

As the Vandals marched through the Roman Empire, Christians living there felt their wrath.

The pagan hordes of northern Europe had been converted to a false sect of Arianism. As they swept across the continent, conquering from Spain to Africa in the fifth century, the Vandals committed many cruelties.

“They persecuted the Christians wherever they went, and laid waste the country as they passed, in order that those who had escaped might perish from hunger. They plundered the churches, and murdered the bishops and ministers by a variety of cruel devices. ...the chief churches in Carthage were perverted to heretical worship, or put to profane uses; and wherever any castles held out against them, they brought great numbers of Christians and slew them, leaving their bodies under the walls, that the besieged might be forced to surrender by means of the offensive stench which arose from them” (King, pp. 36-37).

Cyrilla, the Arian bishop of Carthage, furiously persecuted “those Christians who professed the faith in its purity.” He persuaded the king that he could not prosper as long as he allowed orthodox Christians to practice their principles. The king then sent for several eminent Christians named Rus-

ticus, Severus, Liberatus, Rogatus, Servus, Septimus and Boniface. The king attempted to draw these men from their faith by flattery. When that didn’t work, he used the promise of riches and worldly rewards. But they remained firm in their faith, declaring, “We acknowledge but one Lord and one faith; you may therefore do whatever you please with your bodies, for it is better that we should suffer a few temporary pains than to endure everlasting misery.”

This exasperated the king, who sent them to prison and ordered them placed in irons. The keeper, however, allowed their friends to visit them and they became more resolved to die for Christ. When the king learned of their resolve, he ordered them to be put on a boat filled with flammable materials and set on fire. Thus died these seven Christians (King, p. 37).

### **The Early Dark Ages**

The period of history from the fall of Rome in 476 to the 1000s is called the Dark Ages. Civilization in much of western Europe nearly collapsed. Latin learning was preserved in only a few places, chiefly the monasteries. Greek learning all but disappeared. Writings of the time were poor in style and reflected great ignorance. Many of the arts and crafts of the ancient world were completely forgotten.

Roman Catholicism continued to grow stronger as the bishop at Rome assumed the position of Pope. Meanwhile, the Church of God, unable to be extinguished by Satan (Mat. 16:18), continued to survive with its members hiding in the wilderness, living out of tents, caves and homemade houses.

### **Church Called Vaudois in Sixth Century**

Most members of the Church of God, when fleeing from the Roman church and state, found a haven in the mountains and valleys of northern Italy and southern France. (Others fled to other nations—anywhere they could find an entrance and protection from

**500s**

the Pope.)

Historians called the Christians who settled in northern Italy and southern France many names but the predominating one is “Valley Dwellers” or, in French, “Vaudois.”

Even in hiding, the Vaudois were not safe from persecution for keeping the true faith once delivered by Christ and the Apostles. They called themselves the Church of God, retaining the true name of the church. They also observed the seventh-day Sabbath, baptized new believers by immersion (instead of the Catholic sprinkling of infants), and kept the Passover once a year, in the first month (*Persecutions and Atrocities on the Vaudois*, pp. 348, 349, as reported by Dugger and Dodd, p. 101).

Centuries later, the Vaudois were still living in the same area. Gilly, in *Excursions to Piedmont*, p. 259, wrote about the Vaudois in the 13th Century:

“They occupy a mountain district... and yet from this secluded spot, have they disseminated doctrines, whose influence is felt over the most refined and civilized part of Europe. They... speak the same language, have the same patriarchal habits, and simple virtues, and retain the same religion, which was known to exist more than a thousand years ago. They profess to constitute the remains of the pure and primitive Christian church, and those who would question their claims cannot show either by history or tradition that they were subscribed to the popish rituals, or bowed down before any of the idols of the Roman church.... In short, there is no other way of explaining the political, moral, and religious phenomenon, which the Vaudois have continued to display for so many centuries, than by ascribing it to the

manifest interposition of Providence, which has chosen in them the ‘weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty’ ” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 102).

The Vaudois used a Bible that was translated by Jerome, a native of Stridon, a city in Dalmatia. He translated the Bible into his native tongue about A.D. 378 (Orchard, *History of the Baptists*, p. 230, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, pp. 107-108).

The Vaudois themselves claimed to be remnants of the true Church of God which had fled into the wilderness. They let their light shine through the darkest hours of the Dark Ages.

### **Pope Gregory Persecutes Church**

At the end of the sixth century, Pope Gregory I made life difficult for those members of the true Church of God who had not fled to the Piedmont Valley. “This pope wrote to two African bishops, requiring them to exert themselves in every possible way to suppress their opponents who dared to differ with them” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 107).

### **Montenses in Early 7th Century**

To flee from those persecuting African bishops, it is presumed that Church of God members emigrated early in the seventh century to Spain and Italy from Asiatic countries. They mingled with pagans and worshiped Christ as opportunities afforded. “From their conduct in assembling in caves and dens of mountains to worship, they obtained the name Montenses, i.e., mountaineers” (Orchard, pp. 101, 102, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 107).

**590s**

**600s**

# 29

## The Paulicians

650

God's true church was a scattered flock, hiding in caves and dens throughout the first half of the seventh century. But about 650 the next era of God's church arose: the Pergamos era, named after the church that had existed at Pergamum (Pergamos).

### The Pergamos Era

Notice how Jesus Christ described this era of his church:

"I know where you live, there where Satan has his throne. You are true to me, and you did not abandon your faith in me even during the time when Antipas, a faithful witness for me, was killed there where Satan lives" (Rev. 2:13). But Christ had this against them: they had some among them who followed the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans (vv. 14-15).

"The local church to which John wrote was situated in Pergamos, the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor—Pergamos was Satan's seat of worldly human government for that province. Just as the local Church at Pergamos was situated in a city where Satan swayed human politics, so the

next work of God's Church occurred within the bounds of Satan's government—the Eastern Roman Empire—where a small body of God's people was found" (Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 20).

At this time Satan's government sat astride two thrones. One was at Rome, the other at Constantinople on the Bosphorus Sea. The combined politics and religion of Satan's earthly government spelled persecution for God's church in the Pergamos era.

"This was a different kind of era. An age in which the True Church was actively pursued, and had to remain in hiding. No longer was any part of the True Church associated, even as Polycrates had been, with any part of 'the Catholic Church of God.' The conspiracy had succeeded—it had stolen the name of Christ, the name of God's church. No longer need it acknowledge the existence of the genuine church, no longer pretend to be part of it....

"The scattered remnants of God's church were now mainly in Armenia. It was the one relatively safe and yet civilized area nearby. Most of Armenia, up until the piecemeal Islamic conquest of the seventh and eighth centuries, was nominally under the author-

ity of the Emperor at Constantinople, but rather loosely controlled. Greek and Armenian Catholics were frequently at odds with one another. In this setting, God's people maintained a precarious existence for several centuries" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, pp. 8-9).

Historian A. H. Newman described the hiding place of the Church of God in Armenia. This group became known as the Paulicians: "It was the huge recess or circular dam formed by the Taurus mountain range that furnished a comparatively secure abiding place for this ancient form of Christianity" (*A Manual of Church History*, Vol. 1, p. 381, as quoted by Ronald Kelly, "The History of the Church of God," *The Good News*, Nov./Dec. 1990, p. 22).

654

### 'Antipas' Revives God's Work

About A.D. 654 God raised up an inspired leader to correct his people and preach the Gospel. He was a well-educated man named Constantine of Mananali, and he fulfilled the prophetic role of "Antipas" of Rev. 2:13. (Antipas means anti-Pope).

"He was given a gift of portions of the Bible. Upon studying it, he was utterly amazed at the truth he found revealed in it. Soon he was preaching, and with the help of trained evangelists was ministering to tens of thousands now being converted and put into the True Church...

