

[Eph 2:22 ...you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.]

## APOSTOLIC & CHURCH FATHERS - THE LEGACY

History and the Present

Rackova Valley, 9th September 2014

### 0. INTRO: WHO ARE THE “FATHERS”?

- not *apostles* not *prophets*! (Eph 2:20)
- Baptists and “the church amendments”...
- We still hardly have a better creed on the Trinity than the Nicene Creed or a Christological definition than the Definition of Chalcedon...
- so – why to criticize them?

#### 0.1. “FATHERS”?

- **Mt 23:9** And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.
- **1Cor 4:15** or though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
- “...Christians everywhere, have been in a great measure thus shaped for us by the thoughts of the early Fathers, it is not on account of this fact that we call them Fathers, but rather in gratitude and veneration for them as the patriarchs of Christendom, speaking to us still out of that early dawn of the Christian period of history, and often speaking to us out of the fiery trial of persecution.”<sup>1</sup>

#### 0.2. DEFINITIONS

- The term church fathers refers to Christian writers and theologians of the first eight centuries of the Christian church, especially the period of development up to 451 AD. The church fathers are sometimes further divided into Apostolic Fathers, who wrote in the first century, and the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, who wrote before and after the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), respectively. The period during which the church fathers wrote is known as the Patristic Period and the academic study of these writers is called Patristics. Both terms derive from the Latin word *pater*, meaning "father."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HORT, F.J.A. *Six Lectures on the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, London : Macmillan, 1895, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/church\\_fathers.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/church_fathers.htm) (8-Sep-14)

### 0.3. AN OVERVIEW

Západ	Východ	
Prvé storočie (96 - 150)	APOŠTOLSKI OTCOVIA	
KLEMENT RIMSKY	IGNATIUS POLYKARP PSEUDO-BARNABÁŠ List DIOGNETOVI DRUHÁ EPIŠTOLA KLEMENTOVA PAPIAS HERMAS: <i>Pastier</i> Didaché	
Druhé storočie (125-190)	APOLOGISTI - obrana kresťanstva	
TERTULIÁN	ARISTIDES JUSTIN MARTÝR TATIAN ATHENAGORAS THEOPHILUS Z ANTOCHIE	
Tretie storočie: (190-250)	POLEMICI - Boj proti falošným učeníam	
Praktická	Spekulatívna teol. (Alexandria)	
IRENAEUS - Gnostici TERTULIÁN - Trojica CYPRIÁN - rímsky episkopát	PANTAENUS KLEMENT ALEXANDRIJSKÝ ORIGENES - <i>Hexapla, De principiis (syst.teol)</i>	
Štvrté storočie (325 - 400)	CIRKEVNÍ OTCOVIA	
Dogmatické štúdie	Alexandrijská škola alegorická	Antiochijská škola gramaticko-historická
HIERONYMUS - prekladateľ AMBROSIUS - kazateľ AUGUSTINUS - filozofia dejín	ATANÁZIUS BASIL Z CÉZAREY	CHRYZOSTOMOS THEODORET (kontext)

### 0.4. THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

- [Catholic appraisal:] Let us take the analogy of a courtroom. When looking for witnesses, we want people who were closest to the action. They have a better perspective than those who are far removed. Catholics feel the Early Church fathers were good witnesses to the Christian faith. They understood Scripture the way Jesus and the disciples taught it....
- ...The Church Fathers believed in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, honored Mary, had elaborate ceremonies, prayed for the dead, respected the Church hierarchy, baptized babies, recognized Peter as the Rock, built the Church upon him with successors and followed a rich tradition of Christianity. That was the Christianity of the early days of Christianity and that is the Catholic Church of today.<sup>3</sup>

### 0.5. THE REFORMATION

- [LUTHER Table-talk DXXV] ...whoso reads Chrysostom, will find he digresses from the chief points, and proceeds to other matter, saying nothing, or very little, of what pertains to the business...
- [LUTHER Table-talk DXXVI] Behold what great darkness is in the books of the Fathers concerning faith; yet if the article of justification be darkened, it is impossible to smother the grossest errors of mankind. St Jerome, indeed, wrote upon Matthew, upon the Epistles to Galatians and Titus; but, alas! very coldly. Ambrose wrote six books upon the first book of Moses, but they are very poor. Augustine wrote nothing to the purpose concerning faith; for he was first roused up and made a man by the Pelagians, in striving against them. I can find no exposition upon the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, wherein anything is taught pure and aright.
- DXXIX. We must read the Fathers cautiously, and lay them in the gold balance, for they often stumbled and went astray, and mingled in their books many monkish things. Augustine had more work and labor, to wind himself out of the Father's writings, than he had with the heretics. Gregory expounds the five pounds mentioned in the Gospel, which the husbandman gave to his servants to put to use, to be the five senses, which the beasts also possess. The two pounds, he construes to be the reason and understanding.

