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ANCIENT THEOLOGY

Apostolic Fathers

The writings of the apostolic Fathers are important because they represent the writings of those who were still alive during the lifetime of the New Testament apostles. The writings of the apostolic Fathers are the following: *The First Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians*, written about A.D. 97; *The Second Epistle of Clement*, actually a homily rather than an epistle, and written about A.D. 150 by an unknown author rather than Clement. *The Epistles of Ignatius*, the bishop of Antioch, written about A.D. 110 to the churches of the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnans, and to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna; *The Didache*, or “Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” written about A.D. 100; *The Epistle of Barnabas*, written sometime between A.D. 70 and 132; *The Shepherd of Hermas*, written about A.D. 140-145; *The Fragments of Papias*, bishop of Hierapolis, written about A.D. 125.

In studying the works of the apostolic Fathers it quickly becomes apparent that there is a considerable difference in quality from the New Testament writings, and that there is little new material offered. Moreover, instead of a doctrinal emphasis, there is a decided emphasis on ethics. The writings, however, are important in that “they witness to the canonicity and integrity of the New Testament books and form a doctrinal link between the New Testament and the more speculative writings of the apologetes which appeared during the second century.”²⁸⁻¹

BIBLIOLOGY OF THE FATHERS

A common feature of the apostolic Fathers is the incorporation of the Scripture into the flow of their writings. They quote extensively from the Old Testament and New Testament, weaving the texts (including lengthy sections) into their writings.

They also recognize the authority of Scripture. Clement warns against sinful living, basing it on “the scripture saith” (*1 Clement, Cor.* 35, 46). Clement affirms the Scriptures to be true, given through the Holy Spirit, and that there was “nothing unrighteous or counterfeit” written in them (*Cor.* 45). He refers to the Old Testament as the “sacred scriptures” and “the oracles of God” (*Cor.* 53).

The apostolic Fathers were frequently allegorical in their interpretation. Referring to the Old Testament quotation, “Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not,” it is interpreted as “our Church was barren, before that children were given unto her” (*2 Clement 2*).²⁸⁻² *The Shepherd of Hermas* is another example. Ignatius exhorts the Trallians: “Recover yourselves in faith which is the flesh of the Lord, and in love which is the blood of Jesus Christ” (*Tral.* 8).

THEOLOGY PROPER OF THE FATHERS

Belief in the Trinity is affirmed; Clement sets forth the equality of the triune God in his statement: “For as God liveth, and the Lord Jesus Christ liveth, and the Holy Spirit, who are the faith and the hope of the elect” (*Cor.* 58). Clement acknowledged God as “Creator and Master of the universe” (*Cor.* 33).

CHRISTOLOGY OF THE FATHERS

Noteworthy truths about Christ are affirmed. Ignatius makes significant statements declaring the deity of Christ: he refers to Him as “Jesus Christ our God” (*Eph.* 1; *Rom.* 1); as indwelling the believer—“He Himself may be in us as our God” (*Eph.* 15, also *Mag.* 12); as being the “mind of the Father” (*Eph.* 3); as the “knowledge of God” (*Eph.* 17); as being “with the Father before the worlds” (*Mag.* 6); and as “the Son” (*Rom.* 1). Polycarp also refers to Jesus as “our Lord and God Jesus Christ” (*Phil.* 12). He is declared to be “sent forth from God” (Clement, *Cor.* 42). His humanity is affirmed in the words of John the Apostle (Polycarp, *Phil.* 7). His resurrection is acknowledged with some frequency (Clement, *Cor.* 24, 42; Ignatius, *Trallians* 9; *Phila.* 1). They affirm His high priesthood and His superiority to angels (Clement, *Cor.* 36, 61; Polycarp, *Phil.* 12).

SOTERIOLOGY OF THE FATHERS

The apostolic Fathers frequently mention that salvation was through the blood of Christ. Clement states: “Let us fix our eyes on the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is unto His Father, because being shed for our salvation it won for the whole world the grace of repentance” (*Cor.* 7; cf. *Cor.* 23, 49; *Barnabas* 5). Clement’s statement also seems to suggest unlimited atonement. Ignatius indicates it is faith in the blood of Christ that procures salvation (*Smyrn.* 6). Repentance is also emphasized (*2 Clement* 13; 19).

A prominent emphasis, however, is the necessity of works in salvation. In a lengthy discussion Clement emphasizes the importance of obedience in procuring salvation, indicating Lot was saved because of his hospitality (*Cor.* 11) as was Rahab (*Cor.* 12). Salvation also involves doing the will of the Father, keeping the flesh pure, and guarding the commandments of the Lord (*2 Clement* 8). Love is also necessary for entrance into the kingdom (*2 Clement* 9) as is the necessity of bidding farewell to worldly enjoyments and refusing evil lusts (*2 Clement* 16). Practicing righteousness is also essential (*2 Clement* 19).

These statements indicate a commendable emphasis on a godly walk, but at the same time confuse the salvation message and detract from the free grace of God. This is one of many doctrinal errors that surfaced very early in the history of Christian thought.

ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE FATHERS

There is a clear development of the church offices of deacon, presbyter (elder), and bishop, with increasing authority granted to them. A predominant emphasis of the apostolic Fathers is that believers are to submit to the authority of the elders and bishops. Clement exhorts believers to be at peace with the elders (*Cor.* 54), submit to their authority, and receive chastisement from them (*Cor.* 57; 63). Polycarp teaches submission to elders and deacons (*Phil.* 5). Ignatius likens the believer's obedience to the bishop as Christ's obedience to the Father and as the apostles to Christ (*Mag.* 13). The leaders are to be accorded considerable honor. To the Trallians Ignatius writes: "Do nothing without the bishop; but be ye obedient also to the presbytery, as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ . . . let all men respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, even as they should respect the bishop as being a type of the Father and the presbyters as the council of God" (*Tral.* 2, 3). To the Philadelphians Ignatius states: "As many as are of God and of Jesus Christ, they are with the bishop" (*Phila.* 3). He further says: "Do ye all to follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbytery as the Apostles; and to the deacons pay respect, as to God's commandment. . . . Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the universal Church" (*Smyrn.* 8).

The developing authority of the bishop is clearly seen in Ignatius's statements.

Let no man do aught of things pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that be held a valid eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he shall have committed it. . . . It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptize or to hold a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve, this is well-pleasing also to God; that everything which ye do may be sure and valid. . . . It is good to recognize God and the bishop. He that honoureth the bishop is honoured of God. (*Smyrn.* 8; 9.)

The Lord's Supper is referred to as "the medicine of immortality and the antidote that we should not die but live for ever in Jesus Christ" (*Eph.* 20). The *Didache* gives instruction concerning the prayers before and after the Lord's Supper (9; 10). Instruction is also given concerning baptism and fasting (7; 8).

ESCHATOLOGY OF THE FATHERS

There is not a great deal of information concerning last things. *Second Clement* refers to the kingdom of God coming at God's appearing (12; 17); people will be amazed when the kingdom of this world is received by Christ (17). Distinction is also made between the kingdom and life eternal (5); it is in the kingdom that believers will be crowned for contending bravely (7). At Christ's appearing those who have lived ungodly lives will be judged and punished in unquenchable fire (17).

Barnabas exhorts believers on the basis of the imminent return of Christ (21). Papias acknowledges a millennial kingdom in this statement.

The blessing thus foretold belongs undoubtedly to the times of the Kingdom, when the righteous shall rise from the dead and reign, when too creation renewed and freed from bondage shall produce a wealth of food of all kinds from the dew of heaven and from the fatness of the earth . . . how the Lord used to teach concerning those times, and to say, The days will come, in

which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand shoots, and on each shoot ten thousand branches, and on each branch again ten thousand twigs, and on each twig ten thousand clusters, and on each cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape when pressed shall yield five-and-twenty measures of wine. . . . and all the animals, using these fruits which are products of the soil, shall become in their turn peaceable and harmonious, obedient to man in all subjection. (*Frag. Pap.* 14.)

Ancient Apologists

Because of a general misunderstanding of Christianity and the slander that resulted, there arose prominent Gentile Christians who wrote “apologies” in defense of Christianity. These early Christian writers became known as Apologists. Their task was threefold.²⁸⁻³ (1) They defended Christianity against the false charges of atheism, cannibalism, incest, indolence, and other anti-social behavior. (2) They took the offensive, charging the Jews with misunderstanding the typological and shadowy nature of the Old Testament in anticipating Christ. They also attacked paganism, its immorality, as well as the immorality of the pagan deities, particularly in comparison with the revelation of God in the New Testament. (3) They were also constructive, arguing for the reality of the New Testament revelation through fulfilled prophecy and through miracles.

The major apologetical writings and Apologists are the following:²⁸⁻⁴ *Epistle to Diognetus*, written by an unknown author about A.D. 150; Quadratus, bishop of Athens, wrote an apology, now lost, to emperor Hadrian about A.D. 125; Aristides, an Athenian philosopher wrote to either Hadrian or Antoninus Pius; Melito, bishop of Sardis, wrote an apology to Marcus Aurelius; Claudius Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, also wrote an apology to Marcus Aurelius; Miltiades, an Athenian philosopher wrote against both Jews and pagans; Athenagoras defended Christians in an apology to Marcus Aurelius in about A.D. 177, refuting charges of atheism, cannibalism, and immorality; Theophilus of Antioch wrote three works defending belief in God and the hope of the resurrection, denouncing heathen beliefs and exposing the inferiority of heathen literature compared to the Old Testament; Tatian, an Assyrian, defended the reasonableness of Christianity against the “worthlessness of paganism”; and Justin Martyr, considered the greatest of the apologists, wrote two *Apologies* and the *Dialog with Trypho the Jew*. He was a converted philosopher and retained his philosophical bent in defending Christianity.

BIBLIOLOGY OF THE APOLOGISTS

The *Epistle to Diognetus* emphasizes the revelation of God; the Creator of the universe has revealed Himself to mankind: “The Invisible God Himself from heaven planted among men the truth and the holy teaching which surpasseth the wit of man, and fixed it firmly in their hearts” (*Diog.* 7). This statement contrasts the revelation of God to man with the speculative groping of philosophers. The epistle declares that God has revealed Himself through the Word (meaning Christ), a philosophical term (Gr. *logos*), meaning *word* or *discourse*; hence, Christ is the discourse of God to mankind. In this sense, particularly, the Apologists emphasize Christ as Teacher who communicates the revelation of God to mankind. The reader is exhorted, therefore, to “understand the discourses which the Word holds by the mouth” (*Diog.* 11).

THEOLOGY PROPER OF THE APOLOGISTS

The author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* declares at length the insignificance and futility of gods of wood and stone. He reminds his reader that these gods are made of stone just like the stone the people walk on; these gods rot and decay. In fact, the gods made of silver and gold have to be locked up at night and guarded (*Diog.* 2). God is referred to as the “Almighty Creator of the Universe, the Invisible God” (*Diog.* 7), and “the Master and Creator of the Universe, Who made all things and arranged them in order” (*Diog.* 8). Justin Martyr refers to God as “the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is untouched by evil” (*1 Apol. Just.* 6).

Prior to His revelation people did not know what He was like; now they know Him to be “kindly and good and dispassionate and true, and He alone is good” (*Diog.* 8). While man was deserving of punishment and death, God was longsuffering and patient, therefore, He sent His Son as a ransom for sin (*Diog.* 9). In this God has demonstrated that He is a God of love (*Diog.* 10). The words of John 3:16 are prominent in this declaration.