"Constantine of Mananali plainly taught that the Pope was not the representative of God, that Peter was not the only apostle given the keys of the kingdom as the Popes claimed, but that all the original apostles and all their true successors shared in the knowledge and authority to guide Christians into the way of life" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 9).

After 27 years of ministry, Constantine of Mananali was stoned to death—fulfilling the prophecy of Antipas (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 9; Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 20).

Why was the leader of the church allowed to die at this time? Rev. 2:14-16 holds

the answer. In spite of Constantine's preachings, the church was on a moral and spiritual slide. Many who claimed to be members were not truly converted. They held the doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans. We discussed these beliefs in Chapter 21. To review, the doctrine of Balaam was to live as worldly as possible without bringing on God's wrath. This was Satan's way, and sin! The Nicolaitans led lives of unrestrained indulgence and sexual promiscuity.

"Such foolish and improper fellowship could only lead to the total corruption and resultant destruction of the church!

"But the church did not repent. So, to shake up and wake them up, Christ allowed his apostle Constantine to die" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 9).

681

### Death of Constantine

The emperor at Constantinople sent an officer named Simeon to destroy the leaders of God's church. Simeon offered to spare anyone who would stone their leader. And it was a man from the church who should have been disfellowshipped long before, who cast the first stone!

### Simeon's Conversion

"So greatly impressed was the officer Simeon by the fortitude and sincerity of most, and especially the faith and courage with which he saw Constantine die, that he was convinced these were God's people. Three years later, he completed his duty in the Emperor's court and returned to join the humble people of God's church. He was placed by Jesus Christ at their head and carried on the ministry of Constantine for another three years, until he too was martyred. He was burned at the stake—accused to the Emperor by that same man [who first stoned Constantine]!" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 9).

### Martyrdom in Northern Italy

During the three years that Simeon com-

681

pleted his time in the emperor's court at Constantinople, God's people in northern Italy were being persecuted.

"John, Bishop of Bergamo, in Lombardy [a region in northern Italy], did his utmost to clear the church from the errors of Arianism, and adjoining with John, Bishop of Milan, he was very successful against the heretics. He exerted himself strenuously to prevent the heresy from spreading, on which account he was assassinated on the 11th of July, A.D. 683" (King, p. 38).

Some of God's people may have been among these "Arians" though not all Arians were of the Church of God! Even though they suffered persecution, God's people would not have assassinated the bishop of Bergamo. Christ's instructions had been to flee persecution (Mat. 10:11-23). And the church followed Paul's admonition in Rom. 12:17-19: "If someone does evil to you, do not pay him back with evil. Try to do what all men consider to be good. Do everything possible, on your part, to live at peace with all men. Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's wrath do it. For the scripture says, 'I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord.'"

### Church Called Paulicians

The church members in Armenia who were called during the time of Constantine of Mananali were called by the world "Paulicians." They were given this name because they followed Paul as he had followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

"The Paulicians were undoubtedly the most numerous sect of this century (A.D. 600 to 700). According to the opinion of some celebrated writers this sect was named thus from their attachments of its professors to the Apostle Paul. The names of the apostolic churches were applied to their congregations. The teachers were distinguished by their scriptural names, by their zeal and knowledge, and by the austerity and simplicity of their lives. They were, however, soon involved in the horrors of persecution. Under the reign of Theodore, one hundred

thousand were extirpated" (Hugh Smith's *Church History*, pp. 216, 207, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 106).

The Paulician leaders took the names of Paul and his assistants. Constantine called himself Silvanus. Simeon, his successor, used the name Titus while he led them from 684 to 687. Simeon's successor was a man named Paul who kept his name. From 717 to 746, Gegnesius, the son of Paul, led the church while using the name of Timothy. His successor was Joseph, who called himself Epphroditus (746-782) and Later Sergius became Tychicus (801-835) (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, pp. 11, 15).

The congregations, too, took their names from the time of Paul. Some of the members were descended from Paul's converts. Just as the church which fled to Pella continued to be called the Jerusalem church, those who fled from Greece and Asia Minor kept their old names.

The Church of God which met at Mananali continued to call themselves Achaia, where Corinth had been. The churches in Castrum Colonias and Cibossa called themselves Macedonia (Northern Greece where Philippi and Thessalonica had been). The congregation at Cynoschora was called Laodicea; the one at Argaios, Colosae; the one at Mopsyestia, Ephesus; etc.

Paulicians used more than just the writings of Apostle Paul. They used all of the canonized New Testament as well as the Old Testament.

Many reports circulated about these people were slanderous and false. Very little history is preserved about the Paulicians except these hostile reports. All books and writings of the Paulicians were condemned to the flames by order of Catholic emperors. Often those who owned Paulician works were murdered (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 11).

### Beliefs of the Paulicians

It was not until 1898 that a book of the Paulicians, *The Key of Truth* (which had been hidden for centuries in Armenia), was

translated into English by Fred C. Conybeare.

“This partially preserved record of God’s people proves that they preached the gospel of the Kingdom; that they believed the Church was founded not only upon Jesus Christ, but also upon the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20); that they baptized by immersion; that they laid on hands for the ‘reception of the Spirit’ (p. cxxiv), they not only ‘continued to keep the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan,’ but they also observed the Sabbath and the festival of unleavened bread (pages clxii and clii of *The Key of Truth*)” (Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 20).

Paulicians believed that Satan was the ruler of this world (2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9) and that human nature was dominant here. They did not believe in praying to saints or to Mary. They rejected purgatory and the Catholic use of images, pictures, crosses, incense and candles. The Paulicians claimed monks were agents of Satan and held that Mary, according to Scripture, did not remain a perpetual virgin.

They were not Manichaeans, i.e., believers in the ancient Persian Magician doctrine of dualism. But many early writers lumped the Paulicians and Manichaeans together. The two groups may have associated together in the same area and some of the false Manichaean beliefs may have rubbed off on members of the Church of God.

Catholics accused the Paulicians of ignoring all their fasts and feasts, especially Sunday. Instead of the pagan Sunday, Paulicians kept God’s Sabbath.

Paulicians knew the truth about baptism. They rejected the “bathwater” of the persecuting church (infant baptism) and practiced real baptism by immersion instead. To those who advocated infant baptism, the Paulicians responded, “You do not know the mystery of baptism; we are in no hurry to be baptized, for baptism is death.” They understood baptism symbolized death of the self.

The Paulicians claimed to be the “holy and apostolic church” founded by Christ and his apostles. Of the false churches they said,

“We do not belong to these, for they have long ago broken connection with the church.”

As for the “church”—Paulicians believed it was neither a building nor an organization but an organism of truly converted baptized members which had continued in succession from the apostles. Jesus Christ was the head of the church, they understood.

Unlike the false church, Paulicians taught that Scripture was for laymen as well as for ministers. They continually urged members to check the Scriptures for themselves. They accused Catholic priests of hiding the Scriptures to deprive people of truth.

Paulicians used the same names for offices established by the apostolic church. Four of their greatest leaders were called apostles and prophets. These directed other ministers, called *Synecdemi* (itinerant evangelists), *poimenes* (pastors) and *notarii* (teachers who hand-copied Scriptures). These ministers all had the power of “binding and loosing.” Other offices mentioned during this “Pergamos Era” included *elders*, *rulers* and *readers*. (Meanwhile the false church had such offices as priests, monks and nuns.)

While ministers in the false church—and “electi” of the Manichaeans—were to remain celibate, Paulician elders were expected to marry and head a family.

Paulicianism became accepted in a vast region along the Taurus Mountains. Great inroads were made in Armenia, Albania on the Caspian Sea, and other nearby regions (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, pp. 11-13).