### 0.6. OUR ATTITUDE

- respect: (1) martyrs, (2) theology, "The Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church are central to the creation of Christian doctrine" (3) NT was unfinished, (4) translated the Scriptures
  - Irenaeus: "...he was essentially a biblical theologian. He made no claim to originality. He

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.catholicbridge.com/catholic/early\\_church\\_fathers.php](http://www.catholicbridge.com/catholic/early_church_fathers.php) (8-Sep-14)

was content to rely on the Word of God. Throughout his classic treatise (as elsewhere) he referred to the witness of Scripture preserved by the "elders", which he simply sought to hand on and apply. Hans von Campenhausen thinks that "the important thing is the basic attitude which Irenaeus adopts toward the Christian Bible, his declared intention of refusing to go beyond that which was revealed from the beginning, and the conviction that the final and irrevocable depositum of apostolic teaching is once and for all sufficient for salvation". With Irenaeus, tradition was not an independent factor: it merely served to confirm the testimony of Scripture. This latter he regarded as "the ground and pillar of our faith".<sup>4</sup>

- Ambrose: criticized the emperor
- Athanasius: 5 times exiled for the truth
- critique: non-biblical speculations; persecutions;
- "Do not judge – be careful not to make the same mistakes!"

## 1. APOSTOLIC FATHERS

- The term "apostolic father" first occurs in the *Hogedos* of Anastasius, the seventh-century anti-monophysite abbot of St. Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1. CLEMENT OF ROME (109-116) → OT PRINCIPLES

- Pope: ca. 91–ca. 101 (88–97 in the Vatican's official list)
- "Also known as Clement of Rome, he is best known for his likely authorship of the letter referred to as 1 Clement (96), the most important first-century Christian document outside the New Testament and treated by some in the ancient Church as if it were, in fact, part of the New Testament canon. A second letter attributed to him (2 Clement) is not authentic."<sup>6</sup>
- "This being plain, we must do all things decently and in order, as our Heavenly Master wills us. The appointed times, the fixed places, the proper ministers, must be respected in making our offerings. So only will they be acceptable to God. In the law of Moses the high-priest, the priests, the Levites, the laity, all have their distinct functions'."

### 1.2. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (c.35-c.107) → CHURCH HIERARCHY

- Bishop of Antioch;
- "THESE seven epistles were written in the early years of the second century, when the writer was on his way from Antioch to Rome, having been condemned to death and expecting to be thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre on his arrival. They fall into two groups, written at two different halting-places on his way. The letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, and Romans, were sent from Smyrna, while Ignatius was staying there and was in personal communication with Polycarp the bishop. The three remaining letters, to the Philadelphians, to the Smyrnaeans, and to Polycarp, were written at a subsequent stage in his journey, at Alexandria Troas, where again he halted for a time, before crossing the sea for Europe. The place of writing in every case is determined from notices in the epistles themselves."<sup>7</sup>
- "For a long time, however, many Protestant scholars continued to reject all the letters owing to their strong emphasis on episcopacy."<sup>8</sup>
- "See that ye all follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ the Father; and the presbytery, as the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as the command of God. Let no man do anything of what belongs to the church separately from the bishop. Let that Eucharist be looked upon as well established, which is either offered by the bishop, or by him to whom the bishop has given his consent. Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people also be; as where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church. It is not lawful without the bishop, neither to baptize, nor to celebrate the holy communion; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing unto God; that so whatever is

<sup>4</sup> SKEVINGTON WOOD, A. *The Eschatology of Irenaeus*, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> EHRMAN, B. *Apostolic Fathers*

<sup>6</sup> MCBRIEN, R. *The Pocket Guide to the Popes*, San Francisco : HarperCollins, 2006, p. 18

<sup>7</sup> LIGHTFOOT, J. B. *The Epistles of St. Ignatius*, London : Macmillan, 1898, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 817

done may be sure and well done.”<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3. DIDACHE [c.100] → LEGALISM