Athenagoras provides a clear statement of monotheism and the Trinity. He states: “We acknowledge one God, who is uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable. He is grasped only by mind and intelligence, and surrounded by light, beauty, spirit, and indescribable power. By him the universe was created through his Word, was set in order, and is held together. (I say ‘his Word’), for we also think that God has a Son” (*Athen. Plea* 10). The Holy Spirit is referred to as “an effluence from God, flowing from him and returning like a ray of the sun” (*Ibid.*). Justin Martyr gives an interesting statement of the Trinity in saying the Son holds the second place and the prophetic Spirit the third rank (*1 Apolo. Just.* 13).

CHRISTOLOGY OF THE APOLOGISTS

As the Word, Christ has been sent forth from God to be rejected by His people but believed on by the Gentiles (*Diog.* 11). He is referred to as eternal in the statement, “This Word, Who was from the beginning . . . Who is eternal” (*Diog.* 11). Although Athenagoras describes Christ as “the first offspring of the Father,” he nonetheless denies the Son was created. He says, “since God is eternal mind, he had his Word within himself from the beginning, being eternally wise” (*Athen.* 10; cf. *1 Apol. Just.* 21). Christ is further described as the Son of God but also as God’s “Word in idea and in actuality . . . the Son of God is the mind and Word of the Father” (*Athen.* 10).

In His work, Christ is presented as “a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the guileless for the evil, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal” (*Diog.* 9). Through One Righteous Man people are justified (*Diog.* 9). The language of Romans 5 and 1 Peter 3:18 are clearly in view.

ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE APOLOGISTS

Justin Martyr suggests Isaiah 1:16-20 refers to Christian baptism, apparently suggesting that this rite produces the new birth (*I Apol. Just.* 61). Justin also indicates the Eucharist is only for believers and states that the “food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus” (66). The seeds of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation are noticeable in this statement.

Ancient Perversions

RELATING TO MOSAIC LAW

It is readily understood how Jewish converts to Christianity would still cling to the Mosaic law, because this was even a problem with New Testament personalities like Peter. It was also the problem the church dealt with in Acts 15. Early in church history there were Jewish Christian sects that taught it was essential to adhere to the law for salvation.²⁸⁻⁵ The *Nazarenes* strictly observed the Mosaic law, enforcing the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary laws, although they did not impose it on Gentiles. They acknowledged the virgin birth and deity of Jesus, recognizing His teachings as superior to Moses and the prophets. The Nazarenes used only the Hebrew edition of Matthew’s gospel, but at the same time they recognized Paul’s apostleship. The *Ebionites* denied the virgin birth and deity of Christ, teaching that He was the natural son of Mary and Joseph and as such, just a man, howbeit, a prophet. Paul’s apostleship was rejected; they considered him an apostate from the law. The *Elkesaites* claimed an angel had given a book to Elkesai that taught that Christ was an angel born of human parents. Rejecting Christ’s virgin birth, they taught He was the highest archangel. Insisting the law was still in force, they taught the necessity of Sabbath-keeping and circumcision. The epistles to the Colossians and First Timothy may refer to this heresy.

RELATING TO GNOSTIC PHILOSOPHY

The name *gnosticism* comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge,” and stresses the character of this heresy. Gnosticism was a philosophical system built upon Greek philosophy that stressed matter was evil but spirit was good. This being the case, God could not have created the material world. In their philosophical system, therefore, the *Gnostics* constructed a series of emanations or aeons, beginning with the highest God who was entirely spirit. One of the intermediate beings in the chain was a demiurge, the God of the Old Testament whom they disliked. This demiurge “had enough of spirit in him to have creative power and enough of matter to create the material world.”²⁸⁻⁶

This philosophical system also affected the Gnostics’ view of Jesus. There were two differing views: one view was that because matter was evil, Jesus could not have actually come in human form; He only appeared in human form and only appeared to suffer. The other view suggested that the divine Logos came upon the human Jesus and departed prior to the

crucifixion. Salvation was also philosophical—it was knowing the truth, which was imparted only to the esoteric (those who are specially initiated). Sin and evil were associated with ignorance or lack of knowledge. A modern form of gnosticism is Christian Science.

RELATING TO MARCION’S CANON

Marcion, a man of great wealth, came to Rome about A.D. 139 and there attempted to influence the church. When he was unsuccessful he organized his own church with its peculiar doctrines. He followed some aspects of gnosticism but rejected its philosophical emphases. Marcion believed the book of Galatians was the foundational truth of the gospel, which had been corrupted by mingling the gospel with law. Hence, Marcion rejected all Scripture except ten of Paul’s epistles and an edited version of Luke. He distinguished between the Creator God of the Old Testament, who had given the Old Testament law and whom Marcion considered evil, and the God of the New Testament, who revealed Himself in Christ. Christ, however, was not the Messiah of the Old Testament, nor did He come in a physical body, but He revealed the merciful God of the New Testament. This was in opposition to the Old Testament God whom Jesus rejected through His opposition to the law. For this reason the Jews crucified Jesus. He was not harmed, however, because He did not have a real body. Marcion proclaimed a salvation by faith, in contrast to the salvation through knowledge.

Marcion actually aided the church in that it was forced to determine the true canon of Scripture because of Marcion’s selective canon.

RELATING TO MONTANIST TEACHING

In contrast to Gnosticism there arose the strict, ascetic teaching of Montanus of Phrygia in Asia Minor. At his baptism Montanus spoke in tongues, declaring that the age of the Holy Spirit had come and that the end of the world was near. The New Jerusalem was soon to come down out of heaven and inaugurate the millennial age. He and his disciples were the last prophets, bringing the revelation of God to the world. Two women, as his disciples, also were known as prophets giving new revelation. Montanus found refuge in the writings of John and taught that he (Montanus) was the mouthpiece through whom the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, was revealing Himself to the world. While being generally orthodox in his doctrine, Montanus taught “that the Holy Spirit continued to speak through prophets, and among these it included women.”²⁸⁻⁷ Because it was the end of the age, the gifts of the Spirit were being manifested.

Montanus emphasized strict moral requirements of his followers and for that reason found a considerable following in Asia Minor. He emphasized fasting and dieting, prohibited a second marriage after the death of a mate, and encouraged celibacy as well as martyrdom.

Although the Council of Constantinople condemned Montanism in A.D. 381, the teaching enjoyed considerable popularity, even converting Tertullian to its teaching.

Canonization and Creeds

RULE OF FAITH

With the advent of heretical groups and teachers, particularly Marcion, it became necessary to determine what was true doctrine and which books were inspired Scripture and which were not. Prior to the recognition of the New Testament canon the early Christians were forced to develop a “rule of faith” (Lat. *regula fidei*) to determine true doctrine and recognize and reject false doctrine. This was the earliest form of the Apostles’ Creed. The earliest form of the Rule of Faith was the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, which confessed a triune God. The Roman symbol was probably an elaboration of the baptismal formula.

A brief statement of faith called the Old Roman Form, believed to have its origin with the apostles and brought to Rome by Peter, was in use by the middle of the second century A.D. The short form of the Old Roman Form reads: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His Only Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; the life everlasting.”²⁸⁻⁸

CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the initial stages of recognizing a New Testament canon, Paul’s letters were read in churches and recognized as authoritative. In opposition to Marcion and the Gnostics, Irenaeus recognized the four gospels. In approximately A.D. 175 the Muratorian Canon listed all New Testament books except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 1 John. Writing in A.D. 367, Athanasius listed all the books of the New Testament. Widespread agreement on these twenty-seven books followed.

APOSTLES’ CREED

The Apostles’ Creed, the oldest form appearing approximately A.D. 340, was a further endeavor to affirm the true doctrines of Scripture and repudiate the false teachings of Marcion and others. Legend has it that each of the apostles contributed an article to the creed. It may well have had its origin in a concise statement such as Matthew 28:19. Other foundational Scripture statements could be Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 15:4; and 1 Timothy 3:16.

The origin of the Apostles’ Creed was in apostolic times with the preaching and teaching of the apostles. The term *Rule of Faith* has reference to the Apostles’ Creed in its earliest form. The creed developed into two forms, one shorter, known as the Old Roman Form, and the longer creed, known as the Received Form. The Received Form reads: “I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.”²⁸⁻⁹ The earliest form of the expanded creed first appeared about A.D. 650 but was in existence at least by A.D. 460.

The purpose of the Apostles’ Creed was not to supplant Scripture but to corroborate the Scriptures and to protect the church from the infiltration of heretics. For example, the confession that God is Almighty and Maker of heaven and earth militates against Marcion’s concept of an evil Creator God; the confession that Jesus was born of a virgin and died excludes the Gnostic and Docetic beliefs that Jesus was merely a phantom.

Ancient Trinitarianism

A major problem in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity related to the Old Testament monotheistic belief. How could the church recognize the belief that God is one and yet acknowledge the deity of Christ? In its beginnings the church had no clear concept of the Trinity, in fact, Christ was variously explained as the mind of God—an impersonal Logos who became personal at the incarnation. Others pictured Him as eternal with the Father yet subordinate to the Father. There was even less understanding concerning the Person of the Holy Spirit. Some understood Him to be subordinate to both the Father and the Son.

MONARCHIANISM

The two issues facing the church concerning the Trinity were maintaining the unity of God on the one hand and affirming the deity of Christ on the other hand. The first heresy connected with the Trinitarian controversy was Monarchianism of which there were two forms. The less influential form was *dynamic monarchianism*, which stressed the unity of God at the expense of the person of Christ. This doctrine was advanced by Theodotus of Byzantium in A.D. 190 and later by Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch. He taught that the Logos was

consubstantial with the Father, but was not a distinct Person in the Godhead. He could be identified with God, because He existed in Him just as human reason exists in man. He was merely an impersonal power, present in all men, but particularly operative in the man Jesus. By penetrating the humanity of Jesus progressively, as it did that of no other man, this divine power gradually deified it. And because the man Jesus was thus deified, He is worthy of divine honour, though He cannot be regarded as God in the strict sense of the word.²⁸⁻¹⁰

It is clear that although this doctrinal view maintained the oneness of God, the distinctiveness of the three persons within the Godhead was lost.

A second form of monarchianism was *modalistic monarchianism*, the more popular of the two. It also sought to preserve the unity of God but additionally emphasized the deity of Christ. It was also called *patripassianism*, out of the belief that the Father was the one who became incarnate, suffered, and died. It was further known as *Sabellianism* after Sabellius, its proponent in the east.

The designation *modalistic* stressed the idea that God was one God who variously manifested Himself as Father, other times as the Son, and other times as the Holy Spirit. Even though modalistic monarchianists spoke of three persons, they nonetheless believed that there was but one essence of deity who variously manifested Himself in three different modes. Hence, the Father was born as the Son, the Father died on the cross and the Father also raised Himself from the dead. In fact, Praxeas, the probable originator of modalistic monarchianism, said the Father became His own Son.

ARIANISM

The most prominent name in the Trinitarian controversy is Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria. In opposition to modalistic monarchianism, Arius taught that only one who is called God is eternal and, in fact, is incomprehensible. To suggest that Christ is eternal would be to affirm two Gods. Arius taught that the Son had a beginning; there was a time when the Son did not exist. The Son was not of the “same substance” (Gk. *homoousios*) as the Father; the Son was created by the Father—also referred to (incorrectly) by Arius as being generated by the Father. Arius further taught that Christ was created prior to all other creation, He being the medium through which God later created. As such, Christ is the highest ranking of all created beings, however Christ is subject to change because He is not God.