Paulicians kept Passover on the 14th of Nisan. “The Sabbath was perhaps kept, and there were no special Sunday observances.... Wednesday and Friday were not kept as fast-days. Of the modern Christmas and of the Anunciation, and of the other [Catholic] feasts connected with the life of Jesus prior to his thirtieth year, this phase of the church knew nothing. The general impression which the study of it leaves on us is that in it we have before us a form of church not very remote from the primitive Jewish Christianity of Palestine” (*The Key of Truth*, trans-

lated by Conybeare, p. cxci).

“But with most of the vast numbers who were called Paulicians, there was only a form of religion. Truly converted members of the True Church numbered only in the tens of thousands. Often ‘false brethren’ who lived among God’s people were confused with the True Church. His people were allowing many false teachings to grow in their midst.

“Now understand what this situation led to. During all this time, persecution had not ceased. Even in Armenia an organized persecution was waged as early as the middle of the 6th century. Persecution was nearly continuous in the Roman (Byzantine) territory” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, pp. 13-14).

The civil government no longer persecuted. Now it was the false church! This church knew enough of true Christian doctrine to detect God’s people from the general population. At first, the false church found it difficult to condemn Paulician doctrine. When the persecutors asked if they believed in certain fundamental Christian doctrines, Paulicians usually could answer “yes.”

Many spiritually weak Paulicians outwardly agreed to their persecutors’ demands while holding mental reservations. “Once started on this road of compromise, a Christian’s conscience becomes more and more blurred. At length, persecutors discovered certain pertinent questions which inescapably reduced their Paulician victims either to apostasy or martyrdom.

“Many ‘professing’ Paulicians then permitted themselves full *external* conformity with the dominant church. They secretly *knew* they were sinning. But they held that Christ would forgive it. Thus *many* accepted the *DOCTRINE OF BALAAM*—going as far in the way of evil as they thought they could” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 14).

687

### Evangelists in Germany

We pause for a moment in our history of the Paulicians to describe the activities of another group of Christians living in Britain. Whether this group was the true church is

unclear. About the time that Simeon of the Paulicians was martyred (687), this group went from Britain into pagan Germany. They apparently preached the Gospel and caused some to be converted.

Hugh Smith’s history of the seventh century, p. 191, states, “Missionaries from Britain, Scotland, and Ireland traveled into Germany with the design of propagating or preserving Christianity” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 105).

The leader of these Christian men was an Irish man named Kilien. He took 11 men with him as he crossed the English Channel and preached in Wurtzburg, Germany. After two years he had converted many to Christianity.

The governor of the area was named Gozbert, and he married his brother’s widow. When Kilien persuaded him that this action was wrong, the governor resolved to leave his wife. She sought revenge. She sent men to the place where Kilien’s group assembled and had them all beheaded in 689. They were buried at night, together with their books, clothes and everything they had (King, pp. 38-39).

689

### The Church in the Eighth Century

The Paulicians continued strong throughout the eighth century (701-800).

Paul “the Armenian” became their leader in 702. He was succeeded by Gegnesius, his son, in 717. Gegnesius took the name Timothy.

About 750 Emperor Constantine Copronymus reconquered the upper Euphrates region from Armenia and removed many Paulicians from there to fill the deserted cities of Thrace (the region northeast of Macedonia, west of the Black Sea).

From this time on the Paulicians were split into parties. Violence flared among them at Mananali between the followers of Zachariah, son of Gegnesius, and Joseph, who took the name of Epaphroditus. Gegnesius, during his reign, which ended in 746, convinced Emperor Leo III that the Paulician doctrine was not heresy. At his

702

717

750

death, his son, Zachariaiah, claimed the office but was rejected by most Paulicians.

Joseph (Epaphroditus) began leading the Paulicians in 746. He led his people across the border where he was received by other Paulicians. When they became the target of attacks by a local ruler, Joseph led the Paulicians to Pisidia. From this headquarters, he evangelized all Phrygia until 782.

782

Pockets of resistance to the Catholic Church existed in many areas. Some of these probably included members of the true church which had fled into the wilderness and continued to live God's way.

"Milner says: 'The despotism of Antichrist was then [786] so far from being universal, that it was not owned throughout Italy itself. In some parts of that country, as well as in England and France, the purity of Christian worship was still maintained' (*Townsend's Abridgement*, p. 361, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 112).

786

The people who would later be known as the Waldenses were flourishing in the 700s. These people had a different Bible translation than that used by Catholics. These people "had the truth unadulterated, and this rendered them the special objects of hatred and persecutions" (Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, pp. 31, 42, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, pp. 112-113).

Evangelization of Germany by Christians from the British Isles continued throughout the eighth century (Hugh Smith's *History of the Church*, as noted by Dugger and Dodd, p. 115).

"The wilds and forests of Germany would prove asylums to dissenters through the rise and assumption of the man of sin [Pope]. That Germany was inhabited by persons of this description is evident, and that such persons must have been very active in disseminating the truth becomes plain, since it is recorded that the baptist itinerant preachers, could in their travels, pass, during the ninth century through the whole German empire, and lodge every night at the house of one of their friends. It is very probable that these traveling ministers were Paulicians or

Paterines from Bulgaria or Italy. They were termed by the Catholics anabaptist preachers. Their sentiments of religion are learned, and their views of the ordinances proved, from their confession of faith, which asserts, 'In the beginning of Christianity there was no baptizing of children; and their forefathers practiced no such thing'; and, 'We do from our hearts, acknowledge that baptism is a washing, which is performed with water, and doth hold out the washing of the soul from sin' " (*Orchard's Baptist History*, pp. 322-323, as quoted by Dugger and Dodd, pp. 116-117).

### The Church in the Ninth Century

As the ninth century (801-900) dawned, God's church was active though scattered in many areas. We have just read how traveling baptist ministers during this century passed through the German Empire, lodging every night with friends converted by Paulicians in the previous century.

Small pockets of resistance to the Catholic Church have been noted in the British Isles, Germany, southern France and northern Italy. The greatest group, of course, were those called Paulicians, who now entered the sunset years of the "Pergamos Era." At the beginning of this century, Paulicians were numerous in Phrygia and Lycaonia.

### The Key of Truth Written

It may have been about A.D. 800 that the beliefs of the Paulicians were put into writing in the book, *The Key of Truth* (Conybeare, pp. vi, ix). Notice Conybeare's preface: "...About 800 A.D., the old believers seem to have organized themselves outwardly as a separate church; and a great leader [possibly Sergius, who led the Paulicians from 801 to 835, or by Smbat, a Paulician of this century—p. xxxii] stereotyped their chief rites by committing them to writing in an authoritative book. That book survives, and is *The Key of Truth*" (p. ix).

"We here are moving in a realm of surmise

801

only, and we cannot assume as a fact, but only suggest as a hypothesis, that this Smbat was the author of the *Key of Truth*. Apart from the notices of Gregory of Warek and Gregory Magistros, we should be inclined to refer the work to Sergius, the great Paulician apostle of the ninth century, concerning whom we have many notices in the Greek writers of that and the two following centuries.

“Even if Smbat’s authorship be questioned, there can be no doubt that the *Key* accurately reflects the opinions and rites of the Paulicians of the four centuries, 800-1200” (Conybeare, pp. xxxii).

As we have done in the past with the New Testament writings and the Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp, let us now also briefly review *The Key of Truth*.

### Baptism Discussed

The first three chapters discussed the Paulician’s understanding of baptism, which was based on New Testament Scriptures and was similar to what is taught by God’s church today.

