Chapter 2 :

The persecuted Church

From the death of the last apostle, John, c. 98 A.D.,
to the Edict of Constantine, 313 A.D.

A. Persecutions of the church by the Roman Emperors:

1) Christians during the time of the apostles were persecuted from the beginning by the unbelieving Jews, but persecution by the Roman government began with Emperor Nero, who persecuted Christians from 64 to 68 A.D. The mad Nero reportedly caused fires to be set in Rome which destroyed large parts of the city, so that he could rebuild the city after his own desires. To divert suspicion from himself, he accused the Christians and turned the wrath of the city against them. Thousands were killed in terrible ways. Paul and Peter probably died in this persecution. Another emperor, Domitian, persecuted Christians and killed many in 96 A.D. He imprisoned John on Patmos in John's old age - Revelation 1.

2) Why did the Romans persecute Christians?

a. The various religions of idolatry could co-exist and tolerate each other, but Christians believed that Jesus is the only way to God. This offended the Romans.

b. Idolatrous customs affected every part of the daily life of the pagans, and so Christians were constantly seen as different in everything they did.

c. Besides worshiping idols, the Romans also worshiped the emperor Caesar as divine. (All Roman emperors were called Caesar). Because Christians refused to worship the image of Caesar or offer

sacrifice to him, they were considered disloyal to the government.

d. The Romans allowed Jews the special freedom of practicing their own religion without being persecuted. At first the Christians were left in peace because they were looked on by the Romans as a faction of Judaism. But when the Jews rebelled against Rome and Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., this freedom ended, and Christianity stood on its own without legal protection.

e. Christians customarily held their meetings in secret and did not allow unbelievers to meet with them at the times when they ate the Lord's Supper. The secret meetings aroused government suspicion. Also outsiders, hearing about the Lord's Supper, ignorantly supposed that Christians were offering human sacrifices and eating their flesh and blood. Christian love and the holy kiss were misunderstood as immorality.

f. In the church, worldly social and economic distinctions were ignored, the master and his slave, the government officer and the peasant, all ate the Lord's Supper together as children of God. The outside world was offended by this.

g. Some pagans made money from the manufacture or worship of idols, or from other evil businesses, and these were offended when their business declined as more people were converted to Christ - compare Acts 19:23-41.

h. A leading cause of persecution was popular turmoil, created by the clash of Christianity with paganism and particularly with Judaism (the unbelieving Jews frequently stirred up unrest against the Christians). The government could not tolerate disorder, and felt the need to suppress religions that seemed to cause it.

3) <u>The life of Christians under persecution</u>: The persecutions were not continual. Some emperors persecuted Christians fiercely, some moderately, and some not at all. Not all the persecutions were empire-wide, and many were local, depending on the attitude of local officials. During times of persecution, Christians sometimes hid in caves or tombs or in the countryside, and held their meetings in secret in the homes of members or elsewhere. When a person was arrested for being a Christian, he was offered a chance to be released if he would verbally recant (express that he was no longer a Christian) and offer sacrifice to the emperor as a deity. If they refused they were usually sentenced to death.

4) <u>Some Roman emperors who persecuted Christians</u> (we cannot list here all the Christians known to have been killed, but will give some examples:

a. <u>Trajan</u> and his immediate successors (98-117). Simeon, the brother of Jesus and a bishop of the church in Jerusalem, was crucified in

107. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, was thrown to wild beasts between 110 and 117.

b. Hadrian (117-138). Telephorus, Bishop of Rome, was killed during Hadrian's reign.

c. Antoninus Pius (138-161). Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was burned, and 11 other Christians were killed at the same time. The church at Smyrna wrote a letter with details of the martyrdom of Polycarp. The following account is derived from that letter:

At the festival of Caesar in 156, a number of Christians had been delivered to wild beasts in the stadium at Smyrna. The crowd then demanded that the aged and beloved church leader Polycarp (who had studied under the apostle John) be arrested and brought to the arena. Polycarp had been moved from farm to farm in the countryside and kept safe till now. But a servant betrayed his whereabouts to the authorities, and the sheriff and soldiers came to arrest him. He ordered that they be given as much food and drink as they wanted, though it was late at night. He asked an hour for prayer, which he was granted, and then he was taken on the journey to the arena. The sheriff tried to persuade Polycarp to save himself by worshiping Caesar and denying Christ, but Polycarp refused.

The letter from Smyrna tells us that the uproar from the crowd was massive as Polycarp was led into the stadium, and that Polycarp heard a voice from heaven, "Be Strong, Polycarp, and play the man." The proconsul tried to persuade him, saying, "Have respect for your age. Worship Caesar. Repent of being a Christian. Say, 'Away with the atheists!'" (The pagans called Christians "atheists" because they did not believe in the pagan gods). Polycarp looked at the mob in the stadium, waved his hand at them, looked up to heaven, and groaned, "Away with the atheists." The proconsul urged him again, "Worship Caesar, and I will release you. Curse the Christ." Polycarp answered, "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no wrong, how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"

The proconsul persisted in his persuasion, but Polycarp answered, "If you vainly imagine that I would worship Caesar, pretending not to know what I am, hear plainly that I am a Christian. If you are willing to learn the teaching of Christianity, give me a day and hear me." At this point the proconsul gave Polycarp the customary opportunity to persuade the crowd in the stadium, that they might call for his release. But he answered, "I had considered you worthy to speak to, for we are taught to honor the authorities ordained of God. But I do not consider this crowd worthy that I should defend myself before them."

