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Historical Theology Survey
Saturday, 9am-4pm Section
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Report #1

Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers

100% read

Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*

100% read, 216 words written

Ignatius writes from “Smyrna by the Ephesians”. He is in prison writing to “the Church which presides in the place of the region of the Romans.” Ignatius’ testimony is extraordinary. In no way does he seek to avoid his martyrdom. Inherent in his testimony must be the knowledge of the Savior’s prophecy and teaching, since they persecuted Him, they will persecute the faithful; the student is not above the master, etc. I’m fascinated by his comment of being afraid of their love. He realizes that the best he can do at this time is attain martyrdom and not be saved from martyrdom. As for the terrible prospect of wild beasts, he is “the wheat of God”. He desires to die and loves nothing in the world, but loves only Christ. This work is a powerful exposition of the Biblical theme of warning against loving the world. Ignatius is not only assuring that his own faith and love is undivided to Christ – he quotes Matt. 16:26 “what profits a man...?” – but he is also inspiring the Christians in Rome: “Do not speak of Jesus Christ, and yet prefer this world to Him.” ***Theme: Pray that I may be martyred to the glory of Christ and remember this example that you may never prefer the world to Him.***

Ignatius, *Epistle to Polycarp*

100% read; 200 words written

This time the bishop of Antioch writes to the bishop of Smyrna, one-to-one. I am struck by the tenor as if Ignatius were Polycarp’s spiritual father, not necessarily a peer (co-worker). He is not at all harsh, but I would say quite bold in admonition. For example, “Ask for more understanding than that which thou [already] hast.” And “If thou lovest the good disciples only, thou hast no grace...” And later, “Be [still] more diligent than thou yet art.” Ignatius sees the opportunity (need?) to spur Polycarp on in faithfulness. One of the underlying themes seems to indicate that perhaps Polycarp is struggling with some who may be causing some kind of unrest within the church. Ignatius favorite analogy for faithfulness for Polycarp: “athlete”. Endure, endure, endure, but that is not all. There are some practical matters to attend to: widows, frequent assemblies, slaves, fleeing wicked arts, husbands and wives, and those who practice celibacy. The single most amazing reference is in regards baptism. What a high view of it! “Let your baptism

be to you as armour...” *Theme: Polycarp, be a faithful soldier, unmovable in Christ as you serve without bias and guide Christians to live out their faith.*

Justin Martyr, *First Apology*
100%; 738 words written

The second century apologist, Justin Martyr, writes to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius Caesar and his sons, Verissimus and Lucius, the Senate and the whole people of the Romans. This is clearly a true apology in that Justin is giving a defense not for his life only, but the lives of all unjustly persecuted Christians.

Ironically, the Christians are accused of being atheists. This absurdity is aptly refuted by Justin. How can this be when the confession and worship of Christ the Son of God is so apparent?

I see three broad and main strokes here. One is to approach the persecutors from the standpoint of what is well-accepted reason and philosophy. How can we live contrary to truth? The hallmarks of the Roman Empire would be violated to do so. What the Christians are doing is reasonable and even consistent with the most important philosophers known by the Romans. Ultimately, the God of the Christians is Himself the Logos, pure Word, perfect Reason, who became flesh.

This first point is effectively made through Justin’s invitation to the Emperor to go beyond the use of the name “Christian” and to take into consideration the actual lives of those who profess the Lord Jesus Christ. If one makes such a profession, but lives in an evil way, then do us all a favor and prosecute them. But, if you investigate true Christians you will find that they live as excellent people who ought be protected and defended.

Secondly, what makes the Christian religion stand out as superior, however, are the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Even Plato borrowed from Moses. Moses, the first prophet and the other Old Testament prophets pointed to Christ. The Greek “gods” are inferior shadows, flawed and incomplete depictions of the truth that was plainly prophesied by the prophets who were before the philosophers.

To give foundation to this second broad aspect, Justin minces no words: “And so, too, Plato, when he says, ‘The blame is his who chooses, and God is blameless,’ took this from the prophet Moses and uttered it. For Moses is more ancient than all the Greek writers.” As to the “gods” mentioned, they only hint at the superior and Christ is clearly superior “for the superior is revealed by His actions.” This superiority, however, is also seen in Christ’s followers...they are persecuted more than those who follow idols.

Thirdly, there is a coherent presentation of the Christian doctrine; a systematic that addresses so many details of the Christian faith. This full-orbed presentation shows the orderliness and coherence of the Christian religion. It is thoroughly consistent and thorough. It is reasonable and logical. It is ethical, moral and good. It possesses a superior quality.

An organic doctrine is put forth in many ways, but one way is that while Justin speaks of the atonement in his section on Christ predicted by Moses where he says, “cleansing by His blood those who believe in Him,” he goes on to depict present application in the Communion. Thus, he provides explanation of the how our salvation was won and how our salvation is distributed and given. There are other good examples of a thorough systematic. A refreshing facet is that his Christology ranges from preexistence through second coming.