Arius was opposed by the highly capable Athanasius of Alexandria. Athanasius stressed the oneness of God while maintaining three distinct Persons within the Godhead. He also propounded the eternal existence of the Son. Athanasius stands out in the history of the church as one of the brilliant defenders of orthodoxy.

COUNCIL OF NICEA

Because of the Arian controversy, the Council of Nicea met in A.D. 325 to deal with the problem. Three hundred bishops attended. The council rejected Arianism and any concessions to Arius and, with the approval of the emperor, adopted the following creed.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [*ousias*] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [*homoousion*] with the Father, through whom all things came to be, those things that are in heaven and those things that are on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and was made man, suffered, rose the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

The designation *homoousion* stressed that Christ is not merely like the Father but He is of the identical substance as the Father. The terms “God from God” and “true God from true God” further stressed the deity of Christ. At the same time “begotten, not made” and “came down” stressed His eternity.

Following the council of Nicea controversy continued, with the center of controversy revolving around the term *homoousian*, a term to which many objected. The controversy shifted

back and forth, with both Arius and Athanasius being banished at different times. The West favored Athanasius's view, whereas the East wanted a modified statement. In A.D. 381 Emperor Theodosius convened the Council of Constantinople and accepted the Nicene Creed, reaffirming the *homoousian* clause.

COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Good as it was, the Nicene Creed only affirmed "We believe in the Holy Ghost." There was no clear doctrinal formulation concerning the Person of the Holy Spirit. Arius, meanwhile, taught that the Holy Spirit was the first creation of the Son. Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople, taught that the Holy Spirit was a creature, like angels, subordinate to the Son. Athanasius emphasized that the Holy Spirit was also of the same substance (*homoousian*) as the Son and the Father. It was not until the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381, however, that the matter was settled. The council adopted the following statement: "We believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets." The statement emphasized that the Holy Spirit was not subordinate to the Son nor the Father but was of the same substance as Father and Son.

Ancient Christology

BACKGROUND

The Trinitarian controversy was clearly also a Christological controversy. The discussion involved not only the true deity and genuine humanity of Christ, but also the relationship of His two natures. The pendulum swung back and forth: the Docetists denied Jesus' humanity; the Ebionites denied His deity; the Arians "reduced" His deity, while the Apollinarians "reduced" His humanity; the Nestorians denied the union of the two natures, while the Eutychians emphasized only one nature.

APOLLINARIANISM

Apollinaris (the Younger) was opposed to Arianism so that he taught an opposite extreme, which also proved heretical. Apollinaris taught "that the divine pre-existent Logos took the place of the 'spirit' in the man Jesus, so that Jesus had a human body and a human 'soul' but not a human 'spirit.' He held also that Christ had a body, but that the body was somehow so sublimated as to be scarcely a human body . . . Apollinaris reduced the human nature of Christ to something less than human."²⁸⁻¹¹ Apollinaris believed the spirit of man was the seat of sin; therefore, to remove any possibility of sin from Christ, Apollinaris felt he had to deny the humanity of Jesus' spirit.

The problem with Apollinaris's view was that while retaining the deity of Christ, he denied the genuine humanity of Christ. In Apollinaris's teaching Jesus was less than man. In seeking

the unity of the person of Christ, Apollinaris denied Jesus' humanity. Apollinaris was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381.

NESTORIANISM

Nestorius disliked the Chalcedon statement describing Mary as "mother of God." Although the statement also affirmed "as to his humanity," Nestorius resisted this statement that led to the worship of Mary. Instead of acknowledging two natures in one Person concerning Christ, Nestorius "denied the real union between the divine and the human natures in Christ . . . (and) virtually held to two natures and two persons."²⁸⁻¹² Nestorius taught that while Christ suffered in His humanity, His deity was uninvolved (which was also the view of John of Damascus). The teaching was a denial of a real incarnation; instead of affirming Christ as God-man, He was viewed as two persons, God and man, with no union between them. Nestorius believed that because Mary was only the source of Jesus' humanity, He must be two distinct persons.

Nestorius sought to defend Christ's deity against Arianism and to resist Mariolotry. But he ultimately denied the unity of Christ. He was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431.

EUTYCHIANISM

In reaction to Nestorius, Eutyches (A.D. 380-456) founded the monophysite heresy, declaring that Christ had only one nature. "The divine nature was so modified and accommodated to the human nature that Christ was not really divine . . . At the same time the human nature was so modified and changed by assimilation to the divine nature that He was no longer genuinely human."²⁸⁻¹³

The result of the Eutychian teaching was that Christ was neither human nor divine; Eutychians created a new third nature. In their teaching, Christ had only one nature that was neither human nor divine.

This view was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, but the view continued in the Coptic church in Egypt.

A variation of this view was later propagated under a new designation, the monothelite view, suggesting Christ had only one will. This teaching was condemned at Constantinople in A.D. 680.

Ancient Anthropology

SIN AND GRACE

Pelagius. Pelagius, a British monk, was a man quite unlike Augustine, having led a quiet, austere life and knowing nothing of the spiritual conflicts that Augustine experienced.

Pelagius first propounded his doctrine of man and salvation in Rome about A.D. 400. In 410 he came to Africa where he met Augustine, with whom he disagreed sharply. The conflicting issues involved original sin and freedom of the will. Pelagius taught that man is born neutral with the ability and freedom to choose good or evil; man is not born with original sin. Because God creates each soul individually at birth, each person is born free and neutral as Adam, and each has the capacity for good or evil; in fact, a sinless life is possible. Adam's sin did not affect the human race; it affected only himself. Hence, any person can choose good or evil at any given moment, having the capacity for good as well as evil. Pelagius explained the problem of sin in the world as being due to "wrong education" or "bad example."²⁸⁻¹⁷ God's grace was helpful in overcoming evil in life, but it was unnecessary for salvation because man could choose that of his own ability. Because man is not born inherently evil, Pelagius also rejected the necessity of infant baptism for salvation; infant baptism was merely a dedicatory rite.

Augustine. Augustine was born in A.D. 354 in North Africa. Although he had a Christian mother, he led a wild life that was restless and without peace. In his search for peace he became a disciple of the Manichaeans and later studied Neo-Platonic philosophy. Under the influence of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, Augustine was introduced to Christianity, but he experienced the "terrible power of sin and his own inability to overcome his sinful desires."²⁸⁻¹⁸ Upon reading Romans 13:14, Augustine experienced release from his burdens and was converted. He immediately began a diligent study of Paul's epistles, wherein he had experienced the grace of God.

Undoubtedly the greatest theologian between Paul and Luther, Augustine formulated the following doctrines.²⁸⁻¹⁹

Man's original state prior to the Fall was one of natural perfection in which he enjoyed the image of God in wisdom, holiness, and immortality. Through the Fall man lost his privileged status with God. Love for God was exchanged with love for self; he passed into a state wherein he was unable not to sin (Lat. *non posse non peccare*). The will was entirely affected, now being inclined toward evil instead of neutral. Man was no longer free.

The fallen sinful nature and disposition was passed on to the entire human race. In the Augustinian doctrine of the imputation of sin, all humanity was "seminally present" in Adam. Therefore, when Adam sinned, each person of the entire human race to the end of time was judged guilty as having individually participated in the first sin. This was Augustine's understanding of Romans 5:12. Even infants were included in this depravity.

God's grace was absolutely essential in rescuing man from his state of total depravity. Because of the Fall, man's only freedom was freedom to sin; man was now incapable of doing right. To secure salvation, God extends His grace—which Augustine termed "irresistible grace." God's grace does not operate contrary to the nature of man, but "so changes the will that man voluntarily chooses that which is good. The will of man is renewed and thus restored to its true freedom. God can and does so operate on the will that man of his own free choice turns to virtue and holiness. In this way the grace of God becomes the source of all good in man."²⁸⁻²⁰ This

grace was even necessary for the ability to believe the gospel. “Grace is imparted to sinful man, not because he believes, but in order that he may believe; for faith itself is the gift of God.”²⁸⁻²¹

Conclusion. The distinction between Pelagius and Augustine was sharp. Pelagius believed man was born neutral, without a depraved will and without an inherent tendency toward evil. He believed man had the ability to choose to serve God without any need of God’s grace. Augustine believed Adam’s fall had affected the entire human race so that man was thoroughly corrupt, his will inclined toward evil. Only the intervention of God’s grace could save man; man was not free to choose good. Salvation was not man cooperating with God, but man was entirely dependent on God’s grace for salvation.²⁸⁻²²

Pelagius was ultimately accused of heresy at the Synod of Jerusalem, and Pelagianism was condemned as heresy in A.D. 416 at the Synods of Carthage and Mileve. The Council of Ephesus also condemned Pelagianism in A.D. 431.

Unfortunately semi-Pelagianism, which attempted to follow a mediating position, resulted. Followers of this new mediating theology stressed that both the grace of God and the free will of man were operative in salvation. Man could cooperate with God in salvation because his will was weakened but not fatally injured in the Fall. Semi-Pelagianism ultimately came to full fruition in the Roman Catholic church.

Pelagian and Augustinian Views of Sin		
Comparisons	Pelagius	Augustine
Effect of Fall	Only Adam affected	All humanity affected
Original sin	No	Yes
Hereditary sin	No	Yes
Humans at birth	Born neutral	Born with fallen nature
Man’s will	Free	Enslaved to sin
Fact of universal sin	Due to bad examples	Due to man’s innate sinfulness: man is “not able not to sin”
Turning to God in salvation	Is possible independent of God’s grace	Only possible through God’s grace

Ancient Soteriology

ATONEMENT AND SALVATION

The apostolic Fathers taught the substitutionary atonement of Christ and adhered to the statements and phraseology of Scripture; they did not elaborate on the theme and provide a further explanation of the atonement. It is noteworthy, however, to consider their statements on the atonement. Clement refers to the blood of Christ as being precious to the Father “because being shed for our salvation it won for the whole world the grace of repentance” (*1 Cor.* 7). This statement seems to imply that man makes a saving contribution to his own salvation (“the grace of repentance” as distinct from what the blood achieved); it also implies unlimited atonement (“for the whole world”). Clement also refers to the blood of Christ providing redemption for all who believe (*1 Cor.* 12). Ignatius makes a similar statement (*Smyrn.* 6). Other similar statements indicate the concept of the blood of Christ was prominent for salvation. Polycarp refers to substitutionary atonement in stating that Christ “took up our sins in His own body upon the tree” (*Phil.* 8).

Athanasius taught Christ’s substitutionary atonement as satisfying not the holiness or justice of God but rather the truth of God. Augustine taught that the death of Christ assuaged the wrath of God and reconciled man to God; however, Augustine’s teaching on the atonement is not well formulated.

APPLICATION OF SALVATION

While the apostolic Fathers recognized the importance of the death of Christ in procuring salvation, they nonetheless stressed works as a part of salvation. Clement goes to great length in stressing the importance of obedience in salvation, citing Enoch, Noah, Abraham—even Lot. Rahab was saved “for her faith and hospitality” (*Clem. 1 Cor.* 12). Salvation is expressed in terms of a “path in holiness and righteousness” (48); baptism (*Clem. 2 Cor.* 6); doing the will of the Father, keeping the flesh pure, guarding the commandments of the Lord (8); loving one another (9); refusing evil lusts (16); and practicing righteousness (19). The cooperation of man with God in transacting salvation became increasingly prominent in the centuries that followed. The belief that baptism atones for sin became prominent and eventually so did the belief that the suffering of some Christians, such as martyrs, could atone for others.²⁸⁻²³

Men such as Pelagius deviated even further from the Scriptures, suggesting salvation could be attained by keeping the law. Gnostics taught salvation was attained through avoiding contamination with matter. Origen, the allegorist, taught that eventually all—even demons—would be saved, however, after undergoing educative punishment.²⁸⁻²⁴

Ancient Ecclesiology

BAPTISM

The *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* requires that a person be baptized in the name of the triune God; prior to baptism, the one baptizing and the one being baptized should fast (*Did.* 7).

