**Church History Part 3 - Church Order and Persecution (By EHBC Church History Team - 0verseer: Pastor Ray Poutney)**

*People Use Statistics as a Drunk Uses a Lamppost — For Support Rather Than Illumination (attributed to Andrew Lang).*

It is important to recognise that God has built His Church, but that He has worked in partnership with human beings, with all their passions, emotions, faults, failings and nobility of spirit.

Additionally, the reader needs to appreciate that our recounting of Church History does not fulfill the aims of a historian. The historian attempts to explain why events happened after those events have surfaced and become known. He will attempt to confirm whether accounts recorded are as told or whether there were other factors not included in the retelling. For our purposes we are looking at this history with a broad view and homing in on aspects that pertain to the everyday Chrisrtian. Some readers may find the hyperlinks attached will give a more detailed analysis.

**Montanus**

Little is known of Montanus himself but it is estimated that the sect of Montanism arose about 156-157 AD in Phrygia (Central Turkey). It has been claimed that he was converted from the practise of the Cybelean (Sybilan) oracles, that he had two prophetess followers, Maximilla and Priscilla, who left their husbands to attend to him. It is claimed that he declared himself to be the Holy Spirit and that he said that the New Jerusalem was going to descend in Phrygia.

* Basically they claimed to receive new relevations and prophecies that were higher and more authoritative than those of the apostles.
* They would fall into frenzied and enraptued siezures.
* They encouraged speaking in tongues ***(something not done from circa 57 AD)*** of the whole assembly at the same time.
* They uttered 'prophecies' that were given in the first Person (as if God Himself was speaking).
* They imposed a strict moralistic lifestyle of holiness on their followers, as though works would benefit the saints in their salvation.
* They were an influence in the rise of the cult of martyrdom in that they declared that those that fled it were cowards.
* They refused to recognise the authority of other bishops in regard to their practises.

**Tests of a prophet:**

* His prophecy must come to pass - Deuteronomy 18:20-22.
* He must not be presumptuous that he is speaking the Word of God, or to add to a prophecy or remove any part of one - Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Revelation 22:19.
* He must not contradict the Word of God even if his prophecies come to pass - Deuteronomy 13:1-5
* He must have a renewed heart for God, exemplified in worship, obedience and a blameless lifestyle - 1 Samuel 10:5-6 (Samuel's prophecy over Saul after being anointed king).
* He must be not be overtaken by a spirit of jealousy, envy or any other evil or lying spirit - 1 Samuel 18:8-10; 1 Kings 22; 1 Timothy 4:1.
* His speech is to be plain in order to convict of sin - 2 Samuel 12:1-13; 1 Kings 22:24-25.
* He is to pull down and destroy that which exalts itself before God with the aim to rebuild and renew the worship of God - Jeremiah 1:10; Ezra 5:1-2 and 6:14.
* Although he is to be authoritative he must not be boastful, but is to have a spirit of meekness born out of his sense of unworthiness - Jeremiah 1:6; Isaiah 6:5, Exodus 3:11.
* He will not be overtaken in ecstatic behaviour but will be in control of his faculties - Numbers 24:1-2; 1 Corinthians 14:32 (NOTE: trances appear to be linked to visions. Since humans perceive 95% of the world around them through their eyes it seems likely that the outside world must be cut off in order for them to receive. See Numbers 24:4 and Acts 10:10).
* His prophecies are to be judged and tested by others who possess spiritual discernment - Nehemiah 6:12; 1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 John 4:1.
* They are to be orderly - 1 Corinthians 14:2-33; Galatians 5:22-23 (temperance means self-control).

The purpose of tongues is self-edification (1 Corinthians 14) but when interpretation is available it is equivalent to **prophesying** (as distinct from prophecy - to 'prophesy' is a verb and is exhaltation whereas 'prophecy' is a noun and is a prediction or what God has declared). Church is to be orderly.

**HOMEWORK: read 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 in one reading.**

**Cessationists** (those that believe the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased when the Bible became Canon) use 1 Corithians 13:8-10 for the basis of their argument. They say that the Canon is that which is perfect that is referred to in this passage. An alternative understanding would be that it is the return of the perfect Christ that will cause a cessation of the gifts. To take the passage in context we need to view chapters 12-14 as one discourse by the apostle Paul. Sandwiched between his teachings on the gifts and their use is his discourse on love. It can be argued that when God's people do the good works that glorify their Lord then the need for the gifts will diminish to a trickle. They will also quote 2nd century bishops as saying that the gifts are no longer evident in the Church, but there are indications that the necessity to emphasise their authority to maintain Church order that they denounced the use of them and threw the baby out with the bath water. There are also indications that they strayed towards legalism.

**Persecution of the early Church.**

The ten primitive persecutions as recognised by the Church during the rule of the following emporers:

**1) Nero (64-68 AD)** - He martyred the **aspostles Peter and Paul** in Rome c. 64 AD. A general fire that tore through the heart of Rome was blamed on Nero who wanted to build a new palace for himself. He in turn blamed it on the Christians. He is infamous for using live Christians as human torches at his parties.