“Thus the universal and apostolic church learned from our Lord Jesus, and continued so to do, as is clear in their Acts and especially in the traditions of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which he imposes on the universal and apostolic church, saying, Mark xvi. 15: ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creatures. Whoever shall believe, shall be baptized, shall live; and he who shall not believe, shall be judged.’

“Wherefore also our Lord first asked for faith, and then graciously gave healing; and after that bestowed holy baptism on believers; but not on unbelieving catechumens.... Thus also the Lord, having learned from the Father, proceeded to teach us to perform holy baptism and all his commands at the age of full growth (or *lit.* in a completed and mature season), and at no other time” (Conybeare, pp. 73, 75).

### Against the Orthodox Churches

In Chapter 4, *The Key of Truth* assails the

orthodox religions of the day, calling them Satan’s.

“Our mediator and intercessor Jesus Christ doth direct us truly as follows: ‘beware of evil doers,’ and the rest....

“And out of such knowledge did our Lord Jesus Christ give proof unto schismatics, unbelievers, the impious, liars, the false to law (or false examples), false teachers and false priests, who are ever learning, yet never are able to come to the knowledge of the truth,’ and the rest.

“Thus our Lord Jesus meant that their father and teacher is Satan” (Conybeare, pp. 78, 79).

### Satan Discussed

In Chapters 5 through 9, Satan is described. He is adversary of Christ in Chapter 5, of the apostles in Chapter 6 and of the church in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 8, the form of Satan is described, beginning with the serpent and ending with monks: “At the first this gate of hell took the form of a serpent; secondly, of a raven; thirdly, of a calf; fourthly, of wild beasts; fifthly, of light; sixthly, of women; seventhly, of men; eighthly, of clerics; ninthly, of teachers of the school; tenthly, of apostles; eleventhly, of bishops; twelfthly, of monks” (Conybeare, pp. 83-84).

In Chapter 9, the *Key of Truth* mentioned that Satan uses other disguises, though only 12 were mentioned. And then those 12 were elaborated. Notice this accusation against clerics, false apostles and monks: “Eighthly of clerics, because they lead the lives of imposters.... Eleventhly of bishops and catholici, because they are proud and overweening, and in particular traffickers in the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ; yea, and though dispensers of the holy law, yet are also avaricious [greedy] and excogitators [inventors] of falsehoods. Lastly, they disguise themselves as monks, because they always love herbs and vegetables, yea, and also... [the word has been removed from the original manuscript] and they keep fasts, because their food always grows in damp

places. Wherefore also their dwellings are there, for they like it much” (Conybeare, pp. 84-85).

Chapter 10 began by saying it would discuss the testimonies of the holy apostles and of the Gentile writings that prove Satan takes “the form of...” Again, the word is missing. Conybeare thought the missing word was “monk.” The chapter began by quoting 2 Cor. 11:12-15, explaining how Satan is disguised as an angel of light, so his ministers also appear pure. But the remainder of the chapter and the next three and a half chapters were torn out of the original manuscript.

### Missing Chapters and Words

To avoid persecution, the owners of the original copy of *The Key of Truth* tore out sections and obliterated words that were most critical of the Catholic Church. Beginning in Chapter 10, 24 pages were torn out of the manuscript. Conybeare wrote a footnote: “These pages seem to have contained the last part of chap. x, all of chaps. xi-xiii, and the first part of chap. xiv. These chapters must have contained a free criticism of orthodox abuses” (Conybeare, p. 85).

Conybeare earlier explained that he used three dots to indicate total erasure in the manuscript of a word because of its “unorthodox tendency.”

Chapter 14 picked up where the text left off in Chapter 10, i.e., discussing the abuses of the orthodox churches. Most of Chapter 15 also was lost. It discussed how Jesus and the apostles were baptized.

### Repentance, Baptism and Passover

The next several chapters discussed baptism, the need for repentance prior to it, and the need for Passover, which renewed the baptism vow.

“Thus our Lord Jesus Christ decreed that these three ineffable mysteries (or sacraments) are essential when he spoke to those who listened. First he lays stress on and ordains repentance, like St. John, who

was mentioned above. Secondly he grants holy baptism, as he said to Nicodemus: ‘Jesus made answer and said to them, Verily verily I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Thirdly, as regards his holy, precious body and blood, the Saviour commands us to make them (separately) from one another, as is clear from John 6:54: ‘Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves’” (Conybeare, Chapter 16, p. 87).

Attacking infant baptism, *The Key of Truth* added: “So must we also perform baptism when they are of full age like our Lord; so that they may seek it in faith from us, and that then we may give them baptism and perfect blessing” (p. 88).

Ministers were warned to beware of people who, like Simon Magus, came to be baptized but were not truly repentant. “So also ye, my loved ones, must examine those who come to you” (Chapter 18, p. 92).

The baptizer (or minister) is described in Chapter 20. In addition to Paul’s instructions to Timothy (Ch. 3:1) and Titus (Ch. 1:7), the following instructions were given for ministers:

“Now the teacher [shall be] wise, obedient, modest, sober, virtuous, God-fearing, loved by all, himself a lover of the faithful. But let him not be superstitious, a babblers, a liar, an inciter of evil. Neither shall he be dissolute or vicious, nor shall he be deceitful and an imposter, nor shall he be fond of low gain nor a lover of pleasure.

“Let him not be contentious and choleric, nor let him be a wine-bibber and a drunkard. Neither shall he be fond of glory or a taker of profits. And he shall not be a taker of gifts and greedy, nor a thief and robber; nor shall he be a murderer and a grinder of the poor. Let him also not be weak in faith, or perverse, litigious. Let him not be a deceiver of men and women. Let him not be double-tongued, an inciter unto evil; let him not be a calumniator [slanderer] of others. Let him not be proud and selfish, let him not be a lover of silver

or of any of this world's riches. Let him not be scarred with impurity, or a buffoon. Let him not be an adulterer or effeminate. Let him not be blind or halt, let him not be deaf or mute. Let him not be tall to excess above all men, nor let him be shorter than all men" (Conybeare, p. 95).

The baptism ceremony, including all Scriptures to be read, was described in Chapter 21 (pp. 96-101). Following baptism was a ceremony of "laying on of hands." This was described in Chapter 22 (pp. 101-112). This symbolized the ordination of the baptized person and the giving of the Holy Spirit to him or her.

### Other Tenets

The final four chapters in the manuscript which were translated by Conybeare had their chapter numbers erased. Though parts of these were lost, they discussed Christ's birth and Mary, mother of Jesus (pp. 112-114); the creation of Adam and Christ (pp. 114-116); a repetition of the three ordinances—repentance, baptism and Passover—(pp. 116-117), more about baptism and the doctrines of the Paulicians (pp. 117-121), judgment (pp. 121-122) and the bread-and-wine sacrament used in Passover (pp. 123-124).

Much of these sections repeated earlier ones. However, there were some new ideas presented in these final chapters.

A Christian was defined during a series of questions and answers:

"*Question.* Art thou a Christian?

"*Answer.* Yes, I am a Christian by the grace of Christ.

"*Q.* How are we to define a Christian?

"*A.* Thus—One who knows our Lord Jesus Christ, what he is, and keeps his commandments.

"*Q.* What is the command and precept of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we keep?

"*A.* That which our Lord prescribed to his disciples and his faithful, saying, 'If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments. As I also have kept the commandments of my father'" (Conybeare, p. 117).



A Paulician minister, as illustrated in 1645 by Wenceslaus Hollar, a Czech emigrant living in England.

Intercession of the saints was condemned on page 120.

Thus we conclude our discussion of *The Key of Truth*.

### Sergius' Work

About this time half-Jewish Baanes gained local influence among the Paulicians and taught a militant doctrine of retaliation. They did not heed the Scripture which says vengeance is God's (Rom. 12:19).