The proconsul then threatened Polycarp with wild beasts if he would not repent, but Polycarp answered, "Send for them, for repentance

from better to worse is not permitted to us, but to change from cruelty to righteousness is a noble thing." The proconsul said, "If you despise the beasts, I will cause you to be consumed by fire, if you do not repent." Polycarp answered, "You threaten with the fire that burns for an hour and is soon quenched; for you do not know of the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Bring what you will."

The letter says that Polycarp's face was full of grace and joy as he said these things. The proconsul proclaimed to the crowd that Polycarp had confessed himself to be a Christian. The crowd in a great uproar shouted for Polycarp's death. Members of the crowd quickly helped to bring together pieces of wood and pile them at the stake. The soldiers were about to nail Polycarp to the stake, but he said, "Let me be as I am. He who granted me to endure the fire will grant me also to remain at the pyre unmoved...." Then Polycarp prayed, and when he had finished praying, the firemen lit the fire, and a great flame shot up. (Quotes and details from Documents of the Christian Church, Henry Bettenson, Ed.)

d. Marcus Aurelius (161-180). This emperor increased the persecution of Christians. Justin Martyr and others were beheaded at Rome. In Gaul (modern France) Bishop Pothinius, age 90, was abused and died. A Christian slave girl, Blandina, was subjected to various tortures day after day until people marveled at her faith and endurance. She refused to renounce Christ, and would only say over and over, "I am a Christian, among us no evil is done." One of the officers, amazed that she was still alive after so long, finally finished killing her.

e. Septimius Severus (193-211). This emperor in 201 made it a crime to convert anyone to Christianity. In North Africa and Egypt, Christians were killed daily. In 202, Leonidas, father of the illustrious teacher Origen, was killed at Alexandria. At Carthage, there was a 22-year-old Christian woman named Perpetua, who had an infant child. She was imprisoned. Her father visited her in prison and implored her to renounce Christ and save herself, but she refused. At her trial, the judge also tried to persuade her. "Have respect for the gray hair of your father and for the life of your baby; offer sacrifice to Caesar." Perpetua answered, "I cannot do that." The judge asked, "Are you a Christian?" Perpetua answered, "I am a Christian." Upon this, Perpetua, along with her slave-girl Felicitas, who had just had a baby in prison, and three Christian young men, were all placed in the arena where they were killed by beasts.

f. Decius (249-251). He decreed that every person must offer sacrifice to the Roman gods and to Caesar once a year, and must have a certificate showing that he had done this. Decius knew that a faithful Christian would not have such a certificate, and it was his way of trying

to discover all Christians and put an end to the church. Some of the weaker Christians gave in and offered sacrifice. Others managed to buy certificates from corrupt officials without actually offering sacrifice. Others refused to practice deceit or to sacrifice, and confessed to being Christians if they were asked. Many were imprisoned and killed. But Decius died very soon and was not able to carry out his plan to destroy the church.

g. Valerian (253-260). He surpassed Decius in persecuting Christians. He wanted to eliminate every Christian in the empire. He did not realize that persecutions only strengthened faithful Christians. In 257 he killed Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. In 258 he killed Sixtus, Bishop of Rome.

h. Diocletian and fellow-rulers (303-310). These were the last Roman rulers to persecute Christians, and they persecuted them more severely than all before them. They started systematically to eliminate Christianity and to restore the old pagan religion of idolatry. They ordered that all Bibles be burned, that church buildings be destroyed, and that there be no more Christian meetings. They imprisoned church leaders. Diocletian decreed that anyone who would not sacrifice to idols should die. Many Christians were tortured, wounded, beaten, and killed. Others were imprisoned. Others were sentenced to slave labor where many died from bad conditions and overwork. Some church buildings were burned with the worshipers inside them.

5) Emperor Constantine (306-377) is the Roman emperor who stopped the persecution of Christians. When he became emperor he was still a pagan. At first some were contesting his leadership, and he fought a military battle with them in 312. Before the battle, it is said that Constantine saw in a dream a fiery cross in the sky, inscribed in Greek with the words, "By this sign conquer." He won the battle and his rule was firmly established. In 313 he issued the "Edict of Milan" in which he ordered that no Christian should be persecuted, and that church buildings which had been confiscated should be returned to Christians. Later on, Constantine himself became a Christian. He exempted church leaders from military service. He urged pagans to become Christians. He ordered more copies of the Bible to be made. Because Christians worshiped on the first day of the week (Sunday) Constantine made this day a legal holiday. (But he did not change the Christian day of worship to Sunday, as some say. The church had always kept this day - Acts 20:7 - to remember the day on which Christ arose from the dead.) Through Constantine, the church rested at last from persecution.

B. How the books of the New Testament were brought together into one book.

1) These books were written by the apostles and prophets of Christ, inspired by God through the Holy Spirit, and they are the word of God, not just the word of man. Therefore these writings are holy and are different from other books

in authority - John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8; Galatians 1:12; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Peter 3:15,16.

2) At first the apostles and prophets, led by the Holy Spirit, spoke the word of God orally. But later they wrote down the same inspired teachings so that we would have their teachings preserved accurately after their deaths - 2 Peter 1:12-16; Ephesians 3:3-5; 2 Peter 3:15,16; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31; Hebrews 2:3,4; Colossians 4:16.