Very early in the Christian church, prominence was given to the rite of baptism so that many, in effect, taught baptismal regeneration. Justin Martyr taught that, to obtain the remission of sins, the name of the Father should be invoked over the one being baptized (*I Apol.* 61). “After baptism, the Christian was supposed not to sin, and some sins, if indulged in after that rite had been administered, were regarded as unforgivable.”²⁸⁻²⁵ Although this concept was not as emphatic among the apostolic Fathers, it became increasingly so in the following centuries. Augustine, for instance, taught that original sin and sins committed before baptism were washed away through baptism.²⁸⁻²⁶ For that reason he advocated baptism for infants. Augustine nonetheless emphasized the need for repentance and faith as the conditions whereby baptism might be received by adults. Irenaeus and Origen both acknowledged the validity of infant baptism, but Tertullian opposed it.

The mode of baptism was not expressly taught by the apostolic Fathers; however, the *Didache* permits affusion as an alternate mode. The general practice in the early church, nonetheless, was immersion.

LORD’S SUPPER

In writing to the Ephesians, Ignatius identifies the Lord’s Supper as the “medicine of immortality and the antidote that we should not die but live for ever in Jesus Christ” (*Eph.* 20). The *Didache* gives instructions for observing the Lord’s Supper, with prescribed prayers designated for use both prior and following it. Baptism was also a qualification for participation (*Did.* 9, 10). Justin Martyr teaches that “the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus” (*I Apol.* 66). The beginnings of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation can be seen in this statement.

Early Christians observed the *agape* (Gk.) or love feast prior to the Lord’s Supper. This food was reckoned as a thank offering to God, blessed by the bishop and presented as a *thank offering* (Gk. *eucharist*) to God; hence, the meal came to be known as a thanksgiving or offering. With the advent of the priesthood, the priest assumed Christ’s place in offering Christ’s body and blood as a sacrifice for sins. The Roman Catholic Mass clearly has its beginnings in this ritual of the early church. Although recognizing the ordinance as a memorial, Augustine himself taught the elements became the body and blood of Christ.

Ancient Eschatology

Papias, who wrote about A.D. 130-140, provided a rather developed statement concerning the millennial kingdom. Irenaeus indicates Papias spoke of “the Kingdom, when the righteous shall rise from the dead and reign, when too creation renewed and freed from bondage shall produce a wealth of food of all kinds” (*Frag.* 14). Papias refers to the Lord teaching that “vines shall grow, each having ten thousand shoots . . . a grain of wheat shall produce ten thousand heads . . . grass shall produce in similar proportions, and all the animals, using these fruits which are products of the soil, shall become in their turn peaceable and harmonious, obedient to man in all subjection” (*Ibid.*). Photius indicates that Papias and Irenaeus both taught “that the kingdom of heaven will consist in enjoyment of certain material foods” (*Frag.* 17). These statements give quite a clear affirmation of a literal millennial kingdom.

Of the early writers, Irenaeus gives perhaps the most sophisticated statements concerning the millennial kingdom. He distinguishes between the resurrections, teaching that the righteous will rise first to receive a newly created order and to reign. Judgment follows the reign. Irenaeus bases this belief on the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3) (*Against Heresies* 32). He also speaks of a New Covenant in which the inheritance of the land would be renewed in which “new produce of the vine is drunk” (33). He teaches that the just would rise to reign in a created order made new and set free, producing an abundance of food (33). Irenaeus quotes Isaiah 11 and 65 in referring to the millennial age. Irenaeus’s use of Scripture appears considerably more sophisticated and systematized than that of his contemporaries.

George N. H. Peters identifies Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Apollinaris (as well as others) as second-century premillennialists.²⁸⁻²⁷ Amillennialism can be related to the allegorical school of interpretation in Alexandria, Egypt, and men like Clement, Origen, and Dionysius. Augustine was probably the first explicit amillennialist, teaching that the present age was a conflict between the church and the world. The reason for Augustine opting for amillennialism is noteworthy: he observed that Christians holding to a millennial view saw the kingdom in carnal terms. As a result, Augustine abandoned a literal millennial view.

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MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

The medieval period can be understood as existing from A.D. 590, when Gregory I was inaugurated as bishop of Rome, until 1517, when Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation. Gregory I was a serious student of Augustine and wrote prolifically, interpreting the doctrines of Augustine.

The era from A.D. 500-1500 is also often called the Dark Ages because of the corruption of the church during this period—a condition, in fact, that led to the Reformation under Martin Luther, who sought to cleanse the church and restore true doctrine to it.

Roman Catholic doctrine developed during the medieval period. In general, the church assumed a semi-Pelagian stance, depreciating the fall of man so that he was no longer considered spiritually dead but weakened; nonetheless, able to cooperate with God in salvation. Specifically, doctrines such as purgatory, prayers to Mary and the saints, sacrifice of the Mass, and transubstantiation were initiated during this period.

Medieval Controversies**ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY**

The term *iconoclastic* comes from the word *icon* (from the Greek *eikon*, “to resemble”), signifying a religious picture or image, and *klan* (Gk., meaning “to break”). Hence, an iconoclast was one who advocated the destruction of images. Toward the end of the third century people in the church began the use and adoration of images²⁹⁻¹, a practice that increased in the succeeding centuries. The Eastern branch of the church was particularly involved through the influence of heathen worship. The West also, however, became involved. Images and pictures of Mary, Christ, the apostles, and other saints were used increasingly to aid the illiterate people in their prayers. Although the church taught that the images were to be venerated but not worshiped, it is probable that the illiterate laypersons worshiped the images.

Basil the Great indicated that “the honor paid to the image passes on to the prototype”—an action that would surely encourage the use and worship of images. Proponents of images declared that “they beautify the Churches, awaken the memories of the past, and take the place of the Scriptures for the illiterate.”²⁹⁻² The issue climaxed in A.D. 726 when Emperor Leo forbade the use of images. Popes Gregory II and III, with John of Damascus, defended the use of images. John taught that images had sacramental value and dispensed grace. He also distinguished between worship of God and veneration of images. In A.D. 787, an ecumenical church council met in Nicea and approved the use of icons, stating that images of Christ and the

saints should receive “affection and respectful reverence.” Thereafter, image worship became an integral part of the church. In A.D. 843, the Eastern church abandoned the use of sculptured figures and confined its use of images to pictures.

FILIOQUE CONTROVERSY

The *filioque* (Gk., meaning “and Son”) controversy relates to the question, “Who sent the Holy Spirit?” Was it the Father or the Father *and the Son*? Historically, this seemingly non-consequential point has marked the difference between the Eastern and Western churches. The Greek (Eastern) church taught the “single procession” of the Holy Spirit—only the Father was involved in sending the Spirit. On the basis of John 15:26, and the fact that the Son is of the same essence as the Father, the Roman (Western) church taught the “double procession” of the Holy Spirit—both the Father and the Son were responsible for sending the Holy Spirit. At the Council of Toledo in A.D. 589 the phrase “and the Son” was added to the Nicene Creed. The Eastern church refused to accept the doctrine and this was ultimately the issue that permanently split the Eastern and Western churches in 1054.

PREDESTINATION CONTROVERSY

The Roman Catholic church had proceeded on a semi-Pelagian course that led a monk named Gottschalk, in the ninth century, to attempt to return the church to the Augustinian doctrine of predestination. Gottschalk vigorously defended Augustinian doctrine, emphasizing that God had determined all things through His eternal decree. Gottschalk rejected the notion of election based on mere foreknowledge of man’s spiritual responses. He taught a double predestination: an election to salvation for some and reprobation to eternal punishment for others. Others said that sin was not a part of God’s predestination; God only predestined punishment for sin. Therefore, election to damnation could not be a fact. Gottschalk also emphasized salvation by grace rather than works.

Gottschalk was severely opposed because his teaching on the way of salvation left no room for sacraments and good works—nor for other aspects of medieval church doctrine. In A.D. 848, at the Synod of Mainz, Gottschalk was condemned, scourged, and imprisoned for life. He died in 869 without recanting.

LORD’S SUPPER CONTROVERSY

In A.D. 831 Radbertus, a monk in the monastery of Corbie, France, wrote a treatise entitled “On the Body and Blood of the Lord,” in which he taught the doctrine of transubstantiation. Radbertus taught that when the priest uttered Christ’s words of the consecration (“This is my body . . . this is my blood”), a miracle took place: the bread and wine changed to the literal body and blood of Christ. Although the outward phenomena, including color, form, and taste of the physical elements, remained the same, inwardly a miracle took place. Radbertus based his belief on John 6 (“I am the bread of life . . . eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood”) and Christ’s upper room statements, interpreted as literal language. He said that the

value of this miracle, however, only applied to the believer who partook in faith; it was noneffective for the unbeliever.

This view was initially opposed but was officially adopted in the thirteenth century by the Roman Catholic church.

Medieval Scholasticism

Scholasticism is the term given to the monastic schools called *scholae* during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It was there that scholars came to study in order to defend and explain the faith from a rational point of view. They did not endeavor to uncover new truth but sought to defend the doctrines of the church through reason. “Theology was to be treated from a philosophical point of view rather than from a Biblical viewpoint.”²⁹⁻³

Scholasticism became prominent in large part because of the translation in the twelfth century of the works of Aristotle. Scholastics followed the deductive logic of Aristotle in their approach to understanding biblical truth. There were three forms of scholasticism. Realism, which followed Plato, taught that universal ideas exist apart from individual objects. Anselm and Bonaventura were prominent realists. Moderate realists, who followed Aristotle, taught that universal ideas such as truth and goodness have an objective existence but are not separate from their existence in individual things. Abelard and Thomas Aquinas (who was the greatest of the scholastics) were representative of this view. Nominalism, which was a reaction against realism, taught that ideas have no existence outside the mind. Occam represented this view. Nominalists denied anything outside of human experience, hence, they denied the Trinity. The concept of nominalism was seen in later centuries in empiricism and pragmatism.

Medieval Anthropology

ANSELM

Anselm (1033-1109) taught the doctrine of original sin but emphasized that original could also be called “natural” because it did not refer to the origin of the human race. It referred only to the condition of the individual as a result of the Fall. Because all human nature was representative in Adam and Eve, their sin affected all humanity; it was henceforth propagated with a corrupted nature. Children are also affected because they partake of human nature. They sinned in Adam and are therefore polluted with sin and stand guilty.