Christ raised up one last great leader among this Pergamos Era to show the Paulicians their error. His name was Sergius and he took the Bible name Tychicus.

"Sergius is the most renowned of all the Paulician leaders. He was originally a wood-cutter and carpenter and earned his living with his own hands. For 34 years in the ministry he labored earnestly to bring the

people to repentance and a return to the truth. 'I Have run from east to west, and from north to south, until my knees are weary, preaching the gospel of Christ' he wrote" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 15; Conybeare, p. lii).

We have already briefly described a part of the Church of God that became known as "Montenses" because they fled to the mountains in northern Italy and southern France. Conybeare, in his lengthy introduction to the *Key of Truth*, linked the Montanists with the Paulicians. Sergius wrote a letter to Leo, leader of the Montanists, exhorting him, "Beware of thyself lest thou inwardly rend the unswerving faith" (p. clxxxv).

Sergius added, "Cease to rend asunder the true faith. For what charge canst thou bring against us? Have I despoiled anyone, or been overweening? Thou canst not allege it. But if thou dost, thy witness is not true. Yet be it not mine to hate thee, but only to exhort thee, as thou hast received apostles and prophets, who are four in number, so receive (our) shepherds and teachers, lest thou become the prey of wild beasts" (p. lii).

Conybeare then asked, "...how could Leo rend inwardly the Faith, unless there was already communion between the bodies of believers to which they respectively belonged? Nor could Sergius use the words 'unswerving faith' unless he regarded the Montanists as having retained a true baptism and a genuine priesthood. But that implies these 'homines religionis antiquae' [ancient religious people] rejected paedobaptism [infant-baptism] and that they were Adoptionists [those who believe man becomes Sons of God at baptism]" (p. clxxxv).

Sergius also fought against the militant teaching. But the Paulicians as a whole did not heed.

Byzantine Emperor Leo V (813-820) began persecuting the Paulicians in Cappadocia. The vast majority of these Armenians were so carnal that the persecution provoked a military rebellion! When the rebellion was put down, many Paulicians fled to Saracen (Arab) territory.

"For the next 50 years, they continued to

raid Byzantine territory, although Sergius absolutely condemned fighting and retaliation! But of course they would not listen to him. The people would not listen to any true minister of Christ now! *Remember, most of these Paulicians now merely cleaved to the Church with flatteries* (Dan. 11:34). *They were not converted"* (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 15).

### End of an Era

After Sergius died, even those who had followed him began to fight. The Empress Theodora (829-867) continued to zealously persecute the Paulicians. The Paulicians revolted from her dominion and allied themselves with the Arab Caliph of Baghdad. Armies of Arabs and carnal-minded Paulicians raged through the heart of Asia Minor. "But trusting in their worldly alliances with the Arabs instead of relying on Jesus' protection, the Paulicians were betrayed and slaughtered. One hundred thousand perished! (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 15).

Jone's *Church History* described this end of an era: "The persecution had, however, some intermissions, until at length Theodora, the Greek Empress, exerted herself against them beyond all her predecessors. She sent inquisitors throughout all Asia Minor in search of these sectaries, and is computed to have killed by the gibbet, by fire, and by the sword, a hundred thousand persons" (p. 187, as quoted by Ivor C. Fletcher in *The Incredible History of God's True Church*, p. 152).

Smbat reorganized a remnant of the church at Thonrak about 840. It is possible he wrote *The Key of Truth* at this time.

While most of the Paulicians had forgotten Paul's teachings and had become carnal, warrior people, a few true Christians remained among them, keeping the Church of God alive.

About 870, Paulician evangelists from Taurus preached the true religion to Bulgarians from Volga who had settled in Thrace. These converts became known as Bogomils,

829

840

870

813

**870**

which meant, in the Slavic tongue, “Friends of God” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, p. 16).

Conybeare stated in his introduction to *The Key of Truth*, “And when reasons of state or bigotry failed to exterminate this primitive Church among the ranges of the Taurus [Mountains], its members were deported by hundreds of thousands to Thrace. There they thrived for centuries, and spread of their tenets

into Bohemia, Poland, Germany, Italy, France and even into our own England, must have helped not a little to prepare the ground for the Puritan Reformation” (p. civ).

Furthermore, Conybeare stated that the Bogomils came from the Paulicians: “It is generally agreed—and all the sources allow it—that the Bogomil Church was largely their [Paulician] creation” (p. cl).

We will discuss Bogomils in Chapter 30.

# 30

## The Cathars of the 10th & 11th Centuries

901

As the 10th century (901-1000) dawned, the Church of God was a scattered flock. It is possible that some were in England, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the Balkans and Asia Minor. The greatest number seem to have been among the Paulicians. But the Paulicians were not the same group they had been in earlier centuries. They had lost the truth and had become warrior people, making alliances with worldly governments.

In the 10th century we begin to read of people who may have been the Church of God but were called "Cathars" by the world.

Cathars or Cathari is a "name given to various groups of a religious movement that began with the Bogomils in the Balkans (10th cent.) and included the ALBIGENSES. The fundamental ideas of the Cathari were belief in dualism (God versus Satan, good versus evil) and a practice of extreme asceticism. They did not accept the [Catholic] Christian idea of God and rejected sacraments and the priestly hierarchy. There were two classes: the Prefect and the believers. Doctrines apparently descended... to the Cathari through the Paulicians" (*Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, "Cathari,"

p. 218).

### Cathars Held Paulician Beliefs

The Cathars held beliefs similar to those of the early Paulicians. Conybeare compared the two groups in his introduction to *The Key of Truth*:

"We have already dwelt on the curious identity there was between the European Cathars and the Paulicians in their theory of the Eucharist. A cursory perusal of the *Liber Sententiarium*, or any of Monet's work, or of Maitland's useful treatise, shows us many other points of resemblance. The Cathars, for example, rejected the adoration of the cross (Maitland, p. 240, note), and the doctrine of Purgatory was denied by the heretics of Cologne (*ibid.*, p. 349), of Trèves (*Ibid.*, p. 366) and just as the Paulicians opposed the spiritual Church composed of believers to the edifices of stone, so did the Cathars.... The same charge was also made against the Albigeois [Albigenses] as against the Paulicians that they repudiated marriage; the truth being this, that the heretics did not make a sacrament of it, as did the orthodox and persecuting churches. It is

901

also likely enough that the Cathars really taught celibacy to the higher state. But did not their orthodox persecutors teach the same, following St. Paul? The truth is that teaching which was correct and apostolic in the mouth of the persecutor was devilish when it fell from the lips of the persecuted. Whatever the sentiments of the European Cathars may have been on such points, we know from the *Key* that the Paulician bishop had to be a married man. They were therefore less morbidly ascetic than the Roman and Greek churches. The inquisitors relate that the elect of the Albigeois had to be celibate. But this can hardly have been the case. For Peter Auterius, their leader in Toulouse, had a son James.... As to the Paulicians, they simply followed in such matters the teaching of Paul in his pastoral letters; and it is likely that the Albigeois did the same" (p. cxliv).

We will discuss the Albigeois or Albigenes later. The first group the world labeled "Cathars" were the Bogomils.

### The Bogomils

In our last chapter, we mentioned that the Bogomils, according to Conybeare, were a product of the Paulicians who settled in the Balkans, a mountain range in northern Bulgaria.

*The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia* describes the Bogomils as the "earliest (10th cent.) group of the Cathari. Flourishing in Bulgaria and the Balkans, they were distinguished not only by dualistic religious beliefs but also by political nationalism and resentment of Byzantine culture. Various groups were called Babuns, Phundaits, and Patarenes. They spread to Italy and converted the Albigenes. Opposition of Christian churches weakened the Bogomils, who were wiped out by the triumph of Islam (15th cent.)" ("Bogomils," p. 144).