**2) Domitian (81-96)**

**3) Trajan (98-117)** - Recent texts show that he localised persecution by magistrates, where impartiality was to be practiced.

**4) Marcus Aurelius (161-180)** - The bloodiest period of persecution, especially in Lyons and Vienne in Gaul. He overturned the edict of Trajan and allowed mob rule. The martyrdom of Polycarp (bishop of Smyrna).

**5) Septimus Severus (193-211)** - Forbade the proselytism (the process of conversion) of citizens to Judaism and Christianity.

**6) Maximinus (235-238)**

**7) Decius (249-251)** - Issued an edict compelling subjects to worship the throne with a published certificate verifying compliance. Non-compliance was punishable by torture, to obtain a recantation, and execution if one was not obtained. It is said that his aim was to get the common Christians to recant their faith (Apostasy) and the removal only of the Church leaders by execution through their expected defiance. The martyrdoms of the bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch.

**8) Valerian (253-260)** - Martyrdom of Cyprian (bishop of Carthage in North Africa - see Novatian v Cornelius below).

**9) Diocletian (284-305)** - The Great Persecution. He restructured the empire into 2 halves, each half under the control of an Augustus and a caesar under each of them. This was to have far reaching consequences for the Church in its future. He attempted to completely wipe out Christianity.

**10) Galerius (305-311)** - Diocletion abdicated and Galerius was promoted. He initially continued his predecessor's persecution but in 311 he issued an edict to cancel the persecution.

**Constantine** was victorious in his campaign and issed the Edict of Milan that decreed legal toleration for Christianity in 313.

**Reasons for Persecution**

The Pax Romana depended upon the traditional practices of idolatry. It worked by allowing localised subjects the freedom to worship their gods provided they also worshipped the Roman gods. This made the populus feel secure in that they were all praying for good things. Many Christians were seen as separatists by the common people and Roman authorities by not participating in pagan rites and traditions. Roman military officers that were converted to Christianity were in particular difficulty as they were expected to attend such rites. Failure to do so was punishisable by death.

It was the duty of Roman individuals to worship their gods (idols) but because the Christians refused to do so they were labelled as atheists. The Christian practice of worship was misunderstood and this led to a vicious cycle of suspicion when the Christians were forced to worship in secret. Their practices were considered to be cannibalistic and incestual orgies (the Agape/Love Feast/Communion/Eucharist/Lord's Supper and the Christian kiss of greeting respectively).

Christians were blamed for natural disasters and military defeats. The argument being that because they were atheists in subbornly refusing to offer sacrifices to the gods (idols) that the gods were angry with the people.

Early Christian preachings and teachings was also a factor in persecution - two in particular:

* the saints would reign with Christ at His return for a 1,000 years (pre-millenianism)
* that the pagans were doomed for destruction.

This lead to a general condemnatory dislike for the Christians.

The Christians defied common attitudes towards slavery, wealth and property. Slaves with Christian master were emanicapated and became brothers and sisters. They were treated as equals and many rose to positions of trust and authority within the Church. This practice, along with Christian attitudes towards the accumulation of wealth being likened to idolatry, made them appear to desire anarchy.

One source cites a perceived threat to established family life as also a factor. Many pagans thought that the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 was an admonition against mixed marriages (those between a believer and non-believer). This perception was augmented by the erroneous behaviour of some Christians. ***Some of those who found themselves within a mixed marriage, where their spouse did not convert, started divorce proceedings (contrary to Paul's teaching) presummably in their attempts to remain sancified, clean and holy.*** This could only be done with the approval of their local bishops. Many Christian children also refused to recognise their human fathers as such because Jesus taught us not to call any man father. Again this was erroneous as Jesus was speaking about wherein lies our spiritual authority for the atonement of sin. Mixed families were also divided over the burial rites of a loved one.

Some elements within the Church adopted the belief that only martyrs would gain entry to heaven. This resulted in many deliberately provoking the authorities so that they might receive their martyr's crown. Tertullian (Bishop of Carthage) wrote that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

The most important factor behind the persecutions was the Christians refusal to pledge their allegiance to Roman rule and authority. Because they would only respect the rule and authority of the heavenly Kingdom of God, and refused to participate in civil and national ceremonies, this behaviour was deemed to be treasonable disloyalty to the state. It was this factor that led to the latter persecutions (from Decius onwards) as the state attempted to wipe out Christianity.

**The Apostolic Fathers - guiders of the faith during times of persecution and heresy:**

**Clement, bishop of Rome** wrote the first book not to be included in the Canon c. 95 (1 Clement).

**The Didache** (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) was written about the same time as 1 Clement. Discovered in 1873 it deals mainly with church authority, moralism and liturgy.