3) We believe that the first book of the New Testament to be written was the book of James or 1 Thessalonians, about 50 A.D. The last book to be written was Revelation, about 96 A.D. Therefore all the books of the New Testament were written over a period of about 50 years. But the books were written by different authors, from different places, at different times, to different destinations. Therefore, even after the books were all written, it took time for all of them to be brought together into one book as we have them now. In those days there was no post office or automobile or airplane or telephone or email, and communications were slow. There were no typewriters, computers or printing presses; every copy of a book had to be made laboriously by hand. At first those who received a certain letter from an apostle did not know what letters had been received by Christians in other places. But very soon they heard of the letters or books received in other places - see 2 Peter 3:15, 16; Colossians 4:16.

4) Christians in different towns and countries told each other of the books they had received from inspired apostles and prophets. For example, the church in one place might say to the church in another place, "We will send you a copy of the letter we received from Paul, but please send us a copy of the letter you received from John." And as the churches exchanged copies, the church in any place was able gradually to collect copies of books written to various other congregations. This took time, because the copies had to be carried mainly by foot-travelers or on sailing vessels. And brethren in widely separated places did not see each other often to exchange information about books received. Some churches began to keep lists of books known to have been written by inspired apostles or prophets of the Lord. Whenever they heard of another such book, they added it to the list until finally all the inspired books were listed.

5) But there were other good books of teaching which were not written by an apostle or prophet, but by an ordinary person. There were other books which were falsely written under the name of an apostle or prophet in order to gain acceptance for their teachings in the church. Church leaders who listed genuinely inspired books sometimes had a difficult job determining which books to list. They were extremely careful not to list any book which lacked evidence that it was written by an apostle, prophet, or close associate of the apostles. The list of the genuine writings of apostles and prophets is called the <u>canon</u>, which means "measuring rule." The genuinely inspired books are called <u>canonical</u> books, books which measure up to the standards of genuineness. There were some uninspired books which were for a time

considered canonical by some church leaders until later evidence showed them to be uninspired. There were other genuinely inspired books which were not accepted in the canon by some leaders until more evidence showed them to be canonical. The evidence for inspired authorship came partly from the churches who had first received the books and knew the authors, and partly from the contents of the books themselves.

6) By 150 A.D., most of the books of our present New Testament had been brought together and accepted as scripture. Soon after this all our present books were included. Some leaders still questioned the canonicity of a few of the books, because there had not yet come an opportunity for all the evidence to be considered. But after persecution ended, it was much more possible to communicate freely and to meet to consider the evidence for disputed books. From the time of the Council of Carthage, 397 A.D., the 27 books we now have in our New Testament were accepted as inspired scripture. This council did not make the books inspired. They were inspired from the time of their writing, and the evidence for their inspiration existed from the beginning in the local churches that received them, as well as in the character of the books themselves. The council only recognized the evidence which already existed.

C. The "Early Church Fathers" or "Apostolic Fathers" (better-known leaders of the church in the century after the death of the apostles):

1) Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the church at Corinth around 96 A.D. He urged the church to preserve unity, because some of the brethren at Corinth had risen up against their elders. As in the New Testament scriptures, Clement's letter makes no distinction between elders and bishops. The two names were still applied to the same office in Clement's time.

2) Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote letters to seven churches while he was traveling to Rome to be put to death for his faith. These were written some time between 110 and 117 A.D., perhaps about 115. Ignatius is the first writer to make a distinction between the office of elder and that of bishop. This is the first evidence of change from the original apostolic arrangement for the organization of the church. Before the apostles died, all the elders of each local church were equal in authority and wore the name "bishop" or "elder" interchangeably - see Acts 20:17,28,29; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 1:1; Acts 14:23. (ABishop@ is replaced by its equivalent Aoverseer@ in some modern translations, and Aelder@ is the same as Apresbyter.@) But in Ignatius, we begin to see one of the elders elevated above his fellow elders with the title of bishop reserved for him alone. And Ignatius sought to raise the power of the bishop. He wrote that the bishop is like God, and the elders under him are like the apostles. He also wrote that important church functions such as baptism and the Lord's Supper should only be carried out in the presence of the bishop, and that "without the bishop there is no church."

3) Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, lived from 69 to 156 A.D. He studied under the apostle John. He wrote a letter to the Ephesians in 110. He was burned at the stake by the Roman government at Smyrna in 156.

4) Barnabas wrote a letter near 132 A.D. condemning the doctrine of the Judaizers who wanted to bind the law of Moses on Christians. He is not the Barnabas of the book of Acts.

5) Hermas wrote a book called The Shepherd about 140 or 150 A.D. There were some teachers who were saying that a person who commits a grievous sin such as adultery after he has been baptized cannot be forgiven by God. Hermas took issue with them and said that a baptized person who committed adultery could be forgiven once. His opponents were scandalized by his "liberal" views and called him "that shepherd of adulterers." Neither Hermas nor his opponents were teaching as the scriptures teach. They were teaching human opinions. We see here how people were departing from the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

6) Papias wrote a letter between 125 and 150 A.D. He was Bishop of Hierapolis in Egypt.

7) The Didache is the short Greek name for a book called The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. It was not written by the apostles, and we do not know the name of the author. It teaches on many subjects. For example, the churches were having trouble with persons who claimed to be prophets, who wanted to wander from church to church, getting food and money from the brethren. The Didache says that if a prophet comes to the church, the church should feed him one day or at the most, two. If he wants to stay a third day, he is a false prophet. The book also gives directions for baptism: "Baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, in living [running] water. But if you have not living water, baptize in other water, and if thou canst not in cold, in warm. If you have neither, pour water thrice on the head in the name, etc...Before the baptism, let the baptizer and the baptized fast..." (quoted from Documents of the Christian Church, Henry Bettenson, Ed., p.90). This is the first time we hear of baptism by pouring in place of immersion.