Many of this world's writers linked the Paulicians, Bogomils and others with the pagan Manichaeans, and described them accordingly. "It was much easier to copy out of one of the many accounts of the Man-

ichaeans which were still in circulation, than to inquire what their tenets really were.... We must then be doubly cautious not to believe all we read about the Bogomils. What has been written about them appears to me [Conybeare] to be for the most part hopelessly confused and untrustworthy.... According to Mr. Arthur Evans, who has written more fruitfully about them than any other author whom I have consulted, there are still communities of them in existence in the Balkan peninsula. Surely a diligent search made in likely places by a sympathetic person would result in the finding of some of their ancient books. Their literature is indispensable as a connecting-link between the Paulicians and the medieval Cathars of Europe" (Conybeare, p. cxxxviii).

We have records of the Bogomils dating back to A.D. 1017 or 1022. And by the year 1223 they had "entered into some sort of intercourse with the Cathars of Toulouse" (Conybeare, p. cxlvii).

The Bogomils were caught in the cross-fire between the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Greek Orthodox Catholic Church in the East.

Orthodox Christianity from the East reached them first. But they rejected the false teachings of this counterfeit religion. Instead, they held to beliefs of the true Church of God, which were labeled by historians as "the schismatic guise of Bogomilism." Historian Arnold J. Toynbee wrote of these people, "This heresy had drawn upon them the hostile attentions of both Christian civilizations, and in these circumstances they had welcomed the arrival of the Muslim Osmanlis, abandoned their Bogomilism and 'turned Turk' so far as religion was concerned" (*A Study of History* by Arnold J. Toynbee, pp. 416-417).

Faced with great persecution, many of the Bogomils left the true Church of God. Not all left their faith, for as we have seen, there are still pockets of them in existence in the Balkan Peninsula.

"In era after era of God's Church, it is a repeated fact that after a few generations the local congregations are no longer gener-

ally composed of truly converted brethren, but of unconverted children and halfhearted believers of whom many go astray into error.

“Such were those among the Paulicians in the eighth century who began to accept demon-inspired visions they called ‘the new prophecy.’ Some were also in touch with Gnostic sects.

“Why were such heretical sects found associated with (and often confused with) God’s people? Because God’s Church can only exist where there is a significant measure of religious freedom, including freedom for all kinds of heresy to exist also. For example, today, God’s Church is mainly in countries where no state religion is in absolute control.

“Thus the Paulicians of the Pergamos era of the True Church, and their Slavic-speaking brethren called the Bogomils, included, at a later time, several groups with a medley of doctrine. All these false opinions migrated where religious freedom was allowed. And there, too, God’s Church found freedom to preach. This spirit of religious freedom spread into western Europe, where those who fell away from the truth became known as Cathars” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, p. 3).

Some of these Cathars taught celibacy for their ministers or “prefects” but not for the congregation. The result was rampant fornication. They also did not eat meat, milk or eggs.

“Paulicians and Bogomils came into western Europe before the year 1000. There they found a fertile field, prepared by the living Jesus Christ, just waiting for the sowing of His Word. It was to be the scene a little later of a new expansion of Jesus’ work—during the Thyatira Era of His Church.

“North Italy and south France had already known organized objections to the authority and teaching of the bishop of Rome in every century from the fourth onward. This was partly due to an original influence of true Christians who fled there from Rome and other areas in the days of Pope Sylvester and the Emperor Constantine. But that any

true Christianity had survived there throughout the centuries [is possible but] cannot be proven...

“The Paulicians and Bogomils in Italy—among whom were individuals who believed Christ—came to be called Cathars, meaning *puritans*. In France, as Cathars, Publicani, Bulgars and finally Albigenses, and in Germany, particularly around Cologne, they became what the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* calls ‘the abiding background of medieval heresy.’ It rightly identifies these people as ‘the debris of an earlier Christianity,’ that is, of the Pergamos Era (11th ed., art. ‘Cathars,’) (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, pp. 3-4).

The Cathar “prefects” numbered into the thousands and the “hearers” were much more numerous. Wherever they were, they remained in contact with their brethren in Thrace and Bulgaria.

## Burning Becomes Penalty for Heresy

For the first time, about the 11th century, burning became the penalty for heresy. Prior to this time burning was used by pagan governments for civil punishment. And unruly mobs burned the targets of their attacks. But until the end of the 10th century, when the first heretics were burned at Ravenna, Italy, the Catholic Church had not used burning to punish heretics. Instead, the Catholic Church had used banishment or imprisonment. The civil government prescribed burning for sorcery. And heresy began to be equated with sorcery (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., “Burning to Death” and “Inquisition.”)

Like a wildfire, burning to death grew from the first spark at Ravenna. “Thereafter burnings became numerous, an ever-present threat to all heretics, and to God’s Church. Books and Bibles were likewise consigned to the flames” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, p. 4).

## Berengarius Preaches Truth

While the Catholic Church was sinking fur-

1000

ther into the mire of popery and superstitions, there were a few true ministers of light who shone at this time.

One of these was Berengarius. He “perceived the pernicious tendency of such [Catholic] errors” and was “determined to preserve the light of the Gospel in its purity and splendour... about the year 1000 [he] boldly preached evangelical truth according to its primitive simplicity. Many from conviction embraced his doctrine, and were on that account termed Berengarians.” Berengarius was succeeded, about a hundred years later, by Peter de Bruys, whom we will discuss in the next chapter (King, p. 39).

**1015**

### **Cathars Burned in Central France**

A group of Cathars falsely called “Manichaeans” was noted in Limoges in central France as early as 1015. They were first put to death at Toulouse and burned to death at Orléans in 1022.

**1022**

This was the first case of secular powers intervening against heretics in France. King Robert had 13 heretics burned at the stake in Orléans. The sentence of burning had no prior basis in French law. But secular rulers were willing to issue the harshest penalties possible. Subsequently, another group of heretics—this time comprised of seven women—was condemned to be burned at Orléans (*Ecclesia Militans: The Inquisition* by Miroslav Hroch and Anna Skybová, p. 12).

**1025**

Three years later, in 1025, other “Manichaeans” were found at Arras in the north.

In 1025 and 1056 there were Catholic synods which officially condemned the growing sects (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, p. 4).

Meanwhile, in what is now Turkey, the Paulicians also were being persecuted at this time. In 1042 Gregory Magistros drove the Paulicians out of the town of Thonrak. Magistros was commissioned by Constantine IX Monomachus (1042-1054) to harry and destroy the Paulicians. “The favourite punishment devised by the orthodox catholici of Armenia was to brand their foreheads with the image of a fox” (Conybeare, p. lxxi).

**1042**

Catholic clergy became actively involved in the burning of God’s people. About 1070, 28 people in the town of Turin, including the countess, had accepted the Bible as their guide in life. They held meetings in the castle at Montfort. But the Catholic bishop of Milan learned of their ways and ordered their arrest. He burned them alive in the courtyard in front of the cathedral (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, p. 4).

**1070**

Persecution forced God’s people to move. By 1096 the Alpine region was home to many Paulicians and Bogomils. “The Paulician and Bogomil evangelization of the Alpine region led to a fruitful harvest of conversions; so much so, in fact, that the Pope in 1096 described the Valley Louise in Dauphiny, France, as being infested with ‘heresy’” (Fletcher, pp. 156-157).

**1096**

This infestation of “heresy” set the stage for the beginnings of the next era of God’s church—called Thyatira.

# 31

## Petrobrusians: First Works of Thyatira Era

**1100** As our study of the history of God's church moves into the 12th century (1101-1200), we find a new era coming into existence. This era is "Thyatira" and it had characteristics similar to the first century church in that city.