Anselm taught that true freedom was lost as a result of the fall but the “voluntary faculty” was not destroyed. Man retains his will; but Anselm distinguished between freedom—which he rejected—and voluntary ability—which he acknowledged. Anselm rejected the notion that man has freedom with the sense of indifference, to choose either right or wrong; man’s will is made for the purpose of choosing good.²⁹⁻⁴

THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas not only defined sin as something negative—the loss of original righteousness—but also something positive—the lust of the flesh. This sinful nature is propagated by the parents to their offspring. Aquinas taught that Adam’s sin was transferred to all humanity because of the unity of the human race. He declared, “All who are born of Adam may be considered as one man; thus men derived from Adam are members of one body.” The results of original sin are alienation of the human will from God, disorder of the powers of the soul, and liability to punishment.²⁹⁻⁵

The scholastics, with whom Aquinas was identified, recognized capital sins as pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. These they divided into mortal sins, which constituted a willful transgression of the law of God and which separated man from God; venial sins, however, were considered only “a deviation from God without sufficient reflection or full consent of the will. They may be atoned for by temporal punishments.”²⁹⁻⁶

SINLESSNESS OF MARY

Because of the growing prominence of Mary, the church taught that Mary was without sin. The debated question, however, was whether Mary was conceived without sin, or whether she, too, was stained by original sin but then made immaculate in her prenatal state.²⁹⁻⁷ Radbertus first taught that Mary remained sinless in the womb and entered the world without the stain of sin. When the doctrine of the immaculate conception was first presented in 1140 it was opposed by Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas, but the belief gradually gained acceptance and was declared faithful dogma in 1854.

CONCLUSION

During the medieval period, the Roman Catholic view of anthropology emerged—man originally possessed a righteousness that was supernaturally endowed; he was not morally neutral. As a result of the Fall, man lost his supernatural righteousness, but he did not lose his natural abilities. The result was not total depravity but rather moral neutrality out of which man had the ability to cooperate with God in salvation (semi-Pelagianism).

Medieval Soteriology

THE ATONEMENT

Anselm. Anselm taught that through sin man had robbed God of the honor that was due Him. God could elect either to punish sin or to provide satisfaction whereby His honor would be vindicated by providing the gift of His Son. He chose the latter and through His death Christ brought honor back to God. In turn Christ received a reward. He passes this on to sinners in the form of forgiveness.²⁹⁻⁸ (Further discussion of this viewpoint appears in the section on theories regarding the meaning of Christ’s atonement in chap. 24, “Soteriology: Doctrine of Salvation.”)

Abelard. In reaction to the Commercial Theory of Anselm, Abelard taught that God did not require the death of Christ to atone for sin. Instead, God revealed His love through the death of Christ. In Abelard's view, God freely pardons sinners because of His love revealed in Christ's death. His view was called the Moral Influence view.

Others. Bernard of Clairvaux rejected Abelard's theory stating that it was the blood of Christ, not His example, that procured believers' redemption. Peter Lombard combined the concepts of Anselm and Abelard, stating that Christ died for sinners. That death moves sinners to love God, and as a result they are released from sin.

Thomas Aquinas also reflected views of both Anselm and Abelard. He viewed Christ as the head of the human race who dispensed His perfection to the human race. Aquinas viewed Christ as "the teacher and pattern of the human race by His teachings, acts, and sufferings. These sufferings reveal more particularly the love of God and awaken a responsive love in the hearts of men."²⁹⁻⁹

Conclusion. The medieval age contributed little to a further awareness of the doctrine of the atonement.

GOD'S GRACE

Although the medieval church gave verbal assent to Augustine, the doctrinal teachings were moving it increasingly in a direction of semi-Pelagianism. It was the general view that man's will was not destroyed through the Fall; he could cooperate with God in salvation. In general, however, the scholastics acknowledged the need for grace in salvation although grace was variously defined. Thomas Aquinas taught that grace is essential for salvation. He indicated that it is impossible for man to turn from a state of guilt or sin to righteousness apart from God's grace.²⁹⁻¹⁰ However, Aquinas distinguished between "free grace" and "sanctifying grace."²⁹⁻¹¹ Included in free grace is knowledge (faith and understanding), demonstration (healing, miracles, predictive prophecy), and communication (tongues and interpretation). Sanctifying grace involves operative (prevenient) and cooperative (subsequent) grace. In cooperative grace Aquinas understood man to be cooperating with God in receiving God's grace.

Peter Lombard also distinguished between operating grace, which is wholly a work of God that enables man to turn to God in faith, and cooperating grace (which involves all subsequent grace), which requires man's cooperation with God for its reception. The inclination, even among the scholastics, was toward semi-Pelagianism.

FAITH AND WORKS

The scholastics categorized faith in two dimensions. *Fides informis* is a knowledge of church doctrine, while *fides informata* is the faith that produces works of love. It is only *fides informata* that results in salvation and justification. Moreover, religious life is centered not on faith, but on love and good works. That is because the scholastics' view of justification did not produce a new relationship with God but merely the capability for good works.²⁹⁻¹²

JUSTIFICATION

The scholastics taught that justification is effected not as a judicial act of God but as a cooperative venture in which God dispenses sanctifying grace to the individual. Simultaneously, the individual turns to God in contrition and faith in an act of free will. However, in scholastic teaching, justification does not include security of salvation; that is unattainable.

Medieval Ecclesiology

THE SACRAMENTS

There was a twofold interest in the sacraments in the medieval church: to present salvation to the individual in a tangible form and to tie the salvation of the individual to the church.²⁹⁻¹³ The sacraments thus became visible signs of the communication of grace to the individual.

The number of sacraments had not been determined; some authorities had advocated six, others seven, still others twelve. Peter the Lombard was the first to delineate seven sacraments: baptism, Lord's Supper, confirmation, extreme unction, penance, ordination, and marriage. These seven sacraments were officially acknowledged at the Council of Florence in 1439.

It becomes apparent that according to medieval theology salvation and sanctification are achieved through works rather than through the grace of God.

Spiritual Effects of Medieval Sacraments²⁹⁻¹⁴	
Sacrament	Effect
Baptism	Regeneration; confers spiritual life
Confirmation	Strengthens spiritual life
Eucharist	Nourishes spiritual life
Penance	Restores spiritual life if lost through sin
Extreme unction	Heals the soul; sometimes the body
Holy orders	Creates rulers of the church
Matrimony	God's blessing on family; children produced; heaven filled with the elect

THE PAPACY²⁹⁻¹⁵

During the scholastic period, and with the support of scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux, the papacy claimed spiritual and temporal supremacy over the entire world. This concept arose from the notion that Christ had given Peter authority over the other apostles, and that Peter had been the first bishop of Rome with the concomitant authority passing on to the future bishops of Rome.

Gratian taught that to disobey the pope is to disobey God. Thomas Aquinas taught that the pope, as bishop of Rome, is the supreme head who guarantees purity of morals and teaching in the church; the pope alone can teach what is to be believed. Pope Innocent III declared the pope to be the “vicar of Christ” on earth and was thereafter addressed as “holiness” or “most holy.” Innocent III also taught that Melchizedek is a type of the pope. Because the pope has the keys to the kingdom and the power to bind and loose, anyone who does not submit to the pope’s authority is declared a heretic. There is therefore no salvation outside the Roman Catholic church.

The pope’s supremacy also passed to the state. Innocent III declared that the Lord gave Peter the entire earth that he might rule over it. Hence, all civil authority should be subject to the pope. The pope has authority to depose rulers, receive tribute, give away territory, punish objectors, and annul a country’s legislation. Pope Gregory VII declared that he was accountable to God for the kingdoms of the world. In 1302 Pope Boniface VIII issued a papal bull stating that the pope has authority over two realms—he controls the spiritual sword as well as the temporal sword.

NATURE OF THE CHURCH

A concept identifying the church with the kingdom of God developed during the medieval period, deriving its support from two forged documents, the *Donation of Constantine* (written about the middle of the eighth century) and the *Decretals of Isidore* (written about the middle of the ninth century). The former was allegedly written by Constantine, willing his palace, the city of Rome, its districts, and the cities of Italy to the pope and his successors. All of life began to revolve around the church, and all that did not relate to the church was renounced and considered secular. But the church itself became secularized.²⁹⁻¹⁶ Because it was considered the kingdom of God, it became preoccupied with politics rather than the salvation of people.

In the Middle Ages the concept of the church developed the following elements.²⁹⁻¹⁷ (1) The visible nature of the church was emphasized; since Christ is visible in the incarnation, the church now continues Christ’s incarnation. The popes, as visible successors of Peter, possess absolute authority. (2) There is a distinction between the teaching church (all the clergy with the pope at the head) and the hearing church (the faithful who honor the clergy). (3) The church is made up of body (those professing the true faith) and soul (those united to Christ by supernatural gifts and graces). (4) The church distributes the graces of Christ through the agency of the clergy. (5) The church is “an institution of salvation, a saving ark.” It teaches the true faith, effects sanctification through the sacraments, and governs believers in accordance with ecclesiastical law.

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REFORMATION THEOLOGY

Reformation Roots

The Reformation marked a major turning point in the doctrinal development of the church. For the preceding one thousand years the authority of the church had developed continuously until the tradition of the Roman Catholic church and the authority of the papacy determined what the people were to believe. The Reformation changed all that.

There were a number of factors that sparked the Protestant Reformation. One was the political factor. Islam had conquered Constantinople in 1453, causing the downfall of the Eastern church. Islam moved westward, threatening the power of the papacy and also influencing the papacy through its literature, which flowed into Europe. Additionally, the creation of national states and free cities in Europe challenged the political authority of Rome. The nationalistic spirit that arose through strong local political leaders encouraged the support of the Reformers.

A second factor was educational, evoked by the Renaissance. The *Renaissance* (Fr., meaning “rebirth”) opened men’s minds to the study of classical literature in addition to the Bible. Christian humanists were at the forefront of this educational movement, particularly Erasmus, who produced a Greek edition of the New Testament. Erasmus’s work encouraged the study of the New Testament in the original language rather than in the Latin Vulgate. The advent of the printing press further enabled more people to study the Scriptures for themselves.

The Renaissance also brought an emphasis on the centrality of man, which, at least in some measure, coincided with the Reformers’ call to individual faith and salvation.

There was also a social and economic factor encouraging the Reformation. With the end of the Middle Ages came a surge of economic development through the markets produced by the cities and also the colonies. A new middle class emerged that resisted the flow of money to Rome.

Undoubtedly, the religious factor was very significant. Having access to the New Testament, the Reformers and Christian humanists discovered a discrepancy between the church in the New Testament and the practices of the church of Rome. There was corruption from the priesthood to the papacy in the Roman church; simony enabled men to buy and sell church offices. Through the sale of indulgences a person could pay for sins beforehand and be assured of the forgiveness of sins. It was this practice in particular that angered Martin Luther and ultimately led to his break with the Roman church.

Men like Luther brought a return to the authority of the Scriptures—the Bible alone was the final authority on what was to be believed and practiced. With the renewed emphasis on biblical authority and study of the Scriptures came a new awareness of the doctrine of justification by faith, as well as other historic Christian doctrines. Luther in Germany and Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland spread the teachings of Scripture from the pulpit and through voluminous writings. A new day had dawned. The knowledge of the Scriptures was again being propagated.

Reformation Leaders

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

Martin Luther, the catalyst of the Protestant Reformation, was born of peasant parentage in Eisleben, Saxony, in 1483. The foundation of his theological thinking perhaps came when he was confronted by the need of divine revelation while a student at the University of Erfurt. Luther entered a Roman Catholic monastery, having promised St. Anne he would become a monk after he was spared during a violent thunderstorm. However, during a trip to Rome, Luther became disillusioned with the Roman Catholic church as he saw its corruption. He returned to Wittenberg where he received the doctor of theology degree and subsequently taught the Bible. Through the study of the Bible, and particularly Romans 1:17, Luther came to a knowledge of justification by faith alone. This formed the foundation of his theology and opposition to the Catholic church. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg. These statements outlined his disagreements with the Catholic church. Luther stressed *sola scriptura*—the Scriptures alone are the authority for people—not the church and its councils.