D. The Apologists: The word "apology" originally meant a defense, and these men wrote defenses of Christianity to its enemies, such as the emperor and the Roman government. Some of the enemies were falsely accusing Christians of cannibalism, immorality, atheism, and of plotting against the government.

1) Quadratus (125/129) wrote to Emperor Hadrian a letter defending Christianity.

2) Aristides wrote a letter at some time between 138 and 147 explaining that Christianity is superior to pagan idolatry.

3) Justin Martyr (100-163) received the name of "Martyr" because he was executed by the Roman government in 163. Justin was converted to Christ in 133. At Rome he wrote many letters. He wrote a letter urging Caesar to really learn about the church and see that Christians do not do the things their enemies accuse them of. He explained what Christians really do in their meetings. He also wrote to the Jews explaining the superiority of Christianity and urging them to accept Jesus as Messiah (Christ).

Concerning the assemblies of Christians, he wrote: "And on the day which is called the day of the sun there is an assembly of all who live in the towns or in the country, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then the reader ceases, and the president speaks, admonishing us and exhorting us to imitate these excellent examples. Then we arise all together and offer prayers, and, as we said before, when we have concluded our prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president in like manner offers up prayers and thanksgivings with all his might, and the people assent with Amen, and there is the distribution and partaking by all of the eucharistic elements and to them that are not present they are sent by the hand of the deacons. And they that are prosperous and wish to do so give what they will, each after his choice. What is collected is deposited with the president, who gives aid to the orphans and widows and such as are in want by reason of sickness or other cause, and to those also that are in prison, and to strangers from abroad, in fact to all that are in need he is a protector. We hold our common assembly on the day of the sun, because it is the first day, on which God put to flight darkness and chaos [*lit.* matter] and made the world, and on the same day Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead; for on the day before that of Saturn they crucified him; and on the day after Saturn's day, the day of the sun, he appeared to his Apostles and disciples and taught them these things, which we have also handed on to you for your consideration." (quoted from Documents of the Christian Church, Henry Bettenson, Ed., pp. 94,95).

Justin Martyr wrote these things near 150 A.D., long before Emperor Constantine was born and long before there was a Roman Catholic Pope. We can see clearly from this passage, as well as from the scriptures, that neither Constantine nor the pope originated the practice of keeping Sunday as the special day of Christians, as some believe.

4) Tatian (125-200) was converted by Justin. He wrote to the Greeks to convince them that the way of Christ is superior to the way of Greek philosophy. He took the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and combined them into one account of the life of Christ. This book was called the Diatessaron. But because of his intellectual brilliance, Tatian later became proud and went off into the Gnostic heresy.

5) Melito wrote between 169 and 190. He was the bishop of Sardis. He wrote a letter to the emperor defending Christianity.

6) Athenagoras wrote between 177 and 180. He wrote to the emperor stating that the charges made against the church by its enemies were false. He also said that Christ and God are superior to idols, because idol gods reputedly do the same evil things that sinful people do.

7) Theophilus (not the Theophilus of Luke 1) was Bishop of Antioch. In 190 he wrote to a government official a defense of Christianity.

E. Other leaders who later wrote to combat heresies: These men greatly helped the church by opposing false teachings, but in the process of opposing heresies, some of these leaders sowed some seeds of human reasoning which led to doctrinal change and eventually produced the Roman Catholic Church.

1) Irenaeus of Gaul (130-200) was the first head of the Bible school in Asia. Later he became Bishop of Lyons in Gaul (now France). He had studied under Polycarp, who studied under the apostle John. He wrote against the Gnostics and other heretics. In the writings of Irenaeus are laid the foundations for three important doctrinal changes:

First, he believed that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice, not just a memorial, and that it has taken the place of the sacrifices of the Old Testament. This teaching was the seed that helped to produce later the Roman Catholic doctrine that Jesus is sacrificed again and again in the mass. In the apostolic period the church had believed that Jesus was offered as a sufficient sacrifice once for all time - see Hebrews 9:24- 10:18.

Second, Irenaeus taught that the church looks for authority not only to the words of Christ and the apostles in the scriptures, but also to their words kept in the oral traditions handed down from the early church leaders who heard Christ and the apostles teach. Irenaeus overlooked the fact that oral tradition gets changed as it passes through the generations. He also forgot the warning of Jesus to the Jewish leaders who set aside the commandment of God by holding to the traditions of their elders from times past - Matthew 15:1-9. This teaching of Irenaeus helped create the later Roman Catholic belief that the church is not governed by scripture alone but also by the apostolic traditions handed down in the church.

Third, in an effort to protect the church from the confusion of heresy, Irenaeus taught that a true apostolic church is one whose bishop is descended through an unbroken line of succession from the apostles. In other words, a true church is one whose bishop was ordained by a bishop....who was ordained by an apostle. This teaching, not found in the New Testament scriptures, is the seed from which grew the Roman Catholic claims that the Bishop of Rome is the successor of Peter and the other bishops are successors of the apostles.

