

EPIC_Wk 3_PERSECUTION Part 2 MAIN THEME: Persecution

Review:

Pagan attacks on Christians so Roman citizens would not join the group. Christians are:

- *Ignorant and poor*
- *Bad citizens*
- *Practice unreasonable doctrines*
- *Practice cannibalism*

Emperors make Christians scapegoats for various negative events

- Two famous martyrs: St Polycarp (7 letters to the to the Corinthians); St Ignatius (7 letters to Christian churches and to Polycarp)

Heresies

- Gnosticism: St Irenaeus, St Hippolytus (1st anti-pope). He wanted pope to be more rigorous against these, went to Roman mines, had change of heart and welcomed back into The Church.

Apologists*: group of men who defended the faith by explaining major teachings of The Church and *why made good sense to believe in only one god*. They focused on how good Christians lived explaining theological virtues of *faith, hope and charity*.

***Apologetics**: The ability to make a *defense* of a position of a teaching you believe in – NOT in modern sense of *I am sorry* for something.

St Justin Martyr (130 AD): also known as Justin the Philosopher, was early Christian apologist and philosopher. Most of his works are lost, but two apologies and a dialogue did survive.

- Christian understanding of Baptism and Eucharist
- Martyred during reign of Marcus Aurelius

Tertullian (197 AD): From Carthage, son of a centurion, became Christian in 197 AD, 7 yrs. later a priest, wrote *Treatises¹ on the Faith* (especially against Marcion) on sacraments, and **first to use the terms of Trinity in relation to God**. He also addressed the pagan teaching that Christians were *ignorant and poor* and *were bad citizens*. He eloquently explained, *We are a body knit together by the sense of one belief, united in discipline, bound together by a common hope. We form an alliance and a congregation to assail God with our prayers, like a battalion drawn up for combat*. He goes on to explain, *We (Christians) are just like you in every way*. He explained that Christians **pray for** the Emperor (Current day *Prayers of the Faithful*). Left faith for Marconism and *rigorism*, then left Marconism and eventually returned to The Church.

Even in 3rd century, people beginning their own churches. Will become more prevalent with Protestant revolt in 16th century with Martin Luther and John Calvin – failing to unite with rock of St. Peter because see things differently. Never part of God's plan. Jesus prayed for *unity*. Important to *know our story*. (See HO Protestant Reformation Chart)

Origen: From Alexandria in Egypt (via Eusebius of Syria²) (See *Corrupt Bible* HO). Brilliant scholar even at very young age; head of *Catechetical School* of Alexandria (where people who wanted to join the faith were instructed); great teacher, prolific writer, considered first *scripture writer*; **wrote many translations** of the Scriptures and commentaries; became a priest but disagreed with local bishop and settled in Palestine where he collected copies of Scripture and classical writings, was tortured but not martyred by Emperor Decian (250 AD). Some of his writings are quoted in the Catechism. Very revered by The Church but not sainted due to some theological issues that came up after his death.

Emperor Decius (249-251 AD): Wanted unity in Empire and wanted Christians to stop worshipping their god and worship only the imperial gods. Issued Edict of Persecution in 250 AD. EVERY man, woman, child had to make public sacrifice to pagan gods. First event was killing Christian leadership including the pope. There were many who refused but found other ways to avoid martyrdom. How will The Church deal with these perceived *betrayers* of the faith?

Emperor Novatian (200-258 AD): Leader of 2nd Schism of The Church (251 AD): Priest, distinguished theologian, advocated severe penalties for those who hid from martyrdom during persecution by

Emperor Decius. He was passed over for becoming next pope. He was upset; followers elected him pope and he acted as pope by appointing bishops throughout entire Empire. Him and followers *excommunicated* by Pope Cornelius and later died as martyr under Emperor Valerian

Emperor Valerian (253 AD): At first friendly to Christians until Empire attacked from two sides and had to blame someone, the Christians. In 257, issued edict that all Christian bishops, priests and deacons be put to death. Pope St Sixtus II is beheaded and his Deacon St Lawrence is grilled alive. Valerian was first Roman Emperor to be captured by Rome's enemies, namely the Persians. Was used as footstool of Persian King when mounting his horse.

Roman instability: In 92 years, there were 28 Roman Emperors; 22 are murdered

Emperor Diocletian (284 AD) Brought stability and organization to Empire; determined Empire too large and created a *tetrarchy* (divided Empire into two parts)-western part centered in Rome and divided into smaller regional areas he named after himself, *Diocletian* (word *diocese* comes from this time) (SG pg. 200 – Diocletian's Division of Roman Empire 300 AD)

Edict of Persecution (300 AD) Empire wide "**Great Persecution**" (Also called *Persecution by the Surrender of the Books*)- Diocletian issued under urging of Galerius (Emperor of the East from 305-311 AD); Constantine 1, Emperor of the West, less aggressive (Father of Constantine II – who will legalize Christianity 337 – 340)

Phase 1: Close the Churches, hand over *Sacred Scriptures*

Phase 2: Imprison all the Christian clergy

Phase 3: Torture and kill all Christian clergy

Phase 4: Force all men, women and children to offer incense and sacrifice to pagan gods or die

How Christians responded to this persecution

1. Martyrdom: Horrific ways they died all in the ultimate witness of their faith in Christ
2. Suffering but not martyrdom (*Confessors of the Faithful*): brutally tortured or sent to mines where brutally maimed but Christians continued to live holy lives and witness to the Lord; **period of great conversion**
3. Sacrificing to pagan gods (*Traditores*= traitor- Latin: *to hand over*); one who handed over Sacred Scripture or sacred vessels or names of other Christians who had these things in hiding
4. Worshipping (*Lapsi* – people who gave in but repented later): Offered incense and worship to pagan gods but later repented and wanted to return to The Church. Leads to another dilemma for The Church leaders to decide how to deal with this: **Mercy vs. Rigorism** (will dominate The Church's decisions for many years and lead to many different heresies)