Luther left an enormous theological legacy: he taught that only the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper were legitimate; he wrote prolifically, challenging the Roman church and establishing his own catechisms; he provided the church with some of the great hymns, such as "A Mighty Fortress"; he established an educational system, teaching the people to read the Bible.

JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)

John Calvin, the respected and influential theologian of the Reformation, was born in France in 1509. He began his studies at the University of Paris where he came under the influence of the humanists. Later, Calvin studied law at Orleans, with further studies at Bourges. In 1534 he identified himself with Protestantism and was forced to leave France. Calvin came to Basel, Switzerland, where at the young age of twenty-six he completed his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, an apologetic that defended Protestantism to the king of France. The work eventually underwent several revisions until it consisted of eighty chapters in four volumes.

After a brief interlude in Strasbourg, Calvin returned to Geneva, Switzerland, in 1541, to remain there the rest of his life. There, as pastor, Calvin spent his time preaching and lecturing daily. He also wrote commentaries on twenty-seven books of the Old Testament and on all the

New Testament books except Revelation. Calvin's authority in Geneva was both ecclesiastical and political, prosecuting (and sometimes executing) people for heresy. The burning of Servetus for anti-Trinitarian heresy is viewed today as a serious blight on Calvin's career. However, in Calvin's day, at Geneva and at other places also, leaders and heretics alike knew that Servetus's kind of teaching was more serious an offense than murder and would likely incur capital punishment. Calvin unsuccessfully struggled in various ways to spare Servetus but at last sadly concurred with the judgment against him.

Calvin was called the first scientific interpreter of the Bible. He built a theology on the sovereignty of God that directed the Reformed church in Europe and Scotland.

ULRICH ZWINGLI (1484-1531)

While Calvin ministered to the French-speaking population of Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli, born in 1484, served the German-speaking people of Switzerland. Zwingli studied at Berne, Vienna, and Basel, whereupon he entered the Roman Catholic priesthood from 1506-1518. It was during the latter days of this period that, while studying Erasmus's Greek New Testament, Zwingli was converted to Christ and to Reformation views. In 1519, while pastor of the great cathedral church in Zurich, Zwingli began both to preach expository sermons and to denounce Roman Catholic practices. In a public debate before the city council, Zwingli's views were adopted, causing the spread of Reformation theology and practice. Priests married, images were banned, the Mass abolished, and church property was confiscated for educational use.

Zwingli, adopting the memorial view of the Lord's Supper, caused Luther to break fellowship with him, even though they both agreed on salvation by faith. Zwingli was killed in 1531 in a war with a neighboring Roman Catholic canton (province). Zwingli also left his imprint on the Anabaptists, having adopted some views that appeared more radical than those of Luther or Calvin.

Reformation Bibliology

ACCORDING TO LUTHER

For Martin Luther, the Bible was the only infallible authority regarding faith and salvation. In coming to this view, Luther rejected the authority of the pope, the church councils, indulgences, and the Roman Catholic sacraments. Luther declared, "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel." Moreover, the Scriptures were authoritative because they were the witness of the Holy Spirit. Luther referred to the Scriptures as "the Book given by God, the Holy Spirit, to his church" and in the preface of his commentary on Genesis he referred to Genesis as "Scripture of the Holy Spirit."³⁰⁻¹

In Scripture Luther was concerned with what pointed to Christ. Therefore, the book of James was termed a "strawy epistle," whereas he placed a preeminence on Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians because they were pure gospel and provided instruction about Christ. Luther also

questioned the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes and believed Esther should not be included in the Old Testament canon.

Luther provided helpful principles for the interpretation of Scripture. (1) The illumination of the Holy Spirit and not simply the letter of the law was important. (2) The historical circumstances were essential. (3) A distinction was to be recognized between the Old Testament, which was law, and the New Testament, which was gospel. (4) Scripture had one unifying element—Christ. (5) Literal interpretation was important; allegorical interpretation was “monkey tricks.”³⁰⁻²

ACCORDING TO ZWINGLI

Ulrich Zwingli acknowledged the infallibility of the Scriptures, terming them “the certainty of power,” meaning “the certainty that the Word will do what it says.”³⁰⁻³ He was converted through reading Erasmus’s Greek New Testament, whereupon he disavowed the authority of the Roman Catholic church. Scripture alone was authoritative in matters of salvation.

Zwingli devoted himself to serious study of the Scriptures. After recognizing their authority, he began preaching exegetical sermons, beginning in Matthew. “His work as a reformer rested also on the principle . . . that all disputed matters must be decided by the Word of God. Zwingli always attempted to base his actions on biblical teaching and to meet opponents, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Anabaptist, with biblical arguments. No less than Luther, he wanted a theology and a church of the Word.”³⁰⁻⁴

An important thesis of Zwingli was the clarity of the Word of God and the ability of the common person to understand it. Zwingli declared that the Bible “is perfect in itself, and revealed for the welfare of man.” Hence, there is no need for an ecclesiastical person, be it pope, priest, or church council, to interpret the Word of God. That is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Scriptures could be interpreted when approached in humility, prayer, and without prejudice. Amid these conditions, the Holy Spirit would enlighten the reader concerning the meaning.

ACCORDING TO CALVIN

John Calvin affirmed the Bible, not the church, as the final authority in religious matters. It was seen as the binding authority upon all people at all times. His adherence to inspiration was affirmed when he stated that it was the duty of people to accept “without any exception all that is delivered in the sacred Scriptures.”

Calvin has been referred to as the “king of commentators,” “the greatest exegete of the sixteenth century,” and the “creator of genuine exegesis.”³⁰⁻⁵ Others have referred to Calvin as the first of the scientific interpreters. Calvin produced sound exegetical commentaries on nearly all the books of Scripture, as well as an exposition of his theology in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He enunciated the following important principles for biblical

interpretation.³⁰⁻⁶ (1) The illumination of the Holy Spirit is necessary to prepare the interpreter of Scripture. (2) Allegorical interpretation is satanic, leading people away from the truth of Scripture, and therefore is to be rejected. (3) Scripture interprets Scripture. This involved a number of things for Calvin. It meant literal interpretation; it meant listening to Scripture and letting the author say what he will; it meant a study of the grammar of Scripture—meaning of words, the context, and comparing Scripture with Scripture on common subjects.

Reformation Christology

Calvin and Zwingli followed the orthodox view of Christ—He is one Person with two distinct natures, with no intermingling of the two natures. In this, however, Luther took a different view. He held to a real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, teaching that the human nature of Christ takes on certain attributes of the divine nature, such as omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence.

The problem with this view is that it fails to maintain a proper distinction of the two natures of Christ.

Reformation Anthropology

VIEW OF THE REFORMERS

Luther and Calvin were in general agreement regarding the total depravity of man—his utter inability by himself to effect his own salvation. Both also acknowledged that because of man's total depravity the grace of God is necessary to redeem fallen man. Zwingli was also in agreement with this. Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Calvin's successor in Geneva, taught that Adam was the federal head of the human race, therefore, when Adam sinned as humanity's representative, the entire human race fell and became polluted. Henceforth, every child born into the world has been born in a depraved condition.

Because of man's condition of total depravity, Calvin disavowed the idea of a free will; that was forfeited through the Fall. He taught that the will is bound, unable to move in any direction except toward evil.³⁰⁻⁷ Yet Calvin taught that man is held responsible for his sin because he sins out of his own will and not by any outward compulsion. Moreover, although man's reason is impaired, man can discern between good and evil, therefore man is responsible for "not willing the good but the bad."³⁰⁻⁸

The corollary doctrine of total depravity is predestination, which Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli all affirmed. Because man was unable to make a positive move toward God as a result of his depravity, it was necessary for God to predestine certain ones to salvation.

SOCINIAN VIEW

Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) followed Pelagian views in denying man's depravity. Socinus taught that man was not created in the image of God in the sense of moral perfection, but only in achieving dominion over lower creation.³⁰⁻⁹ Although Adam sinned, his sin did not have adverse effects on his posterity because man's moral nature is transmitted intact to his posterity.³⁰⁻¹⁰ People sin today, not because of indwelling hereditary sin, but because of bad examples. On the contrary, Socinus taught that all people are born with Adam's nature prior to the Fall and that people have the ability to avoid sinning.

ARMINIAN VIEW

Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) was at first a strict Calvinist, having studied under Beza at Geneva. In a debate he felt his opponent had stronger arguments than he had and he changed his view, advocating universal grace and freedom of the will. His position was basically that of semi-Pelagianism in which he denied the doctrine of original sin, disputing the idea that the guilt of Adam's sin was imputed to his descendants. He suggested that only the pollution of Adam's sin was passed on to succeeding generations, but this pollution is only a weakness, it does not bring a person under the sentence of condemnation. Rather, it renders him incapable of attaining eternal life by his own effort. The fall of man did not or does not render man incapable of making an initial, positive move toward God.³⁰⁻¹¹ This is achieved through God dispensing prevenient grace to all people to offset the effects of inherited depravity, thereby making man capable of cooperating with God in salvation.

Reformation Soteriology

PREDESTINATION

Calvin taught the doctrine of salvation by grace, which salvation is rooted in the eternal decree of God. Because God is sovereign, all events that transpire have been ordained by Him; hence, Calvin also taught the doctrine of double predestination. He declared, "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself the destiny of every man. For they are not all created in the same condition, but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to death." The doctrine of predestination involves election to salvation and reprobation to eternal condemnation. Calvin emphasized the necessity of both. While election to salvation is entirely of God's grace, reprobation is just because it is due to sin and guilt.³⁰⁻¹²

Luther also taught the necessity of the doctrine of predestination, basing it on man's depravity and inability; Zwingli based his belief in predestination on the providence of God.³⁰⁻¹³

ATONEMENT

View of the Reformers. Although both Protestants and Roman Catholics recognized the value of Christ's atonement, the Roman Catholic church followed the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, whereas the Reformers, in general, followed Anselm's view of the atonement. Anselm, however, taught that God had been robbed of His honor by man's sin and Christ died to satisfy the honor of God. The Reformers taught that Christ died to satisfy the justice of God. Christ bore upon Himself the punishment due sin and thereby satisfied the justice of God. This work of Christ can be appropriated only by faith, which unites the believer to Christ; the believer thereby has Christ's righteousness imputed to him. Luther said Christ "has redeemed me with His precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom." Calvin taught that Christ's death was a particular atonement—He died only for the elect.

Socinian view. Socinus repudiated the idea of the justice of God necessitating the death of Christ. He taught that God could pardon sinners at will—without the atonement of Christ. God pardons sinners on the basis of His mercy, not because of the death of Christ. All that God requires of the sinner is repentance and the desire to obey the law of God. Socinus taught that Christ's death was an example of obedience that should inspire others.

Socinus's view is seen historically as Pelagianism and more recently as Unitarianism.

Grotian view. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) reacted against the Socinian teaching. In teaching the governmental theory, however, Grotius was at variance with the Reformers. Grotius insisted it was unnecessary for God to demand full payment for the violation of sin; rather, Christ's death was a token payment to God, who, in accepting Christ's death as a token payment, set aside the requirements of the law.

The New Testament teaches that Christ's death in itself did satisfy the requirements of the law. Grotius was clearly wrong.