**Ignatius, bishop of Antioch** - martyred c. 110-150. The first to interpret the apostles writings and to start forming theology. He also wrote about respecting church authority. He argued against the Gnostic teaching of **docetism.** The writings of both Clement and Ignatius are thought to be the catalysts for supremcy of the bishop, especially that of Rome.

**Polycarp (bishop of Smyrna)** martyred c. 155. He was tutored by the Apostle John and was held in the highest esteem after the apostle died. With the passing of John, Polycarp was the nearest thing that the Church had to an apostle and he was greatest authority on the teachings of them. However he is not known for writing anything of significant theology.

The Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas are books that are considered in this section but will not be dealt with under Church History.

Most of the Apostolic Fathers leaned towards legalism, demanding that believers must keep a strict moralistic lifestyle (as opposed to grace).

**Rise of the Apologists - defenders of the faith in the face of intellectual criticisms**

An example of a modern day apologist would be Alister MacGrath's book, The Dawkins Delusion? in response to Richard Dawkin's attacks on religion in his book, The God Delusion.

**Justin Martyr** c. 100-162 AD, wrote the book Compedium Against All Hereies c. 150. A copy of this book has never surfaced but it is referred to by later writers. In this book he countered the heresy of **Gnosticism.** He was born into a Greek family in Palestine. He studied Plato's philosophy and then became a Christian. His knowledge of philosophy led him to argue that in Plato's philosophy, the cosmic being and creator known as the **Logos**, was in fact Jesus Christ. He did this in order to win over philosophers, who thought that Christianity was only fit or the unclean, sick and poor. He was martyred in 162 and is named by this act.

**Irenaecus of Smyrna c. 120 AD**

He was tutored by the bishop Ploycarp in Smyrna. He was sent to Gaul (France) to be an elder amongst immigratants from Asia Minor. He settled in Lyon on the River Rhone. In 177 AD the emporer Marcus Aurelius unleashed a terrible persecution of Christians in the area. Irenaecus survived because he was travelling to Rome to contend with some heresies. He became bishop after returning to Lyon and mounted an assault against Gnosticism in his five volumes entitled **Against Heresies: A Refutation and Subversion of Knowledge Falsely So-Called.**

**Celsus -** was probably an influential Roman philosopher and orator. He wrote The True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians about 175-180. He had the ear of the emporer Marcus Aurelius and argued that Christian belief was contrary to logic and a monothesistic philosophy. In his view Christians were a superstitious lot (putting their trust in a God, or gods and 'bizarre' practices like eating the body of Jesus) instead of philosophy and logic. He pointed out the inconsistencies between the 'irrational' concept of the Trinity and that of monotheism. In a time when the worship of a pantheon, or many gods (idols) was beginning to be deemed as foolishness he claimed that they were really polytheists. He added that they refused to respect and worship the emporer.

**Athenagoras of Athens** and **Theophilus of Antioch** took the theology of Justin Martyr further to refute the accusations of Celsus and to try and placate the emporer.

**Origen of Alexandria** 184/5 - 253/4 AD, was the Apologist that eventually countered Celsus in his book **Against Celsus.**

**Novatian v Cornelius**

**Cyprian** c. 200 - 251, was tasked with formulating an answer to the question of whether those that capitulated under persecution could be allowed back into the Church. These persons were known as the lapsi, whereas those that survived persecution and torture were known as the confessors. He said that they could return to the Church if their local bishop forgave them and that they do penance (acts to redeem themselves). Cornelius was his protege but was opposed by Novatian that said that the lapsi could not be re-admitted. Note: the intitial seeds of what was to become Roman Catholic practices.

**Bibliography and Further study aids:**

**Montaus:**

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10521a.htm>

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Montanus-religious-leader>

**Persecution of the early Church:**

[Foxe's Book of Martyrs (Hendrickson Christian Classics)](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Foxes-Martyrs-Hendrickson-Christian-Classics-ebook/dp/B0058IOWNK/ref=dp_kinw_strp_1/275-4103588-4779438)

<http://www.ccel.org/f/foxe/martyrs/fox102.htm>

<http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-of-early-church>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-27/persecution-in-early-church-gallery-of-persecuting-emperors.html>

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<http://earlychurch.org.uk/persecution-russell.html>

<http://www.christianhistoryproject.org/to-the-decian-persecution/st-justin/christian-martyrs/>

**Speaking in tongues:**

<http://www.pentecostal-tongues-theology.org/Tongues_Edify.html>

<http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/tongues.html>

<http://bjorkbloggen.com/2011/11/07/speaking-in-tongues-can-edify-both-you-and-others-and-we-are-encouraged-to-use-them/>

**Praying in tongues:**

<http://www.gotquestions.org/praying-in-tongues.html>

**Bob's Bible Blog:** [https://robertmorrissite.wordpress.com](https://robertmorrissite.wordpress.comp/)

**NEXT WEEK: The rise of Imperial Christianity, the Confessors and Apostates, Heresies against the Trinity and the Creeds**, **Adoptionism, Appollinarism, Arianism, Saballianism and Modalism.**