Let's review what Christ told John about that physical church and this era of God's church:

"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first" (Rev. 2:19, *NKJ*). This era of God's church would do a work. But the first works—those of the early 12th century—would be overshadowed by greater works that would follow.

Who did the first works of this era?

### The Noble Lesson Written

The people of God, living in the mountain valleys of northern Italy and southern France—called "Vaudois" by the world—committed many of their beliefs into writing in this century. The first book was *The Noble Lesson*, written in 1100 (Fletcher, p. 158).

*The Noble Lesson* (which some believe was written as late as the 1400s) "represents

a devout affirmation of Waldensian positions. The Bible history was extensively surveyed, with emphasis on the superiority of the perfect law of Christ to that of Moses. Auricular confession, sacramental absolution, the Mass, and papal authority are repudiated. Among other documents of the same period is a catechism containing expositions of the Lord's Prayer, the Commandments, the Sacraments, and discussions of love, hope, and the gifts of the Spirit. Under the second commandment there is a sharp attack on St. Gregory's statement that images are the books of the laity" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Waldenses," p. 273).

### Peter de Bruys

We know of three ministers who taught the truth of God around A.D. 1100. They were Peter de Bruys, Arnold and Henri (Henry).

"As a result of the evangelization of the Alpine regions by the Paulicians and Bogomils of Bulgaria, as God's people were called, there were numerous ministers and faithful congregations around 1000 A.D. One of these men was Peter de Bruys who preached the Gospel of the Kingdom in south-

**1100**

ern France (*Jone's Church History*, Ch. 4, Sec. 3)" (Hoeh, *A True History*, p. 22).

1104

About 1104 Peter de Bruys began to preach repentance at Embrun and throughout Languedoc and Provence in southern France. He rejected infant baptism and baptized only those old enough to know what they were doing—and who had truly repented of their sins.

He rejected transubstantiation, opposed reverence for the cross, de-emphasized the importance of huge church buildings, rejected the lie of purgatory and Catholic prayers for the dead with bribes paid to greedy false priests (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, p. 5).

Peter de Bruys preached in Toulouse under the protection of the Earl Hildephonsus. Peter wrote his beliefs and the differences between the Church of God and the Church of Rome in a book titled *Anti-Christ* (King, p. 39). This book was written in 1120, six years before his death.

1120

Peter was not ascetic. He strongly upheld marriage and believed priests should participate in that custom. He also sought to abolish many of the fasts established by the Catholic Church.

Much of what we know about Peter de Bruys comes from the writings of his adversary, the Catholic abbot of Clugny, Peter the Venerable. The abbot described Peter de Bruys as a "wretched little man" and wrote, "The people are re-baptized, churches profaned, altars overturned, crosses are burnt, meat eaten openly on the day of the Lord's passion [Friday], priests scourged, monks cast into dungeons, and by terror or torture constrained to marry" (*Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties, and Schools of Religious Thought* by Henry Blunt, p. 423, as quoted by Ronald Kelly, "History of the Church of God," *The Plain Truth*, May-June 1991, p. 19).

Converted followers gathered around Peter de Bruys. God's church began doing a work, preaching widely the true spiritual Gospel. The numbers of people truly converted and led by God's Spirit multiplied (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, p. 5).

The followers of Peter de Bruys were called by the world "Petrobrusians." They:

1. Baptized mature adults who had understanding.

2. Believed it was idolatrous superstition to build church buildings.

3. Abhorred crucifixes—in fact, they burned them.

4. Believed the bread and wine *symbolized* Christ's body and blood, rejecting the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

5. Believed prayers for the dead were of no use.

We have no evidence of which day the Petrobrusians kept. While we have nothing to indicate they kept Sunday, there is no evidence to prove they kept the Sabbath (Arnold Clauson, Bible Study, June 6, 1989, Cape Girardeau, Mo.).

"For 'nearly twenty years' Peter preached. Then the false church would no longer stand for this open rejection of its authority. He was taken and burned alive at the stake (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 51, p. 5). He was burned in 1126 in the town of St. Giles.

1126

### Henry Continues Peter's Work

After the martyrdom of Peter de Bruys in 1126, Henry, one of his disciples, took charge of the work of God. "Henry condemned false opinions of Cathars and Catholics alike. He despised and exposed worldly Roman holidays, baptism of infants, the corruption of priests" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 50, pp. 5-6).

Henry took over the position of apostle and continued the work. He and his followers—called Henricians by the world—"were charged by the Catholic Church with remaining faithful to the whole law of God, including observance of the Sabbath.

"The historian, Mosheim, adds that they abstained from eating meats which were prohibited under the Mosaic economy, and refused to accept the 'Trinity' doctrine. They seemed to have understood that God is a family, which converted Christians may join at the return of Christ....

“Henry, Peter’s disciple, spoke out against chanting and other forms of repetitious prayers” (Fletcher, pp. 157-158).

Monastier, in his book, *The Vaudois Church*, reported that Henry’s “preaching made a powerful impression on his hearers. The people were fascinated” (p. 40, as quoted by Fletcher, p. 158).

## 1140 Birth of Peter Waldo

It was during the ministry of Henry that Peter Waldo was born, about 1140. Waldo’s background and birthplace are undetermined. By the time he was 37, he had become a wealthy merchant in Lyons, and would later become a great leader in the Church of God (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Waldo, Peter,” p. 275).

## Death of Henry

In 1140 the number of the converted was so great that the probability of their increasing alarmed the pope, who wrote to several princes and ordered them to banish God’s people from their dominions. The pope also hired men to write against them. Henry of Toulouse became their most eminent preacher. The Henricians would not observe any religious rites that could not be proved in the Bible. The popish party nicknamed them “Apostolics” (King, pp. 39-40).

Persecutions continued against the Church of God under Henry. In 1147 he was burned in Toulouse (though some sources say he died in prison in 1149) (Fletcher, p. 157).

## Arnold of Brescia Preaches

Another leading minister of the Church of God at this time was Arnold of Brescia (1146). He preached against the evils and corruption of the Catholic Church as he traveled between southern France and Rome. He opposed the wealth of the Catholic clergy and the abuses to which it led. He believed in complete separation of church and state. His followers were called “Arnoldists” by the

world (Kelly, *Plain Truth*, May/June 1991, p. 19).

Information on Arnold is scarce. His writings were all destroyed on papal orders.

Arnold’s cry for the Catholic clergy to renounce power and wealth was enthusiastically approved by the laity but made Catholic clergy irreconcilable enemies. “The local clergy accused him of spreading heretical doctrines, and he was sent to Rome to answer the charges. The Pope promptly unfrocked him, imposed perpetual silence upon him, and banished him from the country” (Nigg, p. 257).

Removed from the Catholic Church and its ministry, Arnold carried on his mission alone, and, as a result, incurred the lasting hostility of Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux.

“Bernard gave his opponent no rest from persecution. Since the abbot of Clairvaux had powerful connections throughout the hierarchy, it was a simple matter to have the heretic expelled from France. Not content with that, he dispatched letters beyond the borders of France, warning others against the dangerous man who questioned the power of the clergy. Arnold fled to Zurich, where he found a temporary refuge and was allowed to deliver lectures. Later he was given asylum by Cardinal Guido of Bohemia” (Nigg, p. 258).

Arnold tired of being a fugitive. He returned to his native hometown of Brescia in Lombardy, northern Italy. He did his penance as ordered by the pope and was accepted back into the Catholic Church. But his submission to the Romans did not last long. A political revolt broke out in Rome and Arnold supported the popular movement.