Arminian view. Arminian theology was formed primarily by Curcellaeus and Limborch, who wrote to correct the errors of Socinianism. They viewed the death of Christ as analogous to Old Testament sacrificial offerings in which the death of the animal had as its purpose to deliver the guilty from punishment. Although the death of Christ was a sacrifice, a sacrifice was not payment of the debt nor was it satisfaction of justice for sin.³⁰⁻¹⁴ In the analogy of the Old Testament sacrificial offering, the Old Testament worshiper who fulfilled the requirement of the law in offering an animal received remission of sin. Similarly, although Christ did not endure the exact punishment due sinners, God promised to pardon sinners on the basis of Christ's death. He did so by waiving the claims of justice. In His death Christ did not suffer what man deserved, but rather Christ's death was a substitute for a penalty.

The death of Christ in the Arminian view is not a strict equivalent for sin nor a substituted penalty, but a substitute for a penalty.³⁰⁻¹⁵ A substituted penalty demands equivalent worth; a substitute for a penalty can be of inferior worth. Similarities to Grotius's governmental view, in which Christ did not make the full payment for sin, are apparent in the Arminian view.

Reformation Views of the Atonement		
Person	Christ's Death	God's Work
Socinus	Unnecessary.	Pardons through His mercy, not through Christ's death.
Grotius	"Token payment"; full payment unnecessary.	Set aside requirements of the law.
Arminius	Not a strict equivalent for sin but a substitute for a penalty.	Pardons through Christ's death but sets aside claims of justice.
Luther	Substitutionary atonement for sin; appeased the wrath of God.	Imputes righteousness to the believer.
Calvin	Substitutionary atonement for sin; appeased the wrath of God.	Imputes righteousness to the believer.

FAITH AND WORKS

Lutheran view. The light of grace came to Martin Luther through reading Romans 1:17, sometime before 1517. Thereafter, in breaking with Roman Catholic doctrine, Luther came to a strong conviction that justification is by faith alone (Lat. *sola fide*). October 31, 1517, when Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, may be seen as the actual beginning of the Reformation, with the affirmation of salvation by grace through faith instead of the synergistic view of the Roman Catholic church. As a result, Luther rejected the Catholic doctrines of penance, indulgences, and any other form of human merit as necessary for salvation. Luther came to the conclusion that only God's grace is the foundation and basis for man's salvation and justification. He taught that it is God's grace alone that forgives sins and imputes the righteousness of Christ to the one who believes.

Works, Luther taught, have no part in salvation. Good works are the result or fruit of salvation but never a part of salvation. He distinguished between the "works of the law," which are done in a state of unbelief and provide no part of salvation, and the "works of faith," which are the proof of justification. These genuinely good works are found in the Ten Commandments, as Luther stated: "Thus we have the Ten Commandments, a compend of divine doctrine, as to what we are to do in order that our whole life may be pleasing to God, . . . outside of the Ten Commandments no work or thing can be good or pleasing to God."

Calvinist view. John Calvin was in general agreement with Luther on the subject of justification by faith. Calvin also emphasized justification as a forensic (legal) act, whereby God declares the believing sinner righteous, an act made possible by the free grace of God. In contrast to Luther, however, Calvin began his doctrine of salvation with God's election of the sinner. Calvin understood election to salvation as unconditional for "If election were dependent on man's faith and good works, grace would not be free, and in fact would cease to be grace."³⁰⁻¹⁶

In relation to James 2:20, Calvin taught that justification by works does not relate to imputed righteousness but rather, as Luther also taught, works that demonstrate the reality of justification. Thus Calvin taught a "double justification." "Primarily, justification is acceptance before God through the imputation of righteousness. This comes by faith alone. Secondarily and in consequence, however, justification is the declaration or manifestation before men of the righteousness of faith. This is justification by works."³⁰⁻¹⁷

Calvin's doctrine of salvation produced a milestone in that he related justification to sanctification. While maintaining the distinctiveness of each, he related both to the act of salvation. Christ does not justify someone whom He does not also sanctify. Justification, according to Calvin, becomes the motivation to sanctification. Although justification is free, sanctification becomes the believer's response of gratitude.³⁰⁻¹⁸ Calvin remarked: "No one can embrace the grace of the gospel, but he must depart from the error of his former life, enter into the right way, and devote all his attention to the exercise of repentance."

Arminian view. In contrast to Calvin's doctrine of unconditional election, Arminians taught conditional election; that is, God elects to salvation those whom He knows will believe in Christ. But provision has been made for all humanity, because Christ died for everyone, not simply the elect. Although man is incapable of responding to God because of sin, God dispenses prevenient grace to all people, which enables them freely to choose to believe in Christ or reject Christ. However, the believer is capable of resisting the Holy Spirit, falling back into the world, and losing his salvation. Perseverance is essential to maintain eternal life.

Reformation Ecclesiology

LUTHERAN VIEW

Church. Through his break with Roman Catholicism, Martin Luther rejected the infallibility of the church, as well as the concept of a unique priesthood. He taught instead the priesthood of all believers. This was an important recovery of biblical truth. Luther taught that the church is "an assemblage of all Christian believers on earth." This is the true church, encompassing all believers who are united to Christ in faith. Luther used the term *Christian* to emphasize the universality of the church. While maintaining there is but one church, Luther distinguished between the visible church, observable through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, and

the invisible church, observable by the provision of salvation through the Holy Spirit and by mystical fellowship with Christ.

Baptism. Luther taught that the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper are vehicles that communicate the grace of God. They are not dependent on the person's faith or worth, but are dependent on God's promise. Hence, Luther later taught that unbelievers profit from the sacraments.

Luther's concept of baptism did not differ markedly from the Roman Catholic view; he retained much of the Roman ceremony connected with the rite. Luther taught that baptism is necessary to salvation and, in fact, produces regeneration in the person. Luther emphasized that baptism is an agreement between God and man in which God promises to forgive the sins of the person and continue to provide His grace while the person promises God a life of penitent gratitude.³⁰⁻¹⁹ Concerning baptism Luther stated: "it is most solemnly commanded that we must be baptized or we cannot be saved. . . . the Sacrament by which we are first received into the Christian Church."

Luther also upheld infant baptism, teaching that although infants are unable to exercise faith, God, through His prevenient grace, works faith in the unconscious child. He based the baptism of infants on the command to baptize all nations (Matt. 28:19).

Lord's Supper. Luther rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the elements actually turn into the body and blood of Christ. Luther sharply disagreed with Zwingli, affirming the real presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper. His view was known as consubstantiation, in which he taught that even though the elements are not altered, Christ is bodily present, "in, with, and under" the elements.

REFORMED VIEW

Church. Even in their common departure from the Roman Catholic church, there was yet a marked difference between Lutherans and Reformed churches over what was to be retained or rejected. "Lutheranism rejected only those features of the Catholic Church which seemed to it expressly forbidden in the Scriptures. The Reformed Churches went further and retained from the Catholic Church only what they believed to have warrant in the Scriptures."³⁰⁻²⁰

Whereas Luther emphasized that the church is observable through the ordinances and that salvation occurs through the visible church, the Reformed believers held that salvation is possible outside the scope of the visible church. They taught the Holy Spirit could work and save people "when, where, and how He pleases."³⁰⁻²¹ The Reformed believers also expanded the explanation of the invisible church: it is universal because no one can see the church in all places and at all times; it will not be completed until the Lord's return; it is impossible always to distinguish believers from unbelievers.

Baptism. Reformed believers taught that the sacraments are to be administered only to believers as signs of their faith. God does, however, communicate His grace through the sacraments.

Reformed adherents held that, although baptism is to be administered only to believers, infants should be baptized to indicate their inclusion in the covenant. It is a symbol of assurance to the parents that the child is included in the covenant, and because children thus come under the covenant, they have a right to baptism.³⁰⁻²²

Lord's Supper. John Calvin rejected Luther's notion of the actual presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper, but he also rejected Zwingli's idea that it was only a memorial. Calvin taught that the ordinance is for believers only and that Christ is spiritually present, mediating grace to the believing participant. Although Calvin taught that the believer partakes of Christ at the Lord's Supper, it is not through the material elements, but spiritually by faith. The unbeliever who would partake of the elements does not benefit from the Lord's Supper as does the believer.

ANABAPTIST VIEW

Church. The Anabaptist view of the church differed from the Roman Catholic view most sharply of any of the Reformers. The very name, Anabaptist, means to baptize again. The Anabaptists stressed that the church is composed only of believers; hence, because infants are incapable of believing, they are not a part of the church. In distinction to Luther and Calvin, the Anabaptists also maintained a sharp distinction between church and state. A corollary doctrine that evolved was nonresistance—the prohibition concerning bearing arms in war. Some also insisted that Anabaptists are prohibited from serving on a police force or assuming judicial responsibilities.

Anabaptists adopted a simple way of life in which they endeavored to live by the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. Anabaptists were also committed to the purity of the church and diligently exercised church discipline (corporal punishment) against husbands who mistreated their wives. They also exercised church discipline for other reasons. It is a sad chapter in church history to note that not only Roman Catholics but also Lutherans and Calvinists persecuted Anabaptists to the point of death.³⁰⁻²³

Baptism. Anabaptists stressed that only believers are to be baptized; as a result they rejected infant baptism as invalid, necessitating the rebaptism of those who had become believers but who had received only infant baptism. In this the Anabaptists even departed from Zwingli, who advocated infant baptism. Baptism is to be administered only to those who consciously exhibit faith in Christ. The name "Anabaptist" (the prefix *ana* is Latin meaning "again") was derived from the adherents' demand for rebaptism of those who had been baptized as infants. Interestingly, the mode of baptism was not an issue with Anabaptists; some held to immersion while many held to affusion.

Lord's Supper. Luther's rupture with Zwingli over the issue of the Lord's Supper is well known. Whereas Luther accepted the presence of Christ surrounding the elements, and Reformed believers believed in the communication of grace in the elements, Zwingli taught that the Lord's Supper is simply a memorial commemorating the death of Christ. While Luther understood Christ's statement, "This is my body," to be literal language, Zwingli said that the bread simply symbolizes the body of Christ. Anabaptists followed the view of Zwingli regarding the Lord's Supper. Yet the Lord's Supper meant a great deal to the Anabaptists. This eating and drinking in brotherly fellowship gave them strength and encouragement and the certitude of belonging to a company of redeemed souls, and of being part of the "true body of Christ."³⁰⁻²⁴ The Lord's Supper was seen as confirming the inner unity of the believers and providing the horizontal element of spiritual sharing and togetherness.³⁰⁻²⁵

Reformers' Views on the Church and Ordinances			
View	Church	Baptism	Lord's Supper
Lutheran	All believers on earth constitute the one invisible church. Visible church observed through ministry of Word and sacraments.	Necessary for salvation. Effects salvation. Infant baptism necessary; God works faith in them.	"Consubstantiation" —Christ is bodily present "in, with, under" the elements.
Reformed	Universal church completed at Christ's return. Salvation possible outside the church.	Sign of believer's faith. Infant baptism necessary and sign of covenant.	Christ is spiritually present and mediates grace to participant.
Anabaptist	Church composed only of believers (infants not part of the church). Emphasized church purity through discipline.	Baptism only for believers. Infant baptism rejected.	Memorial only. Bread and cup symbolize Christ and His death. No grace is mediated.

