

The Later Ante-Nicene Fathers

I. Introduction

- A. Two emphases characterize the later Ante-Nicene Fathers
 - 1. A stress on polemics refuting heresy (esp. Gnostic)
 - 2. A more systematic teaching of the Christian faith
- B. “Challenge and response”
 - 1. Often the definition of orthodoxy came when challenged by false teaching
 - 2. Cautions
 - a. Orthodoxy is not “reactive” although the statement often is
 - b. Not all doctrinal development resulted from challenge

II. School of Asia Minor (Polemicists)

A. Irenaeus of Lyons

- 1. Biography
 - a. A bishop in Gaul in Lyons, but from Asia Minor, lived c. 120-200
 - b. Lived through terrible persecutions
 - c. Last of the “school of St. John” (Polycarp esp., also Ignatius, Papias, etc.)
 - d. Major Works
 - 1) *Against Heresies* (particularly Gnosticism)
 - 2) *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*: “First biblical theology” (historical survey of biblical evidence)
- 2. Theology
 - a. Schaff calls him “the most orthodox of the ante-Nicene fathers”
 - b. One of the first to base his theology more on biblical study than philosophical/apologetic argument (Gonzalez)
 - c. “Recapitulation”
 - 1) A strong stress on Christ as the Second Adam to undo everything the First Adam did
 - 2) Led to a stress on the real incarnation
 - 3) Eve/Mary dichotomy (Seeds of “Mariology?”)
 - d. Arguments against Gnosticism (from Olsen)
 - 1) Gnosticism is not based on real history but on silly myths
 - 2) Gnostics had no real claim to take their oral tradition back to Christ.
 - 3) Gnostics interpreted the Scriptures wrongly
 - e. Premillennialism

B. Hippolytus

- 1. Biography
 - a. Presbyter in Rome, active c. 200-235 (but wrote in Greek)
 - b. Opposed bishops of Rome (notably Callistus) & became a “counter-bishop” (“antipope”)
 - c. History was lost until the 19th century and the RCC unknowingly canonized him
 - d. Writings
 - 1) *Philosophoumena* or *Refutation of All Heresies* (anti-Gnostic work; he thought philosophy the root of heresy; enumerated 32 varieties)
 - 2) *Apostolic Tradition* (description of early church order)
 - 3) *Commentary on Daniel* (earliest surviving complete commentary of a biblical book)

2. Theology
 - a. Influenced by Irenaeus and Justin Martyr
 - b. Premillennial
 - c. Rigorist
 - 1) Believed the church could not forgive murder, fornication, or apostasy
 - 2) Believer in the growing system of penance and wanted it applied strictly
 - d. Trinity
 - 1) Opposed Callistus, & accused him of being a modalistic Sabellian
 - 2) So much did he stress the distinction of the persons that some accuse him a being a “ditheist”
- III. School of Alexandria
- A. Clement of Alexandria
 1. Biography
 - a. Father of Alexandrian theology
 - b. Originally from Athens, lived c. 150-220
 - c. Head of catechetical school in Alexandria
 2. Theology
 - a. Stressed role of philosophy (Neoplatonism)
 - b. Christology
 - 1) Christ is the true teacher of true knowledge (*gnosis*)
 - 2) Used the Word (Logos) concept of Christ as the bridge between God & world
 - c. Characteristic Alexandrian Emphases
 - 1) Subordination of the Son to the Father
 - 2) Allegorical interpretation of Scripture
 - 3) Free will (no original sin)
 - B. Origen
 1. Biography
 - a. From Egypt, lived c. 185-250
 - b. Leader of catechetical school in Alexandria after Clement
 - c. Died as a result of torture in persecution
 - d. Textual Criticism
 - 1) *Hexapla* (parallel columns of Hebrew OT w/ Greek translations): One of the first works of textual criticism
 - 2) Early witness to the Alexandrian text
 - e. First systematic theology in *On First Principles*
 - f. Numerous writings (800 titles!): *Against Celsus*, commentaries & sermons
 2. Theology
 - a. Use of philosophy—“spoiling the Egyptians”
 - b. Scriptural interpretation
 - 1) Literal (physical): Thou shalt not commit adultery.
 - 2) Moral (“soulish” or psychological): “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox” means one should support clergy financially
 - 3) Mystical (intellectual or spiritual): Highest meaning, dealing with Christ and the Christian’s relationship to God
 - c. Christology
 - 1) Eternal generation (“begottenness”) of the Son

- 2) Subordination of the Son: Although not denying the deity of Christ, he saw Christ as subordinate to the Father (the Father willed to generate eternally, it was not by nature)
 - 3) “Ransom to Satan” theory of the atonement—the atonement was a ransom paid to Satan, who nonetheless could not hold Christ
 - d. Eschatology
 - 1) Amillennial (great opponent of premillennialism)
 - 2) Pre-existence of souls and their pre-temporal fall
 - 3) Universalism: Restitution of all things (including the Devil?)
- IV. School of North Africa (Latin)
- A. Tertullian
- 1. Biography
 - a. “Father of Latin Theology”
 - b. From Carthage (North Africa) c. 150-220
 - c. Educated as a lawyer
 - d. Possessed a puritan outlook (against shows, immodesty in dress, remarriage, personal discipline)
 - e. Later became a Montanist, probably attracted by their moral strictness
 - f. Important Writings
 - 1) *Apology*
 - a) A strong plea for religious liberty
 - b) “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”
 - 2) Polemics: *Prescription Against Heretics*, polemic against Marcion
 - 3) Practical works: *On Spectacles*, *On Monogamy*, *On Baptism*, *On Prayer* (earliest surviving exposition on the Lord’s Prayer)
 - 2. Theology
 - a. Opposed philosophy (“What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”) and wrote from a nonspeculative point of view emphasizing revelation
 - b. Baptism
 - 1) Believed baptism washed away sin.
 - 2) Opposed infant baptism, because of the need to wash away sin later
 - c. Anthropology
 - 1) Traducianism: the soul is derived from the parents, not created nor preexistent, and so original sin is transmitted
 - 2) Credited with distinction between “mortal” and “venial” sins—perhaps because of his legal background
 - d. Trinity
 - 1) First use of the word “trinity”
 - 2) Set basic terminology of Trinitarian theology well before the Arian controversy: *person* and *substance*
 - 3) Also taught that in Christ there are two substances in one person
- B. Cyprian
- 1. Biography
 - a. Bishop of Carthage c. 250
 - b. Survived the Decian persecution (first empire-wide persecution); later martyred
 - 2. Theology

- a. Primarily a theologian of the church
- b. Salvation and the Church: “There is no salvation outside the church.”
- c. The Office of Bishop
 - 1) Olson says Cyprian “standardized” the role of the bishop of the church and saw the church as a community of bishops.
 - 2) Believed in a “federated” approach to bishops—no one took precedence
 - 3) Hints of idea of a special priesthood
 - a) Applies OT priestly categories to Christian ministers
 - b) First use of “priest” for the one who presides at Eucharist
- d. Baptism
 - 1) Taught baptismal regeneration
 - 2) Required that heretics be rebaptized
- e. Penance
 - 1) Helped develop penance, a process to restore the fallen, originally aimed at the “lapsed” in persecution
 - 2) Cyprian was too lenient for the rigorists (allowing the lapsed back in), too strict for the lenient (requiring a penance).