- “...various sources then could have been produced at different times. The teaching of the two paths may have been taken over from a Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) source written as early as the mid-first century; the church order seems to presuppose a situation prior to the second century, before internal church structures were widely in place; the apocalyptic discourse could have been composed almost any time during the first two centuries. As to the date of the Didachist himself, opinions again vary, but most would put the time of his composition sometime around the year 100, possibly a decade or so later.”<sup>10</sup>
- [about the prophets] And every apostle who cometh to you, let him be received as the Lord; but he shall not remain except for one day; if, however, there be need, then the next day ; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. But when the apostle departeth, let him take nothing except bread enough till he lodge again; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet. And every prophet who speaketh in the spirit, ye shall not try nor judge; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. But not every one that speaketh in the spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord.<sup>11</sup>
- [no mention of Jesus] Chap. I. — Two ways there are, one of life and one of death, but there is a great difference between the two ways. The Way of life, then, is this: First, thou shalt love the God who made thee; secondly, thy neighbor as thyself; and all things whatsoever thou wouldst not have befall thee, thou, too, do not to another. Now of these words the teaching is this: Bless them that curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for them that persecute you: for what thank have ye if ye love them that love you? Do not the nations also the same? But love ye them that hate you and ye shall have no enemy. Abstain from the fleshly and worldly lusts. If any one give thee a blow on the right cheek, turn to him the other also, and thou shalt be perfect; if any one compel thee to go one mile, go with him two; if any one take thy cloak, give him thy tunic also ; if any one take from thee what is thine, ask it not back; for indeed thou canst not. To every one that asketh thee give, and ask not back; for to all the Father desireth to have given of his own gracious gifts. Blessed is he that giveth according to the commandment; for he is guiltless; woe to him that receiveth; for if, indeed, one receiveth who hath need, he shall be guiltless; but he who hath no need shall give account, why he took, and for what purpose, and coming under confinement shall be examined concerning what he did, and shall not go out thence until he pay the last far- thing. But it hath been also said concerning this matter: Let thine alms sweat in thy hands, until thou knowest to whom thou shouldst give.

### 1.4. LETTER TO DIOGNETUS (2<sup>nd</sup> ct?)

- It may be, then, that this should be regarded as one of the earlier apologies, written during the second half of the second century, possibly closer to the beginning than the end of that period.

## 2. THE CHURCH FATHERS

### 2.1. ORIGEN (184-254) → ALLEGORY, PHILOSOPHY, SPECULATION

#### 2.1.1. LIFE & WORK

- [Wiki] ...a scholar and early Christian theologian who was born and spent the first half of his career in Alexandria. He was a prolific writer in multiple branches of theology, including textual criticism, biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, philosophical theology, preaching, and spirituality.
- [Wiki] Some of his reputed teachings, such as the pre-existence of souls, the final reconciliation of all creatures, including perhaps even the devil (the apokatastasis), and the subordination of the Son of God to God the Father, later became controversial among Christian theologians.
- Hexapla ("Sixfold"), an Old Testament in six columns: (1) Hebrew, (2) Hebrew in Greek

<sup>9</sup> IGNATIUS *To the Smyrneans VIII*.

<sup>10</sup> EHRMAN, B. *The Apostolic Fathers I*. p. 411.

<sup>11</sup> *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, London : John C. Nimmo, 1885, p. 21

characters, (3) the Septuagint, and the Greek versions of (4) Theodotion, (5) Aquila of Sinope, and (6) Symmachus.

- “In 249 Decius overthrew Philip the Arab and launched the most deadly and effective persecution the church had yet seen. He sought to force all inhabitants of the Empire – except Jews – to worship the pagan gods, requiring them to obtain papers certifying they had done so. As it turned out, because Decius’s reign was short, the church suffered most from internal dissension over how to deal with those who had obtained certificates. Decius also went specifically after Christian leaders, executing Fabian, bishop of Rome, and imprisoning Origen’s supporter, Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, who, like Bishop Babylas of Antioch, died in prison. Origen was also imprisoned and tortured, but not executed, evidently in the hope that a recantation on his part would be more valuable to his persecutors than his death. As a result, he survived the persecution, but, apparently, with his health broken, so that he died within a year or so of regaining his freedom.<sup>12</sup> An unequivocal death by martyrdom would have been better for Origen’s posthumous reputation.”<sup>12</sup>