2) Tertullian of Carthage (155-223) was head of the Bible school at Carthage in North Africa. He was converted in 195. He wrote a letter to the Roman

government defending Christianity against the false charges of its enemies. He also wrote against various false doctrines. In opposing heresy, he erred as Irenaeus had, looking for authority in "apostolic tradition," not solely in the dependable teachings of scripture. This led the church astray in the future. In Tertullian's later years, he became concerned because many Christians had no real spiritual life, and that worship was becoming more and more a matter of correct forms and not a matter of the heart. He joined the sect of the Montanists, who rejected the authority of the bishops and believed that God spoke directly to the church by the Holy Spirit. We will study more about this group later.

3) Cyprian of Carthage (200-258) was at first a rich man. He was converted in 246 and sold his possessions and gave the proceeds to the poor. After being a Christian only two years, he was made an elder of the church, and soon after was made Bishop of Carthage. Some were offended at the ordination of such a new Christian. But he succeeded Tertullian as head of the Bible school at Carthage. Cyprian taught many good things, but there were three ideas in his teaching that misled the church in future:

First, he greatly elevated the office of the bishop. He said everyone should obey the bishop as one ordained of God. He felt that a strong bishop could better protect the church from false teachings.
Second, he said that the elder who officiates at the table of the Lord is like a priest offering sacrifice at the altar. This idea helped to produce later the Roman Catholic doctrine that there is a special priesthood on earth between Christians and God, and that Jesus is offered over and over as a sacrifice.

Third, he also, like others, appealed to tradition as well as to the scriptures for authority. But one thing which he wrote contradicts Roman Catholic doctrine. He said that all bishops are equal in authority, and that the Roman bishop has no authority over his fellow-bishops. Cyprian was beheaded by the Roman government in 258.

4) Clement of Alexandria (150-200) studied in the Bible school at Alexandria, and later became head of the school. He wrote against heretical teachings. He was well-educated in Greek philosophy and was able to communicate with and to convert other highly-educated people. In those days, some leaders such as those at the school in Carthage, were saying that a Christian teacher has no use for worldly learning and should only study the scriptures. Clement, on the other hand, said that a Christian should not be afraid of worldly learning, but should enter into it and use it as a tool for serving Christ.

5) Hippolytus (170-236) studied under Irenaeus. Later he lived at Rome. He wrote some books explaining scripture and some against false teaching. He was condemned to slave labor by the Romans.

6) Origen (185-254) studied under Clement in the Bible school at Alexandria in Egypt. Later he became the head of the school. Origen's father was killed

for his faith. Origen wrote many, many books explaining the scriptures. But many times he mixed his own ideas with scripture teaching. He used the allegorical method of interpretation (which assumes that every literal statement or object in scripture must not simply be taken literally, but may symbolize something else spiritual. In addition to its literal meaning, each object or person or event may have one or more hidden symbolic or figurative meanings). Since the interpreter supplies the hidden meanings, this method of interpretation allows the interpreter to read into scripture any meaning he chooses. There is always the danger of teaching our own ideas as the word of God whenever we try to find symbolic meanings where they are not clearly called for by scripture. Origen also wrote a book against Celsus, an enemy of Christianity. Taking the words of Matthew 18:8,9 and 19:10-12 literally, Origen had himself made a eunuch surgically.

F. Heresies and doctrinal divergences which appeared after the death of the apostles:

1) Nazarenes. This does not refer to the whole church, which was sometimes called by outsiders "the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5), nor to the modern denomination by this name, but to a group of Jewish Christians who fled Jerusalem before it was destroyed by the Romans in 67-70 A. D., and lived in a town called Pella. They lived there for many generations and separated from others by teaching that Jewish Christians must keep circumcision and the Law of Moses in order to be saved.

2) Ebionites taught that all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, must keep the Law of Moses to be saved. They believed that Moses and Christ are equal in authority. They rejected the epistles of Paul because of Paul's teaching that Christians are free from the Law. They also rejected the gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, and they rejected in Matthew statements about the pre-existence of Christ with God, and about the virgin birth. They said that Jesus was begotten by Joseph, was an ordinary human being, and only became the Son of God at his baptism. They also said that the Holy Spirit departed from Jesus before his death, and that he died as an ordinary person.

3) Marcionites took their name from their leader, Marcion. Marcion feared that the church was losing the New Testament doctrine of the free grace of God and was regressing to a system of law-salvation as in the Old Testament. He wanted to re-emphasize the doctrine of grace, but went to an extreme in doing so. Marcion rejected the Old Testament scriptures. He said that the God of judgment and wrath seen in the Old Testament is different from the God of grace and mercy seen in the New Testament. He maintained that Paul was the only faithful apostle, and that all the others had left the teaching of grace to return to the Old Testament system of law. He also said that the commandments of Christ are not essential to our salvation; only faith and grace.

There is a lesson here: Marcion, in wanting to correct those who had fallen into the error of legalism, reacted so extremely in the opposite direction as to

fall into serious error himself, throwing out many of Christ's teachings. And this is always a danger when religious errors need to be corrected. All through church history we see that when some erred far to the left, others reacted to their error to the point of falling into a pit on the right. It is hard to remain in the center of scriptural teaching if we approach doctrinal questions with pride or in a spirit of reaction. Reaction is a dangerous way to formulate theology. Much humility and self-examination and prayerful contemplation are necessary in order to avoid reactionary error. Marcion was excommunicated in 144 as a heretic and formed the Marcionite church. The Marcionites only accepted the gospel of Luke and the letters of Paul as genuine scripture.