“Arnold himself was frequently heard on the capital and in public meetings. Now he openly attacked the cardinals, saying their assembly, because of their pride and avarice, hypocrisy, and manifold wickedness, was not the Church of God, but a house of business and a den of thieves, and that they themselves acted as scribes and pharisees among the Christian people” (*The Portable Medieval Reader*, ed. J. B. Ross and M.

1147

M. McLaughlin, p. 340).

Arnold also attacked the office of the pope. He called the pope “a man of blood and a torturer of the Church, in whose name arson was committed and who was concerned only with filling his own coffers” (Nigg, p. 259).

Arnold’s speeches helped to inflame the Roman populace. The pope was compelled to leave Rome. He excommunicated Arnold as a heretic. Arnold fled Rome but was later captured and returned to the pope.

### The Truth in Germany

The Church of God was not limited to the Alpine valleys of northern Italy and southern France. In 1147 there were heretics in Cologne, Germany, who rejected infant baptism and denied the Catholic fable of purgatory (Conybeare, pp. cxlii, cxliv).

### Death of Arnold

Before being executed in 1155, Arnold was asked “if he would renounce his false doctrine, and confess his sins; ...he replied that his own doctrine seemed to him sound, nor would he hesitate to undergo death for his teachings, in which there was nothing absurd or dangerous. And he requested a short delay for time to pray, for he wished to confess his sins to Christ” (Ross and McLaughlin, p. 343).

Arnold was martyred and his body burned to ashes.

“The seed Arnold sowed did not fall on barren ground. It sprouted, though slowly, and we find the same idea arising among the Lombards and the Waldensians. To what extent these movements were directly connected with Arnold can no longer be demonstrated. But his ideas retained their life...” (Nigg, p. 261).

### The Albigenses

Another group of people labeled “heretics” by the Catholic Church was that known as the Albigenses. It is quite possible the true

Church of God could be found among this group which made its home in southern France. They became strong during the 12th and 13th centuries. Their preachers were powerful and gained protectors for their enthusiastic sect (*Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, “Albigenses,” p. 28).

The Albigenses were not Manichaeans as some have suggested. Manichaeans rejected the Old Testament. But the Albigenses, like God’s true church, made use of the whole Bible. In an Albigensian manuscript from Lyons, the book of Solomon is quoted with approval” (Conybeare, p. cxlv).

The Albigenses were clearly related to the Paulicians: “...there is a clear affinity between them; and the easiest way of accounting for the fact is to suppose that both are descended from a common source. But this common source must have lain far back in the most primitive age of the Church. It was beyond question a very early Christianity, which survived, perhaps variously modified, in the Albigensian Church. The same primitive faith, after going through another cycle of change of its own, has survived in the Paulician Church. How far back the common source lay we cannot tell; probably not later than the second century; and there can hardly have been any common development of the two systems later than the fourth” (Conybeare, pp. cxlvi-cxlvii).

What we read about the Albigenses is not always accurate. The same problems arose with this group as arose with the Paulicians and Bogomils. Historians and writers assumed this group also originated in Manichaeism, the religion of the half-Christian philosopher Mani, who lived in Persia in the third century. Yet, it is quite possible that God’s Church was among the Albigenses. Some of what we read about the Albigenses could be describing this group accurately—and be describing God’s Church as well. (Some of the beliefs of God’s true church could be misinterpreted by unbelievers to be of Manichaeism.) Other information either inaccurately portrays Albigensian beliefs or describes a part of the group who may have held Manichaeistic beliefs. It would

be a mistake to assume every single Albigensian was a follower of Mani.

Here is how historian Robert S. Hoyt described Albigenses in *Europe in the Middle Ages*:

“The Albigensian religion was thoroughly dualistic. Instead of one God, there were two gods, a god of light (truth) and a god of darkness (error), the former being the god of the New Testament, the latter the god of the Old Testament. Life on earth, indeed all existence, was a struggle between these gods and their principal forces, spirit and matter. Anything associated with material wealth or worldliness was evil; the [Catholic] Church of orthodox Christians was therefore, to the Albigensians, the synagogue of Satan. The good life for human beings was a gradual purification from matter (i.e., evil). Hence, the Albigensians logically condemned marriage, procreation, and even eating food. They abhorred war and physical violence, the veneration of relics, the use of pictorial representations (especially the cross), the wearing of vestments, and the employment of anything material in worship, as in the Mass. Because they refused to take oaths, they were subversive to a society that rested upon the oath of vassal to feudal lord. They also opposed any form of political authority as being worldly and therefore evil. All these tenets and teachings represent the extreme doctrine, and in practice even the Albigensians recognized the needs of human nature and human society. A good Albigensian was not required to stop eating, but he did have to be a vegetarian.

“...[T]hey were taught that such places as purgatory and hell were false Christian myths. The only ‘hell’ conceivable was the imprisonment of the soul in a material body, life in this world. This teaching probably underlay the Albigensian’s reputation for licentiousness. After all, if living in sunny southern France was the worst that could happen, the temptation to ignore conventional standards of morality was very strong” (pp. 368, 369).

The Albigenses also believed one must be baptized to become a member of the

church. But they rejected infant baptism. Only mature people who were old enough to understand sin and had repented were allowed baptism (Conybeare, p. cxlii).

## Religious Freedom in Southern France

God’s church prospered in southern France in the last half of the 12th century because religious freedom was allowed there. God was setting the stage for the “latter works” of the Thyatira Era—and those were to be greater than the “early works” of Peter de Bruys, Henry and Arnold.

“Southern France at the end of the twelfth century was a pleasant and prosperous land, the center of a flourishing provençal civilization. Wealthy towns, castles and courts, and an unruly feudal nobility were prominent in this home of troubadours. Christianity was very old in this area; but the orthodox faith had now become little more than an external form. In this tolerant and cosmopolitan society persecution was unknown, Jews and Moslems traded without hindrance, and the only real element of religious interest or fanaticism was the burgeoning Albigensian ‘church.’ The feudal nobles and the wealthy bourgeoisie were attracted to the heresy, some because of its tenets and others because they were eager to plunder the [Catholic] Church—the Albigensian program included the confiscation of the lands and the wealth of the orthodox clergy. But few of the important lords actually joined the Albigensian movement. Most were content to tolerate or protect the heretics within their lands, without committing themselves on the religious issue” (Hoyt, p. 369).

## Gospel Preached in England

This area of religious freedom served as a base for evangelistic campaigns into other areas.

“From Provence they passed into Languedoc and Gasconne, whence their so-called heresy penetrated into Spain and England” (Monastier, p. 40, as quoted by

**1160**

Fletcher, p. 185).

A treatise which dates from about 1160 mentions “many well-disposed persons devoting themselves to the preaching of the Gospel, notwithstanding the persecution which had been set on foot against the members of Christ” (Fletcher, p. 159).

William of Newberry reports that in 1160 “certain vagabonds” came to England who were “publicans” or Paulicians. (*Publicani* was the Eastern way of pronouncing *Pauliciani*.) Other sources classified them as Waldenses. They came from Gascony, in southwest France, and were accused of preaching heresy or “seducing the simple under a pretended display of piety.” Their leader was a man named Gerard. They spread their doctrine in England only a short time before they were arrested and

thrown behind bars. The king ordered them to be tried by a council of bishops at Oxford. During the trial, the heretics claimed to be Christians and said they followed the doctrines of the apostles and rejected several points of the Catholic faith, especially infant baptism and transubstantiation.

The group was sentenced to be branded on their foreheads, whipped, and driven out of the city. It was bitter winter and without shelter, they perished. Others were burned at the stake (Fletcher, p. 159; Conybeare, p. cxxix).

We now come to God’s calling of Peter Waldo, through whom He did a great work. These were the “latter works” of the Thyatira Era, which were prophesied by Jesus Christ to be greater than the first works of Peter de Bruys, Henry and others.