

Doctrines of the Ancient Church

I. The Scriptures – Early 1st Century had no concept of a canon.

A. In the first century they used the O.T. and oral tradition of stories of Jesus along with whatever circular letters they possessed.

B. In the early 2nd Century they began to assemble the 4 gospels, Acts and letters of Paul.

C. Late 2nd Century the heresies had the positive effect of forcing the church to clarify its teachings and choose between writings.

D. The Canon – The rule of faith, standard is discussed at the end of 2nd Century.

E. Leadership – apostolic succession; the link of church leadership to the apostles; Jesus > John > Polycarp > Irenaeus.

F. Disputed books – Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, James, Jude, Barnabas, Shepard of Hermas, Gospel of Hebrews.

G. Athanasius in 367 listed the 27 books as we now have them as the “only source of salvation and authentic teaching”.

II. Inspiration – All the church fathers agreed the Scriptures were inspired so the divine origin and inerrancy was never questioned.

III. Doctrine of God – monotheistic.

A. The struggle – the relationship of Christ and the Holy Spirit to God.

1. Ignatius – Christ as God incarnate and God manifest as man.

2. Heretical solutions – Ebionite, monarchian, modalism.

B. Doctrine of the Trinity – late 2nd century.

1. Justin Martyr

2. Irenaeus

3. Tertullean – first to use the word Trinity.

C. Arian Controversy of early 4th Century – nature of Christ.

1. Council of Nicea

2. Split of East – West.

3. Unanimity with Augustine.

IV. The Atonement – The Work of Christ

A. Church Fathers – Vague, simple – redemption through the blood of Christ.

B. The Apologists – add the term “satisfaction”, the appeasement of God.

V. Salvation (Sin and Grace)

A. Church Fathers – men are sinful and in need of true life which is only given through Christ – Clement.

B. Apologists – Tertullian, Irenaeus; “The essence of Adam’s sin was disobedience that plunged the entire race to ruin. In the second Adam, that is Christ, we are reconciled.” Nevertheless, they held to cooperative free will with the assisting grace of God.

C. The Theologians

1. – Augustine 395 AD – Original sin; when Adam sinned all men jointly sinned together. Human nature has been physically and morally corrupted after the fall. Adam was still free but he lost the gift of grace which enabled him not to sin and was free only to sin. Man has no free will that is driven by a pure motive of selflessness since God judges motive of action, all man does (apart from Christ) is sinful in God’s view. Grace – an inward wonderful operation of God upon man. Grace is free and unmerited.

2. Clash with Pelagius – Carthage 416, 418, then Ephesus in 431. The ability of man to work out his own salvation; even his own perfection. Adam’s sin injured himself alone and not the human race – there is no original sin.

3. Pelagius is known by human freedom while Augustine is known by divine grace.

VI. Doctrine of the Church

A. The Church Fathers – idea of a “universal church” and a “visible” church; Clement, Ignatius.

B. The Apologists

1. Justin – a new covenant body of people.

2. Irenaeus – the church is the new Israel, it is the sole depository of truth, a monopoly on the apostle’s teaching.

C. Shift to Monarchical Government – apostolic succession.

1. Early 2nd Century – Plurality of leadership, elders and deacons.

2. Irenaeus – attributes to bishops a special gift for the custody of the truth.

3. Cyprian of Carthage – Bishops in each church are successors of the Apostles but there is no top dog. If Peter was, then why did Paul repudiate him? Cyprian told the Bishop of Rome that he had no authority over him.

VII. Doctrine of Last Things – Eschatology

A. Church Fathers

1. Second coming of Christ (parousia)

2. Bodily resurrection of believers.

3. Establishing of the Kingdom (variance of opinion on what it is).

B. Apologists – Justin Martyr

1. Second coming – Jesus will come in judgment and institute the eternal kingdom.

2. Resurrection – bodily resurrection of both believers and wicked.

3. Kingdom – Jesus will reign in Jerusalem for 1000 years.

C. Theologians – The literal interpretation of prophecy gradually changed to a metaphorical – spiritual method by the 4th – 5th Century.