Penal Canons: By Bishop Peter of Alexandria (306 AD); martyred later

- If you are *Lapsi*, penance for 3 yrs. (fasting, offering prayers, alms, etc.)
- If you gave in but not tortured, penance for 4 yrs.
- If possession of fake *certificate of sacrifice* to pagan gods, 6 months
- If you had your slave sacrifice for you, 3 yrs.
- If a slave was Christian, then 1 yr. of penance

SELF-REFLECTION: Are there times when, I as a Christian, am not merciful to those in my community? Are there times when someone wounds me, or times when I know of someone who did something or falls away from The Church, and I look upon that person from a rigorous perspective? How do you interact with those we are associated with in our parishes, in our families? Do we look at them through the eyes of rigorism or eyes of mercy, through the *eyes of God* and see them for who they are – repented people who want to come back into our community, into our faith?

Penal Canons and penitential discipline allowed The Church to practice the mercy of God just as we do today.

Eusebius of Syria (Father of Church history) records the persecution in Egypt was horrific and many thousands of Christian men, women and children died. Some became well known martyrs who are named in the 1st Eucharistic prayer:

St Agnes: 12-13 yr. old virgin, arrested for being a Christian, tied to the stake to be burned but flames did not touch her (like St. Polycarp) Her feast is January 21 (Same day Pope blesses wool used for Archbishops *pallium*).

St Sebastian: A Christian centurion who was shot full of arrows and then flogged.

St Lucia: betrayed by her fiancé and sentenced to prostitution but she refused to move. Even Roman soldiers could not move her, they built a fire around her but did not touch her; was killed by a sword.

Edict of Tolerance: Issued by Emperor Constantine (son of Constantius) just before his death in hopes of the Christian God saving him but died anyway. Was not meant to make Christianity *legal* in the empire but was at least the end of the persecution.

Persecution was time of great suffering but is part of bringing conversion to the empire

Martyr= witness: *to give a witness of your very life for Christ*

¹ **Treatises** – a written work dealing formally and systematically with a subject

² **Eusebius of Caesarea**, also called Eusebius Pamphili, (flourished 4th century, Caesarea Palestinae, Palestine), bishop, exegete, polemicist, and historian whose account of the first centuries of Christianity, in his Ecclesiastical History, is a landmark in Christian historiography; first Church historian

³ **Novatian**, Latin **Novatianus**, (born c. 200, [Rome](#) [Italy]—died c. 258), the second [antipope](#) in papal history, in 251. He was the first Roman theologian to write in Latin and inspired the [Novatian Schism](#)—a break from the Christian church by rigorists who [condemned apostasy](#). Novatian was ordained at Rome and about 250 became a leader of the Roman clergy, in whose name he wrote two letters to Bishop Cyprian of Carthage concerning the *lapsi* (those early Christians who renounced their faith during the persecutions). He had shared with Cyprian a moderate attitude toward apostates, but, when [Cornelius](#) was elected [pope](#) in 251, Novatian became the champion of rigorism. By then he had a high reputation as a learned theologian. While a majority favored Cornelius as pope, a minority declared itself for Novatian, and he set himself up as antipope. His rigorist doctrine was uncompromising, and, by denying the administration of penance, he refused to admit the *lapsi* into the church. Novatian and his followers were excommunicated at a synod [convened](#) by Cornelius in 251.

Although Cyprian and Cornelius joined forces against the Novatianists, the schism developed into a sect that spread across the empire and lasted for several centuries. Despite opposition, Novatian managed to build his own church with his own bishops throughout Christendom. During the persecution of Christians from 251 to 253, he fled Rome. The assertion of the church historian Socrates (d. c. 445) that Novatian was [martyred](#) about 258 under the Roman emperor [Valerian](#) appears confirmed by the inscription “novatiano . . . martyri” found in a cemetery near San Lorenzo, Rome, in 1932.

Novatian’s apologetic [De trinitate](#) (“On the Trinity”), considered to be his most important work, summarizes and defends the orthodox doctrine of the [Trinity](#) against contemporary heresies. In [De cibis Judaicis](#) (“Concerning Jewish Foods”), he points out that dietary laws and other practical prohibitions of the [Old Testament](#) must be understood spiritually rather than literally. In [De spectaculis](#) (“On Spectacles”), he condemns Christians who attend public games, and, in [De bono pudicitiae](#) (“Concerning the Value of Chastity”), he praises chastity.

In the early church, “schism” was used to describe those groups that broke with the church and established rival churches. The term originally referred to those divisions that were caused by disagreement over something other than basic doctrine. Thus, the schismatic group was not necessarily heretical. Eventually, however, the distinctions between schism and [heresy](#) gradually became less clear, and disruptions in the church caused by disagreements over doctrine as well as disruptions caused by other disagreements were eventually all referred to as schismatic.

⁴ Flavius Valerius Constantius "Chlorus", also called Constantius I, was a Roman emperor as one of the four original members of the Tetrarchy established by Diocletian in 293. He was a junior-ranking emperor from 293 to 305, and senior emperor from 305 to 306.

⁵ Archbishop’s Pallium: Given by Pope to an Archbishop as a sign of their authority and symbol of The Church. Presented on the Feast of St Agnes as reminder of who suffered in the great persecution