### 2.1.2. SPECULATIONS

- [Wiki] In his exegesis, Origen sought to discover the deeper meaning implied in the scriptures. One of his chief methods was the translation of proper names, which enabled him, like Philo, to find a deep meaning even in every event of history (see hermeneutics), but at the same time he insisted on an exact grammatical interpretation of the text as the basis of all exegesis.
- Examples of Origen's allegorical Scripture interpretation abound in his writings, particularly in his commentaries and homilies. For instance, in his 27th homily on the book of Numbers, he describes growth in the spiritual life based on the 42 stopping places of Israel in the wilderness mentioned in Numbers 33. Origen begins by asking why the Lord wanted Moses to write this passage down: "Was it so that this passage in Scripture about the stages the children of Israel made might benefit us in some way or that it should bring no benefit? Who would dare to say that what is written 'by the Word of God' is of no use and makes no contribution to salvation but is merely a narrative of what happened and was over and done a long time ago, but pertains in no way to us when it is told?"<sup>13</sup>
- “This is a way for him to connote the doctrine of apokatastasis obliquely, without having to explicate this to his audience: “...I do not know whether we should divulge such mystical things before this sort of audience, particularly among those who do not examine the essence of the Scriptures, but are happy with the bare sense alone. It is dangerous”.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2. TERTULLIAN (160-225) → ASCETICISM

- “The First Latin Theologian” or, “The Founder of Latin Christianity”
- [Wiki] According to church tradition, he was raised in Carthage and was thought to be the son of a Roman centurion; Tertullian has been claimed to be a trained lawyer, and an ordained priest. These assertions rely on the accounts of Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, II, ii. 4, and Jerome's *De viris illustribus* (On famous men) chapter 53. Jerome claimed that Tertullian's father held the position of *centurio proconsularis* ("aide-de-camp") in the Roman army in Africa. However, it is unclear whether any such position in the Roman military ever existed.
- Credo quia absurdum is a Latin phrase that means "I believe because it is absurd." It is a paraphrase of a statement in Tertullian's work *De Carne Christi*, "prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est", which can be translated: "it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd".[1] The context is a defence of the tenets of orthodox Christianity against docetism:

Crucifixus est Dei Filius, non pudet, quia pudendum est;  
et mortuus est Dei Filius, prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est;

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<sup>12</sup> TRIGG, J. W. *Origen*, London : Routledge, 1998, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ch/2003/issue80/2.18.html> (9-Sep-14)

<sup>14</sup> TZAMALIKOS, P. *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology*, Leiden : Brill, 2007, p. 241.

et sepultus resurrexit, certum est, quia impossibile.  
 — (De Carne Christi V, 4)

"The Son of God was crucified: there is no shame, because it is shameful.  
 And the Son of God died: it is wholly credible, because it is unsuitable.  
 And, buried, He rose again: it is certain, because impossible."

- Tertullian is sometimes criticized for being misogynistic, on the basis of the contents of his *De Cultu Feminarum*, section I.I, part 2 (trans. C.W. Marx): "Do you not know that you are Eve? The judgment of God upon this sex lives on in this age; therefore, necessarily the guilt should live on also. You are the gateway of the devil; you are the one who unseals the curse of that tree, and you are the first one to turn your back on the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not capable of corrupting; you easily destroyed the image of God, Adam. Because of what you deserve, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die."
- Ad Martyras (CHAPTER II) Other things, hindrances equally of the soul, may have accompanied you as far as the prison gate, to which also your relatives may have attended you. There and thenceforth you were severed from the world; how much more from the ordinary course of worldly life and all its affairs! Nor let this separation from the world alarm you; for if we reflect that the world is more really the prison, we shall see that you have gone out of a prison rather than into one. The world has the greater darkness, blinding men's hearts. The world imposes the more grievous fetters, binding men's very souls. The world breathes out the worst impurities-human lusts. The world contains the larger number of criminals, even the whole human race. Then, last of all, it awaits the judgment, not of the proconsul, but of God. Wherefore, O blessed, you may regard yourselves as having been translated from a prison to, we may say, a place of safety. It is full of darkness, but ye yourselves are light; it has bonds, but God has made you free. Unpleasant exhalations are there, but ye are an odour of sweetness. The judge is daily looked for, but ye shall judge the judges themselves. Sadness may be there for him who sighs for the world's enjoyments. The Christian outside the prison has renounced the world, but in the prison he has renounced a prison too. It is of no consequence where you are in the world - you who are not of it. And if you have lost some of life's sweets, it is the way of business to suffer present loss, that after gains may be the larger. Thus far I say nothing of the rewards to which God invites the martyrs.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3. CHRYSOSTOM (347-407) → ANTISEMITISM