Theology of the Reformers			
Doctrine	Luther	Calvin	Zwingli/ Anabaptists
Scripture	Only infallible authority for faith and salvation. Scriptures point to Christ.	Bible, not church, is final authority. First scientific interpreter.	Z: Infallible authority—must determine all practice. Scripture will be fulfilled. Common people can understand.
Predestination	All events ordained by God. Taught double predestination.	Predestination necessary because of man's depravity.	Predestination based on providence of God.
Christ	In Lord's Supper, human nature takes on His divine characteristics, such as omnipresence.	Orthodox view; one Person with two natures, with no intermingling.	Orthodox view; one Person with two natures, with no intermingling.
Man and sin	Man is depraved and unable to free himself. Grace necessary because of sin.	Man is depraved and unable to free himself. Grace necessary because of sin.	Man is depraved and unable to free himself. Grace necessary because of sin.
Atonement	Christ died a substitutionary death for all.	Christ died a substitutionary death for all.	Christ died a substitutionary death for all.
Salvation	Justification by faith alone, not works.	Justification by faith as legal act of God, imputing righteousness to the believer. Unconditional election is basis.	Christ died a substitutionary death; paid for original and actual sins. Dependent on eternal election.
Church	Priesthood of all believers, composed of all believers on earth.	Salvation is possible outside of church. Church is visible and invisible.	A: Church composed only of believers; infants not involved. Church and state separate. Believers are pacifists.
Baptism	Communicates grace. Produces forgiveness of sin; necessary for salvation. Infants baptized.	Only for believers, but children baptized to show they are in covenant.	Z: Infants baptized. A: Believers only; infant baptism rejected.
Lord's Supper	Christ present in real sense. Unbelievers may profit.	Communicates grace. Believer partakes of Christ through faith.	Z: Memorial only. Bread is symbol of Christ, not His literal body.

31

MODERN THEOLOGY

Although it might seem strange to call developments of the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries “modern,” from the perspective of comprehensive history that embraces millennia this caption does not seem so inappropriate. This is the sense for which the title of this chapter is given.

Because there is an obvious overlap between the doctrinal development in the modern church and contemporary (twentieth century) theology, this chapter will provide only a brief summary of the major theological views that surfaced following the Reformation. Many specific, distinctive theologies that developed in the church since the start of this century are discussed in greater detail in the chapters of Part 5 of this volume, “Contemporary Theology.”

Covenant Theology

Covenant theology was an outgrowth of the Reformation, particularly through the theological writings of men like Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, and Cocceius. Although these men did not teach what is today known as covenant theology, their theology laid the foundation for what would later be known as covenant theology. Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629), a Reformed theologian from Basel, and William Ames (1576-1633), a Puritan, both made important contributions to the development of covenant theology. Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), a pupil of Ames, was responsible for systematizing covenant theology.

Covenant theology involves two primary features: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works, although not mentioned specifically in the Old Testament, is implied. According to covenant theologians, God entered into a covenant with Adam prior to the Fall. In this covenant He promised eternal life for obedience during a probationary period and death if Adam disobeyed. In this test Adam stood as the federal head of all humanity; had he obeyed, he would have been confirmed in righteousness with the benefits passing to all humanity. Conversely, because he failed and fell, Adam’s act of disobedience was transmitted to all humanity—all are born in sin and under sin’s authority.

After the Fall God entered into another covenant with Adam (who was representing the human race) wherein God out of His abundant mercy promised eternal life to all who would believe in Jesus Christ. Essentially, the covenant of grace is based on the covenant of redemption, made in eternity past by the triune God in which the Father delegated the Son, who agreed to provide salvation for the world through His atoning death. The covenant of grace is understood as the application of the covenant of redemption and is thereby restricted to the elect.

Lutheran Theology

Following the establishment of Lutheranism in the sixteenth century, Lutheran theology was influenced by neo-Aristotelian thought, which had established a foothold in German universities. It was not at the expense of Lutheran doctrine, however.³¹⁻¹ A pietistic movement led by Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), German pastor and royal chaplain, reacted to the scholastic methodology and called the people to individual, spiritual experience. In the eighteenth century, Christian Wolff (1679-1754), German mathematician and philosopher, led Lutheran theology into rationalism, claiming that nothing should be acknowledged without proof. He attempted to harmonize faith and reason, but the consequence was that reason became the final authority.³¹⁻²

Following the Reformation, a distinctive Luther theology developed. The foundation of it was the principle of *sola Scriptura*—the Bible alone is the reliable authority for Christians. It was this truth that led Luther to break with the Roman Catholic church in 1517, and it continued to be the foundational truth that led Lutheran theology into the 1600s.

The second important doctrine that was at the heart of Lutheran theology following the Reformation period was the manner of justification. As Luther, so also his followers taught that justification is based on the meritorious death of Christ, which death alone atoned for sins. The Augsburg Confession of 1530 explained justification as “to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous, and to do so on account of someone else’s righteousness, namely, Christ’s.”

The third important Lutheran doctrine that developed was *sola fide*, faith alone is the means whereby a person may appropriate salvation and God’s justification.

Reformed Theology

The designation *Reformed* distinguishes Calvinistic doctrine from Lutheran or Anabaptist theology.³¹⁻³ The foundation of Reformed theology is found in John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, although there has been considerable diversity among the different adherents in the Reformed tradition. Some of the great catechisms and confessions of faith were the products of this era. The First Helvetic Confession (1536), composed by Johann Bullinger (1504-1575; Zwingli’s successor) and others, represented the Reformed faith of all the cantons in Switzerland.³¹⁻⁴ The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), also written by Bullinger and published in Latin, German, and French, had an even broader influence.³¹⁻⁵ The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)³¹⁻⁶ has had a wide influence down to the present day.

Calvin’s *Institutes* also gained a foothold in Britain among the Puritans and the independent Presbyterians. Even some Anabaptists, known as Particular Baptists to indicate their adherence to particular redemption, followed Reformed theology. The Westminster Confession of Faith³¹⁻⁷ became the doctrinal standard for British adherents of the Reformed faith.

Reformed theology also extended to the Netherlands, finding perhaps its greatest followers among the Dutch in more recent adherents such as Herman Bavinck (1895-1964) and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the latter the founder of the Free University of Amsterdam and also prime minister of Holland. Following in the Reformed tradition were other twentieth-century men such as James Orr in Scotland and Benjamin B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, and Cornelius Van Til in America.

The heart of Reformed theology may be summarized in The Canons of the Synod of Dort³¹⁻⁸ (1619), which responded to the Remonstrance—the doctrinal affirmation of James Arminius. Five positive statements that summarize Calvinism were set forth at the Synod of Dort: (1) total depravity of man; (2) unconditional election to salvation; (3) limited atonement (for the elect only); (4) irresistible grace; (5) perseverance of the saints.

Liberal Theology

The roots of liberal theology (also referred to as modernism) may be traced to Germany in the eighteenth century. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is normally considered the father of modern religious liberalism. Kant denied the proofs for the existence of God, maintaining that man could know God only through reason. This approach was the outcome of the Enlightenment, which viewed tradition and biblical authority with suspicion and acclaimed the merit of reason. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) brought a new feature to theology through his emphasis on “feeling” in religion. Schleiermacher attempted to make theology compatible with the modern mind. He taught that religion cannot be identified with creeds but rather with expressions of feeling, be they art, literature, or other expressions. Schleiermacher defined religions as “the feeling of absolute dependence.” Conversely, he identified sin as a selfish preoccupation with this world. George Hegel (1770-1831) carried liberal thought in another direction. Hegel brought the concept of evolution into history (and religion) when he taught that history is the meeting of opposing movements (thesis-antithesis) with the resultant blending of the two (synthesis). Many feel that it was Hegelian philosophy strongly influenced Ferdinand C. Baur (1792-1860) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) in their critical studies of the Bible. Higher criticism was thus born, in which the traditional views concerning the authors of the biblical books are questioned.

The tenets of liberal theology include the following.³¹⁻⁹ Emphasis on human reason and experience: religious beliefs must pass the tests of human reason and the findings of science; and Christianity must be adapted to the modern world. The Bible is not an infallible, authoritative book: it is a record of the experiences of others; and it has exemplary but not dogmatic value. There is no distinction between natural and supernatural: distinction between God and nature, man and animals, Christ and man is played down; the logical result of this view is pantheism.

Liberalism was an optimistic view of life that lost its influence as a result of World War I, and through the advent of a new approach to religious beliefs called Neo-orthodoxy.

Neo-Orthodox Theology

The term *neo-orthodoxy* means “new orthodoxy”; however, although it is new, it is not orthodox. Neo-orthodoxy was a reaction to the failure of liberalism. The advent of World War I demonstrated the theological error of liberalism with its denial of sin and its affirmation of the basic goodness of man. Karl Barth (1886-1968) sought to recover the truth when he abandoned his liberal training and gave himself to a serious study of the Scriptures. The publication of Barth’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* in 1919 is considered the beginning of neo-orthodoxy, the break from liberalism. Neo-orthodoxy, however, has a wide divergence of theological opinions.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Danish philosopher and theologian, brought an emphasis on experience to theology that was later developed by neo-orthodox theologians. Kierkegaard denounced the cold orthodoxy of his native people who gave verbal assent to creeds and were automatically considered Christians because they were members of the state church. Kierkegaard taught that life is not believing doctrines but involves experience and commitment. In contrast to the liberal emphasis on the immanence of God, Kierkegaard taught the transcendence of God and that it is difficult for man to know God. Man must take a “leap of faith” to discover God. Kierkegaard’s theology (also known as the “theology of despair”) marked the birth of existentialism, an emphasis on personal experience as the standard of reality.

Karl Barth followed Kierkegaard in acknowledging a transcendent God and emphasizing a religion of experience. Barth taught that God could not be known objectively because He is transcendent; He must be known subjectively through experience. (Many of Barth’s views will be discussed later in this chapter as well as in Part 5: Contemporary Theology.) Emil Brunner (1889-1966) was known for his emphasis on Christology—he denounced the liberal view of Christ and taught that a personal encounter is necessary for knowing God. From his teaching came the designation “crisis theology,” because God meets man in a crisis. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), as pastor in working-class areas of Detroit, concentrated on social ethics. Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) denied the reliability of the Bible, suggesting it had been encrusted with the views of the church rather than factual teaching about God and Christ. His thinking has impacted many theologians so that the viewpoint known as Bultmannism has become synonymous with a particular form of Neo-orthodoxy.

The major tenets of neo-orthodoxy are the following.³¹⁻¹⁰ The Bible is not revelation but a witness to revelation: it is not to be equated objectively with the Word of God; the revelation of God is not in words. Jesus Christ is the focal point of God’s revelation: man meets God in an experiential encounter with Jesus Christ. The events of Scripture, such as Christ’s resurrection, are termed *geschichte*, “story,” in contrast to *historie*, “history.” *Geschichte* refers to the transcendent, experiential truth of God that is unaffected by the truth or error that may characterize the earthbound particulars of *historie*. *Historie* is historically verifiable and, therefore, the lower level of Scripture in which errors can and have been discovered. *Geschichte* is historically unverifiable and, therefore, the higher level of Scripture in which errors cannot be discovered. It is unimportant, therefore, whether or not the stories of the Bible really took place

in space and time; the fact that many Bible accounts are “myths” or “sagas” does not affect their higher meaning and validity. God is transcendent, the “wholly other.” A sharp distinction exists between man and God; man can come to fellowship with God only through a “leap of faith.”

Conclusion

This then is historical theology. It is for contemporary Christians to embrace the strengths and avoid the errors of past theologians. This can be done only by evaluating all doctrines in the light of the Word of God. For this cause the Bible was given to be profitable (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Source

BOOK:

The Moody Handbook of Theology, a Systematic Theology book., 1989

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