4) Gnostics damaged the church more than any other group in this period. Their name comes from the word "gnosis," which means "knowledge." They said that they had secret knowledge or light which only "spiritual" people could learn, and they charged money for teaching their secrets to others. Their teaching combined Christian and Jewish ideas with myths from Persian and other Eastern religions. There were varieties of Gnostics. They believed that all matter is evil. The body is evil and should be abased and severely treated. Food is evil and a person should restrict his diet as far as possible. Marriage is evil because it serves the body and produces more bodies as children are born. God is far away and cannot be intimately known. The God of the Old Testament, they said, is evil, because a good God could not have made a material world, since matter is evil. They said that beginning with the good God, who is far away, there are many other gods or "emanations" coming out from him like successive shadows, each further from the good God than the one before, and each less good and less powerful. One of these lesser gods, they said, created the world.

Gnostics taught people to worship angels. They denied the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ. Since the body is evil, Christ could not have come in the flesh. The Son of God did not really die on the cross; his death was just an illusion. He had no real body. One branch of Gnostics believed that only the spirit will be saved, and that therefore a person can sin in any way he likes in the body without being lost. The ideas of Gnosticism began to be heard even during the later apostolic period, and one of the main purposes of some later N. T. books, such as John's gospel and epistles, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, was to counteract these errors (see 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 6:20,21; John 1:1-14; 1 John 1:1-10; 2:4,18; 4:2,3; 2 John 7-11; Colossians 2:16-23). But Gnosticism grew much more powerful after the death of the apostles, drawing away many believers in many countries. By 200 A. D., Gnosticism began to weaken and fade. Irenaeus and others of his time taught much in opposition to the Gnostics. Many Gnostic ideas, such as asceticism, celibacy and the worship of created beings were absorbed into the church as it moved slowly toward medieval Catholicism.

5) Docetism gets its name from a Greek word which means "to seem." Docetists believed that Christ did not really suffer on the cross; he just seemed to suffer. These, like the Gnostics, believed that the body is evil,

and that Christ did not have a real body, but only one of appearance.

6) Montanism was the teaching of a teacher named Montanus and his followers. Montanus feared that the Christians of his time were worshiping from habit and tradition rather than from the heart, in form and letter rather than in spirit. Montanus also felt that since the church had contended doctrinally with the Gnostics for a long time, many of the teachers were more concerned with strife about words than in approaching God in spirit. There was some justification for Montanus' concerns. Montanus' answer was to try to restore the miraculous gifts of the Spirit seen in the early church, and especially the gift of prophecy. He opposed the growing power of the bishops in the church. He said that the church should not be led by exalted bishops, but by the Holy Spirit through the gift of prophecy. He believed that God had given him special revelation for the church, and that he and his helpers had received the Holy Spirit in a measure greater than that of the apostles. Church leaders who opposed Montanus wrote that he and his followers would fall down and babble just as Montanus had been accustomed to do when he had been a pagan idol priest before his conversion.

Montanus converted two women, Priscilla and Maximilla, who left their husbands and traveled with Montanus as prophetesses. They drew many people away into their sect. Montanus taught that Christians should abase the body and practice severity to it. He taught that celibacy is holier than marriage. He did not allow re-marriage even if one's first mate was dead. He made many rules against worldly enjoyments. He taught that there are some sins which, if committed after baptism, have no forgiveness. The Montanists believed in the authority of their visions and prophetic revelations more than in the scriptures. They taught that Jesus was about to return and set up a millennial reign on earth in Phrygia. They set a date for his return and were very embarrassed when this did not happen. Because they had disposed of their belongings in anticipation of Christ's coming, many Montanists had to beg for good and shelter, or turn to theft. In his older years, Tertullian, one of the greatest of the early church "fathers," was converted to Montanism. Montanism, in spite of its extremes and its false prophecies, attracted many people because of its demanding requirements on lifestyle and its emphasis on spirituality. Montanism dwindled away by 400 or 500 A. D.

We have already seen that people, in their zeal to correct some error, often fall into an opposing error. Montanus wanted to combat the cold formalism of traditional religion; he wanted a personal, spiritual relationship with God. But he erred because he began to listen to the subjective thoughts of his heart more than to the objective and certain teaching of the scriptures. If Christians do not try every spirit to see if it is of God, testing each doctrine carefully by the scriptures, many strange teachings enter the church - 1 John 4:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; Acts 17:11. We also learn here that when the church does not live close to God and his will, heresies are born. If the church had kept its warmth and spirituality, perhaps people would not have

felt the need to look for God elsewhere. And the amazing thing is that in its efforts to fight Montanism, the church fell even further into error. Preaching had always been a main feature of Christian assemblies, but now, out of fear of what the Montanists did in their services, many churches stopped having preaching and did not allow any kind of address that would stir people's hearts. This neglect of preaching persisted until preaching was restored to prominence around 1500 during the Reformation. In place of preaching, the Lord's supper received all the emphasis. Teachers became priests offering the body and blood of the Lord. And in reaction against Montanist emphasis on the Second Coming, the church in many places stopped teaching at all about Christ's coming again. The church should be very careful and wise in how it sets about to correct error, lest it fall into other error.

7) Manicheans followed Mani, who was killed by the Persian government in 276. They rejected Jesus and said that there is another Christ in heaven. They practiced asceticism and discouraged marriage. They died out around 450.