- [Wiki] Archbishop of Constantinople was an important Early Church Father. He is known for his preaching and public speaking, his denunciation of abuse of authority by both ecclesiastical and political leaders, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and his ascetic sensibilities. The epithet Χρυσόστομος (Chrysostomos, anglicized as Chrysostom) means "golden-mouthed" in Greek and was given on account of his legendary eloquence.
- "We find all these theological and polemical attacks combined in the six sermons delivered at Antioch, by St. John Chrysostom against the Jews; an examination of those homilies will give us an understanding of the methods of discussion, as well as the reciprocal attitude of Christians and Jews and their mutual relations."<sup>16</sup>
- In his First *Homily against the Jews*, he characterizes Jews as dogs and drunkards who, unfit for work, are fit only for slaughter. These sermons exceed those of the other church fathers in depth and extent of their cruelty and viciousness, contributing greatly to the formation of anti-Jewish propaganda imagery down the centuries.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ellopos.net/notebook/tertullian.asp> (9-Sep-14)

<sup>16</sup> LAZARE, B. *Antisemitism its History and Causes*, New York : The International Library Publishing, 1903 p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> CHANES, J.A. *Antisemitism*, Santa Barbara : ABC CLIO, 2004, p. 135.

## 2.4. AUGUSTINE (354-430) → SACRAMENTALISM

- [Wiki] an early Christian theologian and philosopher [5] whose writings were very influential in the development of Western Christianity and Western philosophy. He was bishop of Hippo Regius (present-day Annaba, Algeria) located in the Roman province of Africa. Writing during the Patristic Era, he is viewed as one of the most important Church Fathers in the Western Christianity. Among his most important works are City of God and Confessions, which continue to be read widely today.
- “The fundamental problem of the Donatist Controversy is: What constitutes the Validity of a Sacrament? Does its validity depend on the personal religion of the minister? Is the validity of a sacrament affected by its being administered beyond the limits of the one visible historic Church?”<sup>18</sup>
- [Wiki ] “Also in reaction against the Donatists, Augustine developed a distinction between the "regularity" and "validity" of the sacraments. Regular sacraments are performed by clergy of the Catholic Church while sacraments performed by schismatics are considered irregular. Nevertheless, the validity of the sacraments do not depend upon the holiness of the priests who perform them (*ex opere operato*); therefore, irregular sacraments are still accepted as valid provided they are done in the name of Christ and in the manner prescribed by the Church. On this point Augustine departs from the earlier teaching of Cyprian, who taught that converts from schismatic movements must be re-baptised. Augustine taught that sacraments administered outside the Catholic Church, though true sacraments, avail nothing. However, he also stated that baptism, while it does not confer any grace when done outside the Church, does confer grace as soon as one is received into the Catholic Church. Augustine upheld the early Christian understanding of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, saying that Christ's statement, "This is my body" referred to the bread he carried in his hands, and that Christians must have faith that the bread and wine are in fact the body and blood of Christ, despite what they see with their eyes. Against the Pelagians, Augustine strongly stressed the importance of infant baptism. About the question whether baptism is an absolute necessity for salvation, however, Augustine appears to have refined his beliefs during his lifetime, causing some confusion among later theologians about his position. He said in one of his sermons that only the baptized are saved. This belief was shared by many early Christians. However, a passage from his City of God, concerning the Apocalypse, may indicate that Augustine did believe in an exception for children born to Christian parents.
- “...before St. Augustine, nobody ever thought of abstracting, as it were, the concept of efficacious symbol, in order to consider it by itself and frame its theory.”<sup>19</sup>

## 3. CONCLUSIONS

- Let us look for the good and lasting work in other believers – **Mt 7:1** Judge not, that you be not judged.
- Let us be watchful, lest we do make the same mistakes – **Gal 6:1** Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.
- Let us see to it we do not fall in the opposite errors by reacting against the previous ones – **1Cor 4:6** that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written,

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<sup>18</sup> SPARROW-SIMPSON, W.J. *The Letters of St. Augustine*, New York : SPCK, 1919, p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> POURRAT, P. *Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 22.