Along the way, Justin Martyr offers wonderful examples of apologetics applied to given issues. Why not believe in the resurrection? If you consider what you were before you grew and matured, why not consider your body coming back from only a small part again? Or, why treat Christians as somehow threatening the empire when they follow Christ who advocated civil obedience? Or, again it is unreasonable to claim that Christ was merely another magician...what magician has the Hebrew prophecies about him?

Lastly, I am extremely impressed by Justin’s description of early worship. He literally outlines the divine service! He is bold in his language pertaining to baptism and eucharist. Through water there is regeneration and remission of sins. In the Sacrament there is reception of the flesh and blood of Jesus. These, however, serve no cheap grace as Justin Martyr describes a sober and serious sanctification in the lives of God’s holy people. ***Theme: Do not persecute Christians because they are atheists, but honor them because they are the finest and original theists who stand for truth and offer you the salvation through the Logos made flesh, Jesus Christ.***

Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*
100% read; 784 words written

Tertullian defends the doctrine of The Holy Trinity against Praxeas who appears to be propagating monarchianism, specifically as a patripassian. Tertullian does not hesitate to label Praxeas’s teaching “heresy,” and rightfully so as Praxeas has indeed through his teaching “put to flight the Paraclete, and...crucified the Father.” Tertullian establishes theological handles for the Biblical defense of Trinity and at the very end, even some ammunition for teaching the two natures of Christ.

First of all, Tertullian is making all along clear distinctions between the *trinity* and *unity*. In speaking of the trinity, he logically speaks of persons, identities and relations; in

speaking of unity, he speaks reasonably of being and substance. Thus, Tertullian shows logical distinctions such as, “Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three *Persons* – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however...not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect...”

Secondly, Tertullian proceeds by thoroughly explicating the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, especially through some very effective illustrations and then through a thorough presentation of the Scriptures themselves. Let us first take a look at the illustrations.

That the Father and the Son are two, distinct persons, Tertullian uses the illustration of human thought and consciousness. God reasons and thinks within Himself. This thought, reason or consciousness is called *logos*, also designated as “Word” or “Discourse.” Tertullian makes it very personal to our own experience: “Observe, then, that when you are silently conversing with yourself, this very process is carried on within you by your reason, which meets you with a word at every movement of your thought, at every impulse of your conception.” Now, both aspects – the one doing the reasoning and the reason itself – are both divine in God, or both human in us. In God, God who reasons is God and the reason itself is God. These are completely one and indivisible in being. And yet, there is distinction again, in relation. In putting it back on us – in the form of the illustration: “Thus, in a certain sense, the word is a second *person* within you, through which in thinking you utter speech, and through which also, (by reciprocity of process,) in uttering speech you generate thought.”

More illustrations come as Tertullian makes the strong point that it makes no sense that the Father is acting upon Himself. Instead, He is acting in relation to another person (namely His Son). So here, Tertullian offers these simple and yet profound illustrations: “For God sent forth the Word, as the Paraclete also declares, just as the root puts forth the tree, and the fountain the river, and the sun the ray.” These are brilliant because while they show distinction and relation, they cannot be substantively divided! Thus, Tertullian shows that the monarchy is undisturbed while guarding the state of economy in regards the three persons.

Then, Tertullian continues by getting into a through Biblical presentation. For example, He describes the invisibility of the Father in Scripture and the visibility of the Son and how these relate. He points out that “the Father can be taken to be the face of the Son, when He is His head...” Tertullian can say this because He later explains that the Son is always in the Father’s mind and thought, so the Son is the expression of the Father and to see Christ’s face is to see and hear the Father’s Word and expression. This is God visible and invisible, distinct and yet united.

Praxeas, however, tries to base his strange identification theory based on some key Johannine passages. For example, his classic text “I and my Father are one.” Tertullian, however, goes on to show that throughout John’s Gospel, Christ is constantly

distinguishing between Himself and the Father. What is more, the other Gospels and Paul make clear distinctions as well.

Finally, the very title “Christ” cannot apply to the Father, otherwise the Father – who does the anointing – is anointing Himself! This distinction is further reinforced when one appreciates the two natures of Christ, especially the humanity that allows the Son to suffer and die. These conditions – suffering and dying – however, cannot and do not apply to the Father. ***Theme: Praxeas purports heresy while making the Father Christ and Christ the Father. The Scriptures on the other hand, clearly show that the unity is in regards substance and being, but also that there is a lucid distinction in persons. As a stream proceeds from a fountain there are two, not one, and with the Holy Spirit, there are three. And yet, it is the Son only who suffered, died and rose, while maintaining the majesty and monarchy of the One God.***

Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, pp. 112-201

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