8) Monarchianism is a teaching which said that there is only one person, not three, in the Divinity. There were various branches of this teaching. Some said that Jesus was only a man, child of both Joseph and Mary, and that God received him as his Son at the time of his baptism. One leader of this sect was Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch. Today's Unitarians preserve this same error concerning the nature of Divinity. One branch of Monarchianism taught that God is one person but manifests himself in different forms and under different names. This idea is called "modalism." They taught that the Father and the Son are the same person manifested in different modes. Sometimes God manifests himself as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and other times as the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this teaching is called "Sabellianism," because Sabellius was one of its leading proponents. It is also called "patriopassianism," because if the Father is also the Son, the Father suffered on the cross. Some brands of Pentecostalism today are monarchian because they teach that there is only one person in the God-head and that Jesus is his name (therefore they strongly emphasize baptism in the name of "Jesus only").

9) Donatists, followers of Donatus, said that Christians who denied the Lord under persecution should not be allowed to repent or be received back into the church. Novatian of Rome had taught this earlier, but Donatus carried the teaching forward around 311. The majority in the churches, however, refused this idea and allowed the fallen to repent.

10) Cerinthianism, the teaching of Cerinthus, who was a leader in bringing Gnosticism into the churches. Cerinthus lived during the last years of the apostle John and afterward. He also taught a form of millennialism. Cerinthus claimed to have been told by an angel that Christ would come and set up a thousand-year reign which would be marked by feasting and marrying among Christians. Even at Christ's first coming, many of the Jews expected him to set up an earthly kingdom and solve the earthly woes of

people - John 6:1-15,25,26. Jesus explained that his kingdom was not of this world - John 18:36; Luke 17:20, 21. But after Jesus returned to heaven, some Christians, like Cerinthus, began to say that when Jesus comes again, he will set up an earthly kingdom. This is a very common idea among evangelicals today. It is now called "premillennialism," a word signifying that Christ will come again before he establishes the earthly millennial reign.

11) Original Sin. This is the doctrine which says that a child receives the sin of Adam through his parents when he is born, and thus is born guilty before God. Tertullian (160-220) was the first to teach this, but he did not teach, as others did later, that an infant should be baptized. Cyprian of Carthage (200-258) established this doctrine more firmly. But because many in the church had not yet begun to accept this doctrine, baptism of infants was not yet common. Only when Augustine popularized the doctrine of inherited sin, around 400, did infant baptism begin to be more widespread. It began to be believed that if an infant died without baptism, it would be lost because of its inherited guilt. Although we have been a sinful race ever since the fall of Adam, and although we do have sinful natures, the scriptures do not teach that a child has any guilt of sin before he or she is old enough to choose personally between good and evil. A child cannot be guilty because of its parents' sin - Ezekiel 18:20.

This new teaching that a child is born with the guilt of his parents gave rise to still another erroneous doctrine called baptismal regeneration. This is the idea that the ceremony of baptism alone can take away sins, although the recipient does not know anything, or believe in the Lord, or repent. The early church under the apostles did believe that baptism is in order that our sins be forgiven, and that we be saved and enter into Christ - Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; compare John 3:3-5; Titus 3:5; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27). But always in scripture baptism is an act of faith following repentance, and is a means of actively trusting the promises of God in Christ. It has no value as a mere ritual or legalistic performance, when the recipient has no faith.

G. Changes in the church between the death of the apostles and 313 A.D.

1) Changes in organization: Most religious scholars of all Christian backgrounds agree that in the time of the apostles, every local church had a plurality of elders who oversaw it - Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17; and that the terms "elder" and "bishop" (overseer) were used synonymously to refer to the same person or office - Acts 20:17,28,29; Titus 1:5,7; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7. All the elders of a local church were equal in authority, and every elder was also a bishop/pastor. There is no evidence in apostolic times of any elder or bishop being elevated in authority over his fellow elders. The scriptures simply speak of "the bishops" of the church at Philippi, or "the elders" of the church at Ephesus. No group of local elders had any authority over some other local congregation besides their own.

Ignatius of Antioch is the first writer who makes a distinction between bishop and elder. He wrote around 115 A. D. He reserved the name of bishop for one leader who is exalted above the elders in the local church. By 150 A. D. it was fairly common for such an arrangement to be found in local churches.

In future, the bishop continued to grow in power. The bishop of a larger town began to have authority over the smaller churches in the villages around, and not just in his own local church. Still later the bishop of the church in the capital city acquired authority over all the local churches in his country.

The process continued as the bishops in the most important Christian world centers came to rule over lesser national bishops. By 400 A. D., authority in the church everywhere was divided between the bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Rome. In all of this we see the organization of the church becoming more and more like that of the empire.

2) Changes in worship: In the time of the New Testament, all Christians were priests and shared in the service of worship. But after the time of the apostles, some began to teach that baptism or the Lord's Supper should not happen without the presence of the bishop. These teachers were concerned lest the Christians be led away by false teachings. But there was also an element on pride and ambition on the part of some bishops.

In the New Testament, Christians worshiped in a simple, inward way, which ministered to the spirit rather than to the senses. There were almost no outward "props" and implements such as there had been in the Old Testament worship. But as time went by, following the death of the apostles, many of the Old Testament ideas were gradually re-introduced. Elders and bishops began to be thought of as special priests standing between common worshipers and God, and they alone were allowed to lead in worship. The Lord's Supper, which had been simply a memorial meal in the early church, gradually came to be thought of as a re-sacrificing of the body and blood of Christ on the altar by the "priests." Cyprian of Carthage reinforced this idea. Partly because of the Gnostic teaching that the body and marriage are evil, Christians began to think that singlehood or celibacy is more holy than marriage. The idea emerged that leaders of the church should not marry. (In the apostolic period, many church leaders were married - 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5, 6; 1 Corinthians 9:5). The early church did not elevate special days, apart from the first day of the week, the day on which Jesus arose from the dead. But later the church began to keep special annual days as the Jews and pagans did. They very early kept Easter, the day of Christ's resurrection; Pentecost, the day the church began; and Christmas, in remembrance of Christ's birth. As time went on, other annual observances were added in memory of other events in Jesus' life.

The church of the scriptures baptized a person as soon as he or she

believed in Jesus - Acts 2:38-41; 10:44-48; 8:12; 16:14, 15, 30-33. But later on, converts were saved up until such special days as Easter or Pentecost and then baptized. Salt was sprinkled on the head of the candidate for baptism, and after baptism he was clothed in white garments and a crown of victory, and given milk and honey to eat.

Very gradually people in some places began to baptize infants. In the apostolic period, baptism was by immersion of the whole body in water (the word "baptize" in the Greek signifies this) - Mark 1:9, 10; John 3:23; Acts 8:38, 39; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12. But gradually and occasionally baptism later began to be performed by sprinkling or pouring water on the head. This form of baptism is first mentioned in the book called the "Didache" (written about 130 to 150 A. D.). The first person known to have been baptized by sprinkling or pouring was Novatian, in about 250 A. D. He was too sick to be immersed, and the brethren, fearing that he would die soon, poured water on his head (this is known as "clinical baptism"). But when Novatian recovered and was later chosen to be a bishop, some people would not accept him because he had not been immersed. This shows that immersion was considered the real form of baptism at that time. For two or three hundred years after the death of the apostles, only the weak or sick were baptized by sprinkling or pouring (the Eastern Orthodox churches have always used immersion to this day). But after infant baptism became common due especially to the teaching of Augustine, baptism by sprinkling or pouring became more common in the West. Even so, many were immersed up to 1300 A. D.

Gradually the churches began to add more and more to their services things which had physical and sensual appeal, after the manner of worship in the Old Testament. They made use of holy oil, holy water, bells, candles, special priestly garb, ornate buildings and such. Worship appealed more and more to the flesh and less to the spirit (John 4:24).

3) Changes in Authority:

The authority of tradition was added. At first, the church was ruled by the word of Christ and his apostles. After the death of the apostles, that same word was left in the hands of the church in the form of the New Testament scriptures. But as time went on, some were not satisfied to rely on the scriptures alone. Some leaders said that the teaching of Christ could be known not only through the scriptures, but also through the oral traditions passed down through the generations from those who had heard the apostles. Church leaders wanted all the ammunition they could get in opposing heresies, and they were glad to appeal to tradition as well as scripture if this would make their case seem stronger.

Though this might have seemed to help at the time, it laid the foundation for great error in future. Those who lived close to the time of the apostles were able to remember their teachings without too much loss or change. But as time passed, the original teachings were often either changed knowingly or

unknowingly, or forgotten, or mixed with the ideas of others while still being claimed as apostolic. Therefore oral tradition could never be trusted to represent the original apostolic teaching in its purity. Only in the scriptures was the teaching of Christ and his apostles and prophets preserved faithfully. Even as the traditions of the Jewish elders began to contradict the Old Testament scriptures after a time - Matthew 15:1-9, even so the traditions of the church began to contradict the New Testament scriptures as the traditions became corrupted. And since the church trusted tradition, not scripture alone, many departures from original New Testament belief and practice entered the church. These errors contributed to the evolution of the medieval Roman Catholic church in the future. Roman Catholicism still believes that the church is to look to tradition, not just to the scriptures, for authority.

The authority of creeds was added. A creed is a statement of faith written by the leaders of a religious communion, and those who would enter that communion must assent to that statement. Creeds were first written as a measuring device for separating true and false believers, as the church battled heresies. Those who refused to confess the credal statements were considered outsiders or false teachers. The first creeds were brief and not elaborate; later creeds were long and detailed. As helpful as creeds seemed to be at first, they caused the church to look at a humanly-written document for authority, and not just to the God-inspired scriptures. Today almost every church has its own creed or catechism. The word of the scriptures is the same for every church, but the creed of each church is different. As long as each church insists on the authority of its own creed, unity between churches is hindered. The first creeds were written to preserve the unity of the church. But the writers did not see that in adding a written authority besides that of the scriptures, they were opening the way for many divisions preserved by creeds in the future.

The authority of councils was added. Beginning in 325 A. D., bishops from everywhere met in "ecumenical councils" from time to time to discuss and settle questions of doctrine and practice in the churches. Their decisions were bound on the whole church just the same as the word of scripture. Some think that the meeting at Jerusalem to discuss the question of circumcision and the law of Moses is a scriptural precedent for such councils. But there is a difference. For one thing, the Jerusalem conference was not a council of bishops from everywhere; it consisted of brethren from two churches, Antioch, which had been troubled by the judaizing teachers, and Jerusalem, from which the teachers had originated. But most important, the apostles of Christ were at Jerusalem and had authority to make rules binding the whole church. Apostles were charged with laying foundational teaching in the church - Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:10,11; 14:37; Galatians 1:8,9; Jude 3; John 13:20; 14:26; 16:13,14. But at the death of the apostles, the work of revealing the will of Christ for the church was finished, and it only remained for the church to obey the word of Christ and the apostles in the scriptures, not to meet and make additional laws. By raising up the authority of the councils, the church established another

fallible human authority, as it had done with tradition and creeds.