

**A HISTORY OF THE EARLY
CHURCH
(05 BC-AD 451)**

JOHN A. APEABU (Ph.D.)

**Department of Christian Religious Studies
Federal College of Education,
Zaria.**

© 2020 JOHN A. APEABU (Ph.D)
First Published 2020

ISBN NO: 978-978-57343-7-9

All Right Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Published by:
Faith Printers International,
Zaria, Nigeria.

Printed by:
Faith Printers International,
Block 6 Flat 36 Rimin Tsiwa Estate
Opposite A.B.U Campus, Kongo Zaria
Tel: 08069991345, 08062241889, 08022067248.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my darling wife, Deborah
Èbùn and lovely children, Jeremiah and Nehemiah.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I cannot but praise my God, who has been with me all through the significant milestones and vicissitudes of life that have helped to redefine my personality and career that now stand as the bedrock for the production of this book. To Him alone be the glory and praises forevermore.

My profound gratitude goes to my lovely wife who is not only my Power House but also the never disappointing engine of my life for the prayer support, conducive and enabling environment she provided while writing this book. The moral support of my lovely children is hereby acknowledged.

I remain grateful to the management of the Federal College of Education Zaria, and specifically the Department of Christian Religious Studies, who accorded me the noble and challenging opportunities that spurred the writing of this book. The candid selfless and sacrificial help of my friend and brother, Bro. Peter A. Matemilola, who proofread the manuscript amidst his tight schedule is hereby recognized with much appreciation. Similarly, I appreciate the services of all who may not be mentioned but contributed in one way or the other towards the production of this book. Your services will not go unrewarded by God. Thank you all.

PREFACE

My more than a decade involvement as a lecturer in Christian Religious Studies Department in Federal College of Education (teaching N.C.E. and undergraduate students) and student pastors in Bible College spurred the passion for church history and the vision and mission to disseminate the knowledge among Christians. The vision is simply a scholarly reconstruction of the history of the origin, growth, and development of the early church amidst seas of persecutions and heresies from the apostolic age to the first four hundred years of the infant church. The book therefore provides a historical framework and scholarly lenses with which to assess issues experiences and phenomena growth of the church of the twenty-first century.

The mission is to help the ordinary Christians, church workers, ministers of the gospel and the entire body of Christ trace the root of Christianity (indeed of their faith) to the Jesus of history. Secondly this little book aims at creating an awareness of some of the uneasy pathways of contending for orthodoxy that the Early Church sailed through, especially in the face of hostilities and persecutions, the emergence of Christianity as a state religion in Roman Empire and Trinitarian and Christological controversies that ensued from the spread of the church among philosophical Greeks.

Pst. John A. Apeabu (Ph.D.)
Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Federal College of Education, Zaria.

FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to write this foreword to Pst. Dr. John A. Apeabu's book. The author is known to me for an upward of thirty-five years now. We were mates during our undergraduate in 1986 at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

There are books written on church history, yet there is need for this one. The main aim of putting up this book is to provide the most helpful up-to-date understanding of the knowledge of church history. This book is written by a Christian scholar who specialized in church history. He was able to trace the origin and expansion of the Christian church from its formation to A.D 450.

In this book, the important themes are woven into the work. The author writes from the conviction that the nine chapters are truly covered. It is very clear that, there is evidence of wide reading and with in-depth understanding of the historical root of church history.

I hereby recommend this book as a textbook for students of church history in tertiary institutions of learning. This book is equally recommended to seminaries, affiliated colleges, and to Christian at large.

Oliver, I. Bongotons (Ph.D)

Associate Professor of Christian Religious Education

Current Head of Section, CRS. Department of Arts and Social Science Education,

Faculty of Education,

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Preface	v
Foreword	vi

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS CHURCH HISTORY?	1
What is History	1
Definition of Church	4
The Meaning of Church History	6
The Scope of Church History	8
The Need for Church History	11
Significant Periods in Church History	15
Self-Assessment Questions	20

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORLD OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction	22
Political Environment Created by the Romans	23
Religious Contribution of the Jews	25
Religions in Roman Empire	27
Self-Assessment Questions	29

CHAPTER THREE

BIBLICAL WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Antioch (Syria)	30
Alexandria	32
Athens	33
Colossae	33
Corinth	34
Decapolis	35
Jerusalem	36
Philippi	38
Antioch (Pisidia)	39
Samaria	40
Jericho	42
Self-Assessment	43

CHAPTER FOUR

SECTS OF JUDAISM

Introduction	44
Pharisees	44
Sadducees	49
The Scribes	51
The Zealots	53
The Essenes	54
Self-Assessment Question	56

CHAPTER FIVE

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH

A Discuss on the Origin of the church	57
Conclusion	59
Self-Assessment	61

CHAPTER SIX

THE EARLY CHURCH IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Introduction	62
Importance of the Book of Acts as a Historical Narrative	62
Pentecost: The Church Birthday	68
Features of the First New Testament Pentecost Experience	70
Clarification of Pentecost by Peter	71
The First Christian Community in Jerusalem	72
The Early Church in Jerusalem	75
Early Christian Worship Pattern	77
The Early Church in Antioch	78
The Planting of the Church in Samaria	79
Apostle Peter in the Early Church	79
Background Paul of (Saul of Tarsus)	80
Conversion and call of Paul	81
Paul's Missionary Journey AD 46-48	82
The First Apostle Council of Jerusalem AD 89	84
Paul's Second Missionary Journey AD 49-53	86
Paul's Third Missionary Journey AD	89
Reasons for the Spread and Growth the Early Church	94
Self-Assessment Questions	96

CHAPTER SEVEN

HERESIES AND SECTS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction	97
Ebionites	98
Gnosticism	99
Marcionism	102
Montanism	107
Arianism	111
Apollinarianism	112
Nestorianism	113
Eutychianism (Monophysitism)	114
Donatism	114
Manichaeism	115
Monarchianism	117
Self Assessment	118

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEFENSE AGAINST HERESIES	120
Introduction	120
Defenders of the Christian Faith	112
Justin Martyr: Apologist in the East (140-165 AD)	126
Irenaeus: The Bishop of Lyons-Anti-Gnostics Polemist (130AD-200AD)	127
Clement of Alexandria: A Polemist (155 AD-215)	129
Tertullian of Carthage: An Apologist (155 AD-225 AD)	131
Origen: A Polemist (185 AD-254 AD)	134
Cyprian of Carthage: A Polemist (200-258 AD)	136
Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)	138
Pelagius Concept of Sin and Grace	140
Anselm	142
Self-Assessment Questions	142

CHAPTER NINE

THE EARLY CHURCH IN THE FIRE OF PERSECUTION

Introduction	144
Reasons for Persecution	150
The successions of persecutors of the early church	153

Persecution under Emperor (Claudius (AD 41- AD 54)	156
Persecution under Emperor Nero (AD 54-AD 68)	156
Persecution under Emperor Domitian (AD 81-AD 96)	158
Persecution under Emperor Trajan (98-117)	159
Persecution under Hadrian (Ad 177-138)	161
Persecution under Antonius Pius (AD 138-161)	161
Persecution under Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180)	162
Persecution under Emperor Septimus Severus (AD193-211)	163
Persecution under Emperor Decius Trajan (AD 249-251)	164
Persecution under Emperor Valerian (253-260)	165
Persecution under Emperor Diocletian (AD 303 -311)	166
Self Assessment Question	169

CHAPTER TEN

EMPEROR COSTANTINE

Christianity in the Reign of Constantine	170
Self-Assessment Test	172

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TRINITARIAN AND CHRISTOLOGICAL

CONTROVERSIES AT ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Introduction	173
Doctrine of Trinity	175
Anti-Trinitarian Views of Arius	176
The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)	176
Heresies of Arius	179
Post Nicaea Council Controversy	183
1. Antiochian's View	184
2. Alexandrians View	185
3. Roman View	185
Council of Constantinople (AD 381)	186
Controversy on the Person of the Holy Spirit	187
Council of Ephesus	190
Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)	192
Chalcedon Definition	194
The Chalcedonian Christology and Creed	194
Self Assessment Question	196
Bibliography	197

Chapter

1

WHAT IS CHURCH HISTORY?

Introduction

Man, by nature is characteristically curious about his past. Thus, every man, tribe, country and nation (humanity: past or present), has a history. Most African cultures attach much value to one's past. Consequently, individuals or group of people or communities are often rated by the track records of their past. In the same vein, the place for history in Christian faith cannot be overemphasized. This is because the foundation of the Christian faith, according to Earle E. Cairns, is rooted in the history of God becoming man, who lived in time and space in the person of Jesus Christ¹. Christianity therefore, counts much on spiritual ancestry as a candid pillar that stands out for a guide on what to hold unto or on what to avoid. The history of our past heroes of faith has gone a long way to inspire, influence and shape the contextualization of our Christian faith today. As it goes without saying it, that people are often affected (either positively or negatively), by the good and or evil past people or events.

What is History?

The French equivalent for the English word history, is "historie" while its German equivalence is "Geschichte," both means 'to happen'. Thus, history is what happened but not the process or the product of what happened. Simply put,

1. Cairns Earle E. Christianity through the Centuries: A History the Christian Church. Grand Rapid Zondervin, 1996

history is an incidence, and an actual event in time and space as a result of human action(s) or inaction(s). Such incidence is usually an absolute and objective fact. In other words, history cannot be exactly repeated later in another place, although, there could be parallel and identical incidence due to people behaving in similar way at different times and places.

Another way to look at the concept of history is to see it as the information that one gets about an incident (that does exist in the present), through the historian's research and reflections. History does not study what people failed to do or did not do. To a very large extent, history is the description of what, when, why, and where of any data, that the historian wants to understand, (often times), from the available information. This suggests that history is the interpretation of the past in the light of data gathered. In this sense, history is the subjective reconstruction of the past in the light of the data that is accessible to the historian at the present. No historian can claim the knowledge of absolute truth about the past but rather all historians *possess* to a very large extent, an objective and impartial truth about the past. In this light therefore, history can be defined as the event, or incident, inquiry or process and product; or information occurring only once in time and space. History as an event, is absolute while on the other hand, history as inquiry and interpretation is relative, therefore it can vary in time.

In addition, history is the reconstitution by those and for those who are living of the lives of those who are dead. History is the written or unwritten narratives consisting of a continuous methodical record in order of time of importance of public event, especially those concerned with a particular country, people, individual and institutions. The elements that constitute history are not exhaustive. In other words, it is difficult for one to produce a comprehensive, systematic and

universally accepted taxonomy of the scope of history. This is because, different people approach the definition of history differently. For instance, Galbraith approached the definition of history from scientific point of view. This is in line with Hillary C. Achunike's opinion that history is a hybrid of science and government². Just as Marc Bloch also argued that history is the science of man in time. By science, they mean the body of knowledge that seeks to tell the truth³. To some extent, history is scientific. History can be defined as the interpreted records of the socially significant human past and sources.

A biblical perspective shows that, history has two sides: the divine and human actors. The former presents history as a God's revelation in order of time including His successive unfolding of His infinite wisdom, justice, mercy for His glory and eternal happiness of mankind. The latter (i.e. humanly speaking), sees history as the biography of human race and the gradual development (including the normal and abnormal) of the physical intellectual and moral forces to find consummation of general judgment with its eternal reward and punishments.

Succinctly put, history is:

- i. The reconstruction and interpretation of past events or incidences.
- ii. The process of objective inquiring into the past that may involve rigorous research, source criticisms while striving to change myths and legends.

The accumulated body of knowledge of the past based on the historian's interpretation(s) of material

2. Achunike C.H. What is History? An African Perspective, Nigeria: Re Carles and Patrick Ltd., Nimo 1996

3. Meyer, S.C. The Church from Pentecost to the Present, Chicago: Moody Press 1999

or non material evidences available in document or otherwise.

- iii. The knowledge of the significant aspects of our past that is made accessible to the historian.

Definition of Church

The general layman's concept of church is that, it is a building used for the purposes of Christian religious activities or worship. This definition of church as a separate building specifically designated for worship would have been foreign to the early believers as they never had such but met in homes of members (Acts 1:13; 2:46 12:12; Rom. 16:5 1Cor.16:19; Col. 4:15; Phil. 2). Others see it as an organization of local assemblies like the Assemblies of God's Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Roman Catholic Church or the Methodist Church.

The concept "church" has elusive meaning as that of history. The word church as already noted, sometimes used to designate a building consecrated for Christian religious services or as often used to refer to a local church or denomination could be misleading. However, the biblical perspective of church is from the Greek word '*Ecclesia*' that means the called-out ones or an assembly of people. Thus, the word church refers to people rather than a building (Acts 19:30-41, 7: 38). When a building was mentioned in the New Testament, it was in relation to the people (the church) that met there for fellowship or worship. (Rom 16:5; 1Cor.16:19, Col. 4:15, Phil. 2). It was much later, when Christianity was legitimized and had gained much affluence in Roman Empire, particularly, after the conversion of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century that the word church came to mean the building where the people met. Our contemporary time has further imported other meanings into the concept of church, so that the word

church is now used to refer to particular denomination. The truth is that the word church as already stated actually means a group of believers.

More appropriately, the “church” is a Greek word “ekklesia”. It is derived from the compound verbs “ekkeleo” that is the compound words “ek” meaning “out” and “kaleo” meaning to call or summon. Thus, the literal meaning of church is to “call out”. This New Testament word “Ekklesia” etymologically, according to Willington’s has a loose connection with the Hebrew word “qahal” which is translated congregation, assembly or company. Qahal, invariably means those assemblies gathered together for a purpose (i.e. for religious worship of God as in 2Chron.20:5; or for Civic affairs as in 1Kings 12:3 and Prov.5:14 or for war as in Num.22:4; Judge 20:2). The New Testament use of the word “ekklesia” is technical. Theologically, it is used as a designation for the people of God that is an assembly of people called out by God. These are people called out of the world and life of sin by Christ unto salvation and inheritance of Christ’s kingdom (Mt.11:28-30; Acts 26:16-18). Pre-eminently, it describes the totality of those who subscribe to the teaching of Jesus Christ. The church therefore, is an assembly of saints and true believers arising from the acceptance and faith in the preaching of the gospel of salvation in Christ and the consequent administration of His sacraments: especially, water baptism and the Lords Supper. It should be rightly pointed out that the church is not a mere formal structure or an organization with administrative and other external features. Rather, the church is an organism that consists of those in whom Christ is actively alive, as members (body of Christ), with Christ as the Head. Scripturally, the church is designated as the body of Christ, the pillar of truth, the temple of God, the communion of saints, and many others.

Although, we have said that the church is not essentially an organization but its visible existence however, has forms of organization and structures. The word church could therefore mean a local assembly or group of believers in a particular place or a body of individual living believers who profess faith in and allegiance to Christ. It is also the universal group of believers in all ages including the dead and the living (Mt 16 18, 5:23-27). The universal church comprises of every believer from all ages, from every nation, and kindred from the time of Pentecost to Christ's return. The universal church is not denominational. Even though, certain denominations may have and do teach the word of God with more accurate and better enlightenment than others. The universal church transcends denominational concept irrespective of the size of the denomination and its orthodoxy. The church is God's congregation. The church is not Jew or Gentiles. It is not a physical building. It is not a business organization. To capture the significance and the true nature of the church, the New Testament writers used certain metaphorical descriptions including: the **People** of God; the **Kingdom** of God; the **Temple** of God; the **Bride** of Christ; and the **Body** of Christ.

Meaning of Church History

Already we have considered the meaning(s) of "history" and "church" separately. From our explanations and definitions of history and church so far, one would readily agree with Mayer's definition of church history as the "story of those who have been followers of Jesus of Nazareth" during the past more than two thousand years⁴. This includes the interpretation of records and facts based on organized information gathered from written materials as well as non-

4. Robertson, O.P. Understanding the Land of the Bible, Biblical Theological Guiding New Jersey, 1996

material sources. A further insight to church history is given by Schaff in his book the “History of the church”. According to him, the history of the church is the rise and progress of the kingdom of heaven upon earth for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind. He is of the view that the introductory part of the church began with the creation of Adam and the promise of the serpent’s head bruiser which meant the regain of paradise that is the hope of future redemption from the curse of sin.

Since history deals with structures and processes, church history must deal with the various churches or denominations within Christendom. It must tell how they arose and how they influenced each other. It is also within the scope of church history to highlight the distinctive features of the various denominations that distinguish them from each other. These features are often doctrinal or ideological conflicts and cooperation that characterise their stories. It is also within the premise of church history to note other structures that have exerted influence on the church or that have influenced it; it considers also, the influence of the church on structures and institutions in the society for example, politics, economy, education, morals and culture. In summary, church history is the story of the people of God, taking into account their success and failures, their sorrows and joys, their sufferings and triumphs, their fellowship and frustrations, their understanding of the workings of the Holy Spirit in their midst and their general response to Christ’s message from the point of view of the dedicated, ordinary Christian and other heroes with a look into the future (Parousia).

From the above, the definition of church history could be summed as the retelling and interpretation of the past story of the followers of Christ in a sustainable way. In otherwords, Church history has to do with the description or

a story of the church (body believers) including their doctrine, growth, development, persecutions in all ages. It tends to spell the socio-political, economic, and cultural factors that have contributed in one way or the other to foster or frustrate the church at one time or the other. Church history also seeks to identify individuals and or groups (including para-church organisations, denominations), that have played significant roles in the spread of Christianity or in the planting of churches. Thus, church history aims at defining and describing the significant milestones in the progress of the church in all ages from the birth of the church to date.

However, within the compass of a short outline of history, not all churches in all countries in all ages or in all periods of more than two millennia could be captured. For the purpose of this book on “Early Church History” the content will be restricted to the first few centuries of the church age. Emphasis will be laid on the unique features and contributions of the church including individuals and denominations within this period. Since all the churches at different times, in their different shapes and forms could be said to have passed through the fire and storms of persecution, the history of the church will not be complete without a look at the causes, successions and effects of persecution on the church within the period.

In conclusion, we firmly hold Achunike’s thesis that church history is better done by Christians and that any church historian must first and foremost be a man or woman of faith to be able to see the meaning of church history in his or her responsible decision.

The Scope of Church History

The scope of the study of church history is very broad. It includes:

1. The History of the Political Environment of the Church

This aspect of church history attempts to define the interplay between the church and the state. It creates the awareness of the social, economic, political structures and other forces that have exerted influences on the church or that are essential factors which the historian needs to take cognizance of in the interpretation or reconstruction of the history of the church at a particular time or place.

2. The History of the Propagation of the Church

One of the major concerns of church history is the pattern of growth and spread of the Christian faith. This is the aspect of church history that helps to describe the various mission, methods of spreading the gospel, the men and martyrs involved in the propagation of the gospel and in the planting of churches.

3. The History of the Persecution of the Church

Persecution is an inseparable element of the history of the church in all ages. '*Yea, and that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*' 2Tim. 3:12). The history of the persecution of the church therefore is the branch of church history that spells the advance of the church amidst oppositions, persecution and unfavourable terrains for the church. Persecution of the church dates back to the political-ecclesiastical hostilities towards the Christians in the early church. It later included the anti-Christian imperial edicts by Decius and Diocletian and Muslim's anti-Christian policies. In modern times, it is often coined or reflected in secular totalitarianism.

4. The History of Church Polity

This is the branch of church history that deals with government of the church. The pattern of church government may include:

- i. Episcopacy (government by bishops).
- ii. Presbytery (government by elected elders).
- iii. Congregationalism (Congregation rather than representation democracy).

In Church Polity (whatever the system of government may be), the historian wants to define and distinguish the position of the Clergy and the Laity; the forms of discipline and liturgy of the church. This aspect of church history therefore, is interested in the description of the organizational structures and operational activities of the church at different times.

5. History of Church Polemics

This is the branch of church history that studies the emergence of heresies and the consequent formation of creeds and dogma to refute heretical teachings. This kind of history exists in the trace description of the tenet of faith and or dogma spelt out by the various Christian polemicists and apologists (church father who helped to define Christian orthodoxy) in their defense of faith. Sources for church polemics include the works of Church Fathers like Origen, Tertullian, Augustine of Hippo, and Cyprian of Carthage.

6. History of Church Praxis

This aspect of church history concerned with the practical contributions of Christianity through life style and activities of the church to the society. It attempts to describe the socio-

economic contributions of the church to enhance some palpable the development of the society.

7. History of Church's Presentation of Truth

This has to do with the historical development of the dogma, theology, catechistical teachings, discipleship programme, the general educational system of the church, the liturgy, hymnology and the like.

The Need for Church History

The place for church history in the appreciation of our modern civilization cannot be over stressed. Church history stands to benefit Christians of all ages and all denominations. Apostle Paul definitely underscores the value of church history when through divine inspiration, he noted that “...*whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scripture might have hope*” – (Romans 15:4). Thus, there abound pragmatic, didactic and moral values of church history for every human society: both the ancient and the modern. Although church history would be more relevant, and significant to those who see the finger of God that rules and reigns in the affairs of men; and or uses men, events, and ordinary human activities to achieve His divine purpose(s).

The history of the Christian faith is the most important and most intriguing study that one can undertake next to the study of the Holy Scriptures. There is something within Christians wanting to know the simple facts of their origins. Hence, all churches, like everybody and nations are deeply concerned and mindful about their past. This longing, coupled with the realization that we are presently experiencing what may be considered as most unusual worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in which the

definition of the church has come to be of most importance, makes the study of church history expedient. The most biblical definition of the church we have advocated in this book is simply that the church is that people of God in whose midst is found the spontaneous presence and activity of Jesus Christ. In this light, the history of the Christian church with the ultimate intent to give validity to this present move of the Holy Spirit as the most genuine present expression of the true life of Christ in His people – holy apostolic universal church of our Lord Jesus Christ in all the earth. Church history is therefore, needful to mould our ideologies in the contextual framework of activities and life of God's people – past and present. The Christian church, as Mayer would argue, has been one of the most powerful forces in the history of civilization during the past more than two thousand years now. Although, such history would be of greater consequence for some more than others. However, to a large number of people, it provides a greater understanding of the contemporary civilization from a Christian perspective. To more others, it may have didactic value that they may find it possible to learn from the past. The implication of this is that, the history of the church would help in the assessment of the present church as to what may or may not be feasible in conducting the affairs of the church or that are capable of destroying the Christian faith. All Christian workers and Pastors will certainly find the appreciation of the church work and ministry greatly enriched by the study of church history. Just as the study of the history of our nation helps to develop patriotism, so the study of church history would help in the Christians in the development of greater loyalty to the institution to which they are part. Church history will be much more relevant and significant to those who believe that there is God who rules and governs his church and those who believe that God

uses men and events in ordinary activities and course of His purpose.

Succinctly put, the following could be deduced as the general importance of church history to all and sundry.

1. Church History helps in the Appreciation and Understanding of the state of the Present Church.

The fact of life is that, what we are; what we experience; and what we see today as a group or individual are often times traceable to our yesterday or our past. In other words, some knowledge of our yesterday (past) is needful for us to successfully unravel, understand and interpret our present. Our differences in doctrines, liturgy and church administration often make more sense when they are examined in the light of our past history. The implication is that, the emerging varied religious phenomena did not evolve from a vacuum but are definitely the products of their historical backgrounds. This will explain the phenomena differences among the Christianity introduced by the Mission Churches; the Classical Pentecostalism and that of African Independent Churches.

2. Church History serves as a Bridge between the Past and Present Church.

The facts about the past activities and experiences of the church including the lifestyles; preachings; teachings; miracles, doctrines and persecutions are the connecting nodes that clearly show the heritage through which one can better understand the present church.

3. Church History Can Save the Church from Error and Falsehood.

The seeds of most theological errors were sown either in ignorance of the scripture or in the complete negligence and

detachment from history of the church. So then, next to the study of the Bible is the study of the history of the church. Christianity was founded by definite historical figure: Jesus Christ. Hence, the tenets, theology and practical life style that could be defined as orthodox are those that are traceable to the 'Faith of our Fathers'. When church history is thrown to the mud, people believe and teach anything they like and are consequently prone to error and falsehood. It is not surprising that one of the standards used by the early church to identify heretics in the face of severe heretical sects that emerged and posed a serious threat to the infant church were apostolic tradition and succession. The term Apostolic Tradition here simply means an appeal to historical evidences and legacies of the Apostles.

4. Church History Inspires

The knowledge of the legacies left behind by our spiritual ancestors often times motivate the younger generations for a greater height. Just as everyone wants to know and take pride in associating with his genealogy, so do the Christian in the awareness of his spiritual ancestors. In addition, church history will help to create hope in the Christians and in the church that is passing through persecutions, even in the face of martyrdom. The awareness of the boldness of Christian martyrs, motivation and inspirational testimonies of the great reformers, revivalists in all ages show that they had benefited from the history of heroes of faith. All through ages of Christianity, church history had provided the stabilizing influence in the face of secularism, persecution, heresies and moral decadence. As already noted church history is very essential in the process of reshaping or redefining our beliefs, doctrines, philosophy of life in the contextual framework of the activities of the saints of God, past and or present.

5. The Necessity of Church History for all Christian Workers Cannot be Over Stressed.

The history of the Christian faith is the most important and most intriguing study that any Christian can undertake next to study of the Holy Scripture. There is something within every normal Christian wanting to know the simple facts of their origin. People generally (be it individuals, groups of people; communities, nations and even churches), are deeply concerned and mindful of their past. The awareness of the history of the church has inherent practical values for every Christian worker. The knowledge of the historical development of Christian doctrines: Trinity, Christology, Sin, and God's plan of salvation for man in the various Post-Apostolic Councils of the church is essential pathway for the appreciation of Christian orthodoxy.

Thus, church history promotes cultural heritage. The history of western civilization is incomplete and unintelligible without some understanding of the role of Christian religion in time and place. Especially as Earle E. Cairns thinks that the history of a man can never be divorced from the history of his religious life.

6. Church History is a Liberating force.

Ignorance of Christian history oftentimes makes people vulnerable to seditions, appeals of false teachers; false prophets and all forms of heretical groups. Adequate knowledge of the history of the church, gives one a solid foundation for defence of one's faith and theological conviction. Church history provides a broad context for one's involvement in ministry.

SIGNIFICANT PERIODS IN CHURCH HISTORY

Periodization is the division of the continuum history into significant manageable segments that can foster easy

remembrance of facts. Such divisions help the historian to achieve the organization of history in chronological order. Generally, recorded history whether secular or sacred is divided into three broad major segments as follows: (i) **Ancient History**; (ii) **Medieval History** and (iii) **Modern History**

Based on these generally agreed three phases of history, we can also cage-in church history as follows:

A. Early Church History (5BC – 500AD)

B. Medieval Church History (500 – 1517)

C. Modern Church History (1517 – Date)

The synopsis of each of these broad phases of church history can further be subdivided into smaller but important phases as described below:

1. A History of the Early Church Age

This period is commonly referred to as the Early Church Age. This period of church history covers the beginning and growth of the Apostolic Church, and all through to the period of the supremacy of the Old Catholic Imperial church. This was the era when the church operated within cultural milieu of Greco-Roman civilization and political milieu of the Roman Empire. The geographical scope was within the boundaries of the Mediterranean Sea including the continents of Asia Minor, Africa and Europe.

The focus of Early Church History includes the description of the world into which the church was born and other environmental factors that influenced the spread of Christianity then. The emergence of the Apostolic Church as a sect of Judaism is given attention here also. Hence, the period spanned through Apostolic Age, the demise of the early apostles and all through the era of The Apologists,

Early Church Fathers and the formation of the New Testament Canon and doctrines of the church. The infant church at this period was characterized by severe persecutions and martyrdom of Christians by the Roman state (external conflicts and problems with which the church had to contend.) The period covers the eventual cessation of organised persecution and the consequent emergence of Christianity as a state religion after the conversion of Emperor Constantine. The internal challenges posed by heretical sects that gave birth to polemical writers in the church and those that stood to defend the faith, doctrine (orthodoxy) of the church are within the scope of early church history too.

The period also covers the time the early church was freed from all forms of barbaric persecutions of Roman Empire. Christianity during this era had become a legal and official religion in the whole of Roman Empire following the conversion of Emperor Constantine. This period marked the beginning of theological and Christological controversies that gave birth to the various post-Apostolic ecumenical councils and the formation of Christian theology.

2. The Church at the Time of Emperor Constantine to Emperor Otto

The fourth century in particular marked a major turning point in the history of Christianity. The period spelt the beginning of a new age of sophistication and growth of the institutional church. It was an era of golden-twilight, when church fathers like Ambrose (339-397); Augustine of Hippo (354-436) and Gregory I (540-604) made immense contributions in the formulation of Christian theology and doctrines of the church as well as its spiritual development. At the fourth century, the Roman Empire had wholly embraced Christianity. Though it also witnessed the

emergence of Christological and Trinitarian controversies that weakened the church to the extent that Christianity later could not prevent the decay in the church and the ensued invasion of Islam.

3. The Collapse of Christianity and Early Muslim Age (638 AD -1002 AD)

This is a significant period in the history of the church that could be described as an '*Era of Set Back*'. It was the age that witnessed the Barbarian Invasions that eventually spelt the ruin of the Western Roman Empire and the consequent rise of Islam and Arab Invasions. At the peak of its power before the fall, Emperor Trajan had extended the boundaries of Roman Empire to territories far above three million kilometers square with an estimated population of fifty million people. The Eastern Roman Empire with its capital at Constantinople survived the threats of Arabian till it finally fell to the Ottoman Turks in AD 1453. Invariably the scene of action of the medieval church began to center on the conversion of the migrating people in the borders of Teutonic tribes to Christianity. The church at this time became more centralized than ever under Papal supremacy. The growth and spread of Islam as a rival religion to Christianity had successfully wiped out most of the churches in Asia and Africa during the medieval period. This was the era of the emergence of Islamic Caliphate that began to have a pervading domineering influence. Some church historians would refer to it as a period of **Set Back of the church**. It was at this time Islam swept through most of the significant Christian centres like Alexandria, Constantinople and many others.

4. The Church During the Age of Conflict Between the Popes and Roman Powers (1002 AD 1303 AD)

This period was characterized by grave challenge on papal influence and authority on the whole of Christendom. That is investiture controversies. It was the era of crusade for recovery in the church.

5. The Church During the Age of Renaissance (1303 AD-1517 AD)

This was the period of the revival of knowledge and learning, the invention of printing press and voyages of discoveries

6. The Church During Reformation (1517 AD-1648 AD)

This is another significant milestone in the history of the church. It was a period that witnessed a large element of reforms in the beliefs, practices and moral life of the church. It was an era that spelt the split of the church into Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Thus, the edifice Catholicism could not but bowed to the power of the gospel. Consequently, the centuries of darkness under papacy gave way to the gospel of Christ. Protestantism was actually born at this time through the reform initiatives of Martin Luther.

7. The Church During the Period of Rationalism (1648 AD- 1789AD)

This period was smeared with much criticisms (both lower and higher criticisms) of the orthodox Christian teachings. There was much apathy for religious dogmas and concepts like God, faith. Invariably there was a pervasive moral decadence.

8. The Church during the Evangelical Revival and Great Awakening (1789 AD-1906 AD)

This was a time of much revolution in the Christian faith

9. The Church during the Birth of Modern Pentecostalism 1906 AD-1960 AD

There was a rekindled fire of Pentecostalism

10. Modern Charismatic-Pentecostalism 1960 till date

Self Assessment Questions

- *Define history*
- *What is church history?*
- *Church history has been described as a very broad discipline. Identify and explain any five areas in the scope of church history.*
- *Why do we study church history?*
- *The study of church history has tremendous significance to contemporary believer. Discuss.*
- *Identify and explain any five importance or benefits of the study of church history to you as a student of Christian Religious Study.*
- *Enumerate and describe the significant events in the period of the Early Church.*
- *What period of the church is known as the Early Church?*

Suggestions for Further Reading

Boer, Harry R. *A History of the Early Church*, Ibadan Daystar Press 1976.

Shelley, Bruce L. *Church History in Plain Language 3rd ed.* Nashville Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Schwarz, John. *The Compact Guide to the Christian Faith*. Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers, 1999.

Chapter 2

THE WORLD OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction

These three cultures, that is, Hebrew, Latin and Greek, more than any other, prepared the whole world for the birth of the church in the first century. Firstly, the Hebrews in their dispersions had carried with them into every place the understanding of the one true God: Jehovah. Also rooted in their understanding was the expectation of the end time kingdom of Messiah. This was the ultimate hope of Israel and the light of the gentiles. On the other hand, the Greek culture providing a matchless language became the common tongue of the whole then known world. This was initially, the medium of the spoken apostolic proclamation “Kerygma” and even the later medium of written apostolic instruction. Charles P. Schmitt, also asserted that the morally bankrupt Greek culture in its exploitation, philosophy and science had served to prove that the way was clearly paved for the bold declaration of the gospel: “*There is no other name whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Furthermore, the socio-economic, cultural and political position of the then Roman empire also contributed immensely in preparing the cradle for the early church. For instance, the network of transportation, postal and communication systems and by its cultural laws and military fortitude, Rome had consolidated and compacted together the “meal” of the whole mass of humanity so that it could be more easily reached with the gospel of Christ. The decadent, and bankrupt world was indeed prepared to hear the anointed declaration of Christ’s exalted Lordship from the lips of that small group of men that Jesus had personally disciplined and sent into the whole world (Mt.28:19,20).

The timing of the birth and the history of the era of the early church appear to have been a product of divine providence. It was at a time, humanly speaking, that the three famous cultures of the world: Hebrew; Latin and Greek had more than any other prepared the world for the emergence of the church in the first century. Any student of history will not find it difficult to acknowledge the fact that the events that preceded the advent of Christ had gone a long way to shape and prepare the world politically, religiously and intellectually for the Gospel of Christ and the eventual on come of the church. This fact of history is embodied in Paul's assertion that: *when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His son...*" (Gal 4:4). The fact that the birth of the church was timely was corroborated by the Evangelist Writer of the book of Mark in the statement that: *'the time is fulfilled'* ... (Mark 1:5). Indeed, history shows that the Romans had created a conducive political environment for the advent of the early church age in the first century. Two, that, the pervading Greek culture of the time helped to prepare the world for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ in the then Roman empire. Three, the religion of the Jews and the entire Hebrew culture provided a religious base for Christianity to take its roots in Roman Empire. We shall closely look at the various contribution of the Romans; Greek and Jews in religio– political and intellectual cradle of Christianity viz-a-viz the church.

Political Environment Created by the Romans for the Birth of the Church

The ruling empire in the first century that recorded the historic advent of the first coming of Jesus Christ was the Roman Empire. Although the Romans were predominantly idolatrous people guided by the principle of mystery religions and emperor worship, God did use them to create a

political environment that was favourable for the inauguration of the Christianity in many ways:

1. By the first century, Roman Empire, as the ruling empire had unprecedentedly fostered solidarity and unity of mankind under the umbrella of universal law for all citizens of the empire. The universal law created an enabling environment for the reception of Gospel that insisted on oneness or unity of human race. By extension, the universal law permitted the granting of Roman citizenship right to men – Roman.

2. Before the reign of Caesar Augustus (27BC-14AD), movement around the empire to take the Gospel to various parts of the Empire would have been an irksome task. Especially, as tribes, citizens and states guarded jealously their territories against foreign encroachments. The universal land of Roman Empire, for all subjugated territories tantamount the extension of imperial power. More so that, Pompey had cleared the pirates in the Mediterranean and that the Roman Army had ensured peaceful traffic on the roads of Asia, Africa and Europe. So, the relatively peaceful world then, made it easy for the early Christians to move from one place to the other preaching the gospel in the whole of the empire.

3. There existed a good network of roads in the whole of Roman Empire. Hence, one of the popular adages then was '*all roads leads to Rome*'. All the important and strategic cities were linked with roads that cut across the empire covering several miles. It is not surprising therefore that Apostle Paul was able to move from one point to the other with relative ease in the empire in his three-missionary journeys.

4. The role of the Roman Army in the planting of Christianity around the Roman Empire cannot be over-

emphasized. History has it that Christianity was brought to Britain probably by the efforts of Christian soldiers. In addition, the Roman Army was a symbol of peace in the empire.

5. The church was born at a time when Roman Empire had harnessed all the ancient empires. The defeat of those nations made them to lose confidence in their gods who could not succour or deliver them from the hands of the Romans. The people then yearned for a ‘superior god’ or a more spiritual religion that would satisfy their quest for a ‘messiah’ which was not to be meant by the already existing religions. The vacuum created was readily filled by the advent of Christianity. More so, that the mystery religion and Emperor Worship that the Romans used and to substitute the gods of the land had helped to prepare the way for the Christian message and worship. There is no gain saying that the infant church enjoyed a favourable political environment created by the Romans.

RELIGIOUS CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE JEWS

The Jewish nation was located in Palestine as a small territory that provided a link for Asia, Africa and Europe. The Jews had gone into captivity to several empires including the Assyrians, Babylonians; Medo-Persian, Greece and Rome. Consequently, the religion of the Jews had been inadvertently sold and spread throughout the Mediterranean world. Judaism (the religion of the Jews), therefore provided the heredity and the initial shelter for Christianity. The religion of the Jews had prepared the way for the birth of the church. Some of the contributions of Judaism include:

1. Belief in Monotheism

Quite unlike most pagan religions of the Mediterranean world that were polytheistic in nature, Judaism uncompromisingly emphasised sound spiritual monotheism. The Jews in their dispersions had carried with them into every captivity their understanding of the true God Jehovah and the concept of monotheism that were central in the religion of Israel. So much so that the pedagogy of monotheism was one of the synagogal tenets of Judaism.

2. Messianic Hope

The Jews had offered to the world the hope of a coming Messiah which was rooted in their understanding of the expectation of end-time kingdom of Messiah. It constituted the ultimate hope of all Israel and the light for the Gentiles. The hope of Messiah for the Jews had been deadly noised about in the whole Roman world. It was at this back drop that one can rightly appreciate the declaration of Andrew when he said: *'we have found the Messiah which is being interpreted, the Christ'* (Jn. 1:41)

3. Ethical Values

Judaism had provided the world with a pure ethical value system. The moral standard demanded and meant to be enforced by the Ten Commandment was different from the prevailing reality of moral decadence. To the Jews, the problems of sin was more than external, mechanical and contractual failure as perceived by the Greeks and Romans. To the Jewish the problem of sin originated from the impure heart that is expressed in an overt action. Hence the doctrine of redemption looks beyond rationalistic system of ethnics or subculture mystery religion.

4. The Jewish Scripture

The New Testament Scripture is very much indebted to the Old Testament scripture. The Old Testament Scripture is a foundation for the New Testament.

5. Synagogue Worship

Synagogue was an integral part of Judaism that emerged after the Babylonian captivity, when the Jews were cut off from possible worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. Quite unlike the temple, the synagogue was an institution that accommodated both the Jews and Gentiles. It was usually a place for pedagogue. Hence the Apostle Paul took advantage of the Synagogue to preach Christ.

6. Philosophy of History

To the Jews, history was not just the happening of meaningless events but every history was created by God whose sovereignty always triumph over man's frailty.

RELIGIONS IN ROMAN EMPIRE

The Roman Empire was a vast territory with many subjugated nations. Invariably, the religions in the Empire were very many but could be classified into three types of religious beliefs. These include Nature Religion, Mystery Religion, and State Religion.

1. Nature Religion

The Romans originally practiced an agricultural religion in which they worshipped mysteries in personal force which pervade nature. This was a religious belief that arrogated some kinds of supernatural powers to natural things like mountains, river, lakes, trees, the moon, sun, stars, animals, and certain humans (both the living and the dead). Nature religion was usually Idolatrous in practice. Hence some

objects were created with some perceived supernatural powers (i.e. charm and amulets) were used as symbols or to represent their object(s) of faith.

Characteristic of nature religion is the belief in good and evil, spirit forces, ancestors that have much influence in the destiny of man. Associated with all Nature religions is one kind of mythical story or the other. Nature religion demands collective obligation of the people in the community with no room for individual expression of faith and relation with nature. Nature religion's (Pantheism) demands of any personal element was much relevant to agrarian community.

2. Mystery religion

This was common in Asia, Africa and Europe. Mystery religion offered the adherents the opportunity for fellowship with the divine through prescribed ceremonial rites and acts. A common phenomenon in mystery religions in Roman Empire was the Baptism with water or blood of animals. The rites of baptism brought the beneficiary into closer relationship and fellowship with the deity. The baptized were to take part in a "sacred Meal" of communal fellowship that led to an experience of enlightenments. The enlightenment symbolized the personal dedication of the baptized to the god: to live in peace and die in the comfort of reconciliation. Most mystery religions had secrets that were known to members only.

3. State religion

The concept of state religion was rooted in the belief that the Emperor was the representative of the god. Hence, to appease the "god," sacrifices had to be made to the living or the dead Emperor. The Emperor determined the prosperity and peace of the state. To this end, the veneration of the Emperor was a common practice in the empire. It was the

belief and practice of emperor worship that necessitated the evocation of the decree that demanded the offering of a sacrifice of a pinch of salt or incense to an erected image or statute of a living emperor. Some of the Emperors demanded compliance of all citizens in the Empire without any regards to the individual's religion. Refusal to worship the emperor was to be an invocation of the wrath of the gods of the land.

Self Assessment Questions

1. *'The church was born in the fullness of time'. Discuss.*

2. *Write notes on the following:*

i). *Mystery Religion*

ii). *State Religion and*

iii). *Nature Religion*

4. *Show that the Jewish religion helped to prepare the way for the birth of the church during the Roman Empire*

5. *Explain how the social, political and economic environment of in the world of Roman Empire favoured the birth of the church*

BIBLICAL WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Antioch (Syria)

Antioch of Syria was named after Antiochus. This was originally built by Selcucus I. Nicanu, one of the generals of Alexander the Great as far back as 300 BC. Antioch is more than 300 miles North of Jerusalem. The city was formed with not less than 5,300 immigrants from Athens and Macedonia who were said to have been transferred by Selencus. Perhaps this accounted for why the city's population was made up of Greeks Macedonians local Syrian and Jews. Syria was defeated by Pompey in 64 BC.

Antioch City was one of the earliest centres for Christian activities. Biblical history given by Luke the writer of the book of Acts would credit the city with the first place the disciples of Jesus were called Christians (Acts 11:26). The apostles' missionary enterprise to the gentile nations was first initiated at Antioch. Bible history also holds that Apostle Paul, Barnabas and John Mark began their missionary career in this city. A little wonder that they always resorted to it as a base. This is obvious from the scriptural evidences of the instances of Paul's returned to Antioch after his first and second missionary journeys (Acts 14:26-28; 18:20).

So then, Antioch is closely connected with the history of the planting and establishment of Christianity in the gentile world. According to Eusebius, a Jewish historian, Apostle Peter was the first Bishop of Antioch, successively followed by Erodus and Ignatius. Antioch could be described as the location for new focus of the expanding kingdom of the

Messiah. It became a pivotal fulcrum of Christianity after the martyrdom of Stephen at Jerusalem.

The entrance of Christ's gospel to this city has been traced to the scattered disciples after Stephen's martyrdom. Some of the disciples who found refuge in Antioch could not but speak of the Good News to the gentile Greeks in Antioch. There was massive conversion of the gentiles. When the reports of the massive conversion in Antioch got back to Jerusalem, the church sent Barnabas to Greek. Barnabas' arrival again occasioned more conversion. Consequently, the assistance of Apostle Paul was requested. For about a year, Paul and Barnabas did exploit for the Lord in Antioch. The church in Antioch grew rapidly with much impact on the whole city that the name "Christian" was used in Antioch for the first time to describe the adherents of the gospel of Christ.

Prophet Agabus from Jerusalem came to Antioch to predict global famine (Acts 11:27-30). It is quite instructive to note that Antioch became so significant, that it served as a location for effective mobilization of believers to raise fund for indigent Christian in Jerusalem. Thirdly, missionaries were also mobilized to thrust out to the gentile world at Antioch. This dramatic new phase in the life of Christ's church was not again traceable to Jerusalem but Antioch. The reasons for much effectiveness and enthusiasms in the church may not be unconnected with the gifted prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers that the church was blessed with. Thus, Antioch like many other early Christian communities like Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Rome and Alexandria served as satellite centres for spreading Christianity in the early days of the church.

The new wine of the new covenant gospel and its worldwide domain cannot be contained in the old wine skins of the

limited, typical kingdom structures of the old covenant community. The old covenant Jerusalem that served well in its days as a shadow and type of new covenant reality has now been superseded by the reality of the Jerusalem that is above where the risen Christ continues to reign over heaven and earth (Robertson 130)⁵.

Alexandria

One of the earliest cities known for its significant contributions in the development of Christian theology of the infant church was Alexandria. The city was named after Alexander the Great, who authorized the foundation in 331 BC, though he was never to see the city. The city of Alexandria had a cosmopolitan population that included Egyptians, Greeks and Jews. The official language however, was Hellenistic Greek.

History has it that, the Christian population of Alexandria during the first century AD stood at about 180,000 which was well over one third of the total population of the city. The city has a history of incessant antagonism between the Jews and the Greeks in the city. The origin of Christianity in Alexandria cannot be directly traced in the N.T scriptures, as there is no direct reference or mention of the city in the N.T. However, N.T records hold that people from Egypt benefited from Peter's speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Church history clearly credited the planting of the Christianity and the first church in the city to Evangelist Mark in about AD 40, where he is said to have died as a martyr. Christianity flourished in Alexandria by the second century. Alexandria, during the early church was known for its catechetical school. By the third century, the city has

5. pp.32. Murphy O. Corner, Cited in Evans and Porters; Persecution in Early Church: A Gallery of the Persecution Emperors <https://Christianhistoryinstitute.org>. 2019

grown to become one of the notable Christian community in Roman Empire.

Athens

Athens was a city famous for its philosophical ideas and highly idolatrous interest. It was named after a Greek goddess: Athene. This city was densely saturated with statues and altars of Greek and Roman deities as well as the statues of the deified Emperor Claudius and Augustus. Paul particularly took note of one of the altars of pagan worship and superscription that was dedicated to the unknown god (Acts 17:20). Apostle Paul perceiving their ignorance took advantage of their superstitions and preached to them. While preaching, Paul was arrested being accused of introducing a strange god. He was taken to Areopagus (Acts 17:17) Areopagus' council was responsible for the introduction of foreign divinities in the city hence Paul probably was arraigned before his court. Evidence from the scripture shows that Paul had a breakthrough in this city with many converts.

Colossae

Colossae was a small town during the first century. It was situated near Phrygia. It is supposed that Paul passed through Colossae on his way to Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23; 19:1). It is not too certain who planted the church of Colossae. Some scholars favour Epaphras and others Paul. Colossae is said to be the home town of Philemon. From the content of Paul's letter to the Colossians, it is obvious that the church had faced doctrinal threat from a particular heretical sect, most likely the Gnostics or Hellenistic Judaism

Corinth

Corinth, the largest and most important commercial city in Roman Empire was not far from Athens. In short, it was about eighty kilometres from Athens. The city was named after a popular current grape grown around the city. Corinth was an important large commercial city. Paul must have visited this city during his second missionary journey. Corinth was commercially linked with international network of roads from Asia and Europe. The moral decadence associated with Corinthian church may not be unconnected with the influx of vices and crimes that usually characterize urban centres.

The history of the church in Corinth dates back to AD 49 during Paul's second missionary journey (McRay 228). Murphy O. Conner, cited in Evans and Porters noted that Corinth had a history of being, an exceptionally immoral city and it was filled with immorality in Paul's days. This is evident in Paul's statement "*it is reported commonly that there is fornication among you and such fornication as is not so much named among gentiles, that one should have his father's wife*" (1Cor.5:1).

During the second missionary journey, Apostle Paul is said to have spent not less than one and half fruitful years in Corinth. It was at this time that Paul came in contact with Erastus an influential city treasurer (Romans 16:23; 2Tim.4:20; Acts 19:22), Crispus and all his household (Acts 18:8) and Titus Justus who was probably called by Roman name Gaius. It was at this point also he had contact with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2). Paul's tremendous success and breakthrough in Corinth notwithstanding his previous opposition, is quite instructive and challenging. As McRay would rightly observe, Apostle Paul refused to be discouraged by the previous rejection of ministry and

presence at Athens, and he did not see the need to flee the city as he did at Iconium (Acts 14). Neither was he driven out by irate synagogue members and civic leaders as he had been in some cities of Galatia and Macedonia (Acts 13:80; 14:19; 16:39). Nor did his new converts send him away for his own safety as they had previously done in Thessalonica (Acts 17:10) and Berea (Acts 17: 13, 14).

Paul's persistency and triumph may not be unconnected with the fact that he had received a divine commission and encouragement which became impetus and drive for success at Corinth.

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city' (Acts 18:9-10).

It is believed that it was only after a period of eighteen months in Corinth that Apostle Paul was arrested by proconsul Galileo. Even at that, no harm was done to the person of Apostle Paul in Corinth in spite of all their plots. This was in accordance with the divine promise of God to him.

Decapolis

Ethnological trace of the term Decapolis would literally adduced compound word 'Deca' (ten) 'polis' (city). Hence, Decapolis literally refers to a region of ten cities. Administratively, Decapolis: including Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphara, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hypos, Dion, Pella, Garasa and Canatha were territories belonging to Syria. The region of Decapolis was far from being a federation though they shared common Hellenistic culture

which distinguish them from the surrounding cities and countryside.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is sacred to the three world monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This city, located in about 40 kilometres from the Mediterranean Sea in an important site for Judaism, Christian and Muslim pilgrims. Jerusalem has a history of several destructions and several instances of rebuilding. This is attested to by Evan, when he noted that it is difficult to attempt a reconstruction of the history of Jerusalem from archaeological evidence due to several destructions and continuous rebuilding and expansion (359)⁶. Though there are earlier references to the city of Jerusalem as far back as to the Abraham encounter with Melchizedek identified as king of Salem (Gen.14:18; Ps.76:2) and the Joshua's time of conquest, but it is well known history that king David made Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom after the defeat of the Jebusites as far back as 1000 BC. The city of David, a title Jerusalem later took in, combined religion and political authorities.

The geographical boundary of Jerusalem increased from twelve acres to about thirty-two acres during the reign of Solomon. All these were ruined in 598 BC during the Babylonian captivity. History has it that when Persia Empire later subdued Babylon Empire in 539 BC the emerging emperor king Cyrus II ordered the rebuilding of Jerusalem in 538 BC. The post exilic Jews including Zerubbabel and others mobilized the Jews to rebuild the second temple which was dedicated in 515 BC. Jerusalem under enlightened Persia rule enjoyed political stability and prosperity.

6. pp.34. Evans A.C. and Porter Dictionary of New Testament Background. A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship, England: Inter Varsity Press, 2000.

As already noted, the history of Jerusalem is replete with series of conquest. In 332 BC Alexander the Great would have Jerusalem bow to his intense Hellenistic cultural drive. Undoubtedly, the pervasive influence of Hellenism ignited conflicts between compromising Judaisers (who had embraced the Hellenistic culture probably because of its attractive influences), and those uncompromising Jews who were vehemently opposed to the adulteration of their faith through Hellenism. As Bety, would observe the Seleucid rulers initially tolerated Jewish customs and religion, even with state financial support for the building of the temple. But Jason, the then High Priest fanned Hellenization into flames in Jerusalem. He is said to have reorganized this holy city in tune with the tenets of idolatrous Greek city-state, typical of the Greek culture though contrary to the wishes of the faithful anti-Hellenistic Jews.

Unprovoked rebellion became inevitable reaction of some of the Judaisers. People like Mattathias (old Jewish Priest) could not but spearhead the revolt of 167 BC that was aimed at resisting the pervading influence of Hellenistic culture that was without regards to the Jewish tradition and religion. King Antiochus Epiphany infuriated, swiftly moved to quell the Jewish rebellion. Consequently, he captured Jerusalem and desecrated the temple by consecrating it to one of the idols of Olympian Zeus. This did not however put to rest the Jewish struggle and agitation against Hellenization. Under the leadership of Judas, there again emerged the Maccabean who used guerrilla warfare tactics against the Seleucid until in 164BC when Jerusalem was recaptured by the Jew with full reinstitution of temple worship and sacrifices. Thus, Jerusalem regained its political and religious freedom under Hasmonian rule till 63BC when Hasmonian rule fell to Roman Empire.

By 40BC, Herod the Great was made the king of Judea. This blood thirsty king eliminated all that was connected to the Hasmonean dynasty. Seeking to please the Jews in addition to the many building projects he embarked upon, he began the reconstruction of the temple hitherto destroyed by Antiochus Epiphany. The size of the temple is said to have doubled (Barley 2000 561). It was this temple (that took forty years to build) that was in place during the time of Jesus. This ironic Holy City is notorious for killing the prophets of God. No wonder Jesus in the following words lamented the evil of the city: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which God sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chicks under her wing and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate* (Mt.23:37-38).

Another destruction of Jerusalem occurred in AD 70. Although this devastation of Jerusalem was a direct fulfilment of the scriptures but some of the immediate causes of the outbreak of the war that led to the defeat and destruction of the Holy City were the cruelties of Roman Procurator Flavius (AD64-66). As the Josephus, a Jewish historian would report, Flavius took side with the Greeks to antagonize the Jews persistently. Nevertheless, the birth of the New Testament Church on the day of Pentecost took place at Jerusalem. So then, Jerusalem was the first Head Quarters of Christianity.

Philippi

Philippi is located toward Eastern Macedonia. It is said to have been founded by immigrants from Thrace. Philippi was popular for the abundant gold mines and springs of water. The city is said to have been named after Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great). The official

language of Philippi was Latin while the market language and that of the surrounding community was Greek. The city was linked with Neapolis ports (Acts 16:11).

The church at Philippi was born in about AD 49-50 following Apostle Paul's visit to Troas (Acts 16:8-10). Although Apostle Paul had a height of humiliating treatment in Philippi (Acts 16:19-20; 1Thess.2:2), he nevertheless, had a successful ministry at Philippi that gave birth to the church in the city. Converted through Paul's ministry at Philippi were people like (i) Lydia (whose house was used for church meetings and fellowship (ii) The Philippian Jailor and his family (Acts 16:14-15, 27-34). (iii) Epaphroditus (Phil.2:25-30), (iv) Euodia and Syntyche (Phil.4:1-3) and (v) Clement who served in the ministry of Paul and Silas.

There are evidences in the scripture to suggest that the liberality of the Philippian brethren served to support the ministry of the Apostle immensely (Phil.4:15-18). The church in Philippi, was very dear to Apostle Paul. So much so that he had to visit the church at least once and again after planting the church (1Cor.16:5,6; 2Cor.2:13; 7:5; Acts 20:1-6). This was the church whose leadership constituted the audience of Paul's 'Epistles to the Philippians' which among all other things addressed the conflict among some workers in the church.

Church history has it that in the second century, particularly during the fierce persecution of the early church one of the church fathers that suffered martyrdom in Rome, passed through Philippi on his way.

Antioch (Pisidia) Acts 13:13-52)

Pisidian Antioch is located at the Southern Eastern bank of Anthios River in Central Asia Minor. It is at the North East of modern Lake Egirdir. Though the founder of the city is

not very certain, but historical traces point to Seleucus or the Seleucids. The church in Antioch (Pisidian Antioch) would have been planted in AD 47 or there about during the first missionary journey of Apostle Paul and Barnabas. Except for Pamphilids and Perga, Pisidia Antioch was the first Asian city Paul and his company reached out to during their journey after a successful outreach to Cyprus.

Samaria

Samaria is located in the centre of a broad valley stretching towards west of Mediterranean and near mountains Gerizim and Ebal. Samaria, during the Omri dynasty served as the third capital of Northern kingdom (1Kings 16:24), after Shechem under Jeroboam and Tirzah under Bashan. Archaeological discoveries have revealed significant traces of Israelites occupation of Samaria to the beginning of the reign of Omri up to the period of the Assyrian captivity when the city fell to Sennacherib of Assyrian invasion in 722BC under Shalmaneser.

Biblical history has it that Rehoboam was installed as a king to succeed his father, Solomon, in Shechem very close to Samaria North of Palestine. However, Jeroboam's revolt led the whole of the Northern kingdom into apostasy that induced almost all his successors to follow his examples of idolatry, false religion, corrupt and immoral practices. This became conspicuous during the Omriad dynasty that ruled for not less than fifty years. Ahab in particular is said to have embodied the syncretism policies that merged the depraved practices of Tyrian Baal-worship with the pure worship of Holy God of Israel. Eventually, Samaria that was notorious for Jezebel's (King Ahab's wife's) promotion of Baal worship was burnt down with all the principal officers killed or exiled into captivity.

Biblical records show that Samaria was colonized by Assyrians who resettled a mixture of foreigners from different places including Mesopotamia and Antioch Samaria (2Kings 17:29). Biblical records also indicated that the colonialist adopted syncretic religion as they sought to practice their idolatrous faith alongside with Israel's Judaism. *'So, these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images both their children as did their fathers so do they unto this day'* (2Kings 17:41).

Biblical and historical records attest to the persistent hostility between the Israelites and the Samaritan up to the time of Jesus. For instances: They refused Jesus passage through Samaria on His way to Jerusalem. And the disciples sought to invoke fire to consume the inhabitant of Samaria (Lk.9:51-56). The Samaritan woman's attitude to Jesus also helps to illustrate the existing hostility between the Jews and Samaritans.

'There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water, Jesus saith unto her, give me to drink (for his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat). Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, how is it that thou being a Jew askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jew have no dealings with the Samaritans (Jn. 4: 7-8)

There are indications that Jesus did not align with these prejudicial attitudes towards the Samaritans. Hence, contrary to the Jewish custom, He would even dare to initiate a conversation with a woman from Samaria and even went as far as unimaginable taboo of a male Jew throwing a question unto a Samaritan woman. Jesus, distancing Himself from the holier than thou attitude of the Jews, was able to lead many men of the city of Samaria to salvation. The healing of the

leper also testified to Jesus positive attitude towards the Samaritans. He also commended the action of the Good Samaritan with a parable. Jesus visited Samaria on a number of occasions to preach the gospel in Samaria despite the accredited cultural hostilities.

Samaria has a significant role to play in the purpose of illustrating the universality of God's redemptive plan for mankind. It is therefore not surprising that Jesus' post resurrection commission to the disciples would specifically include mission to the Samaria. *"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" Act 1:8).*

This suggests that the gospel work must of a necessity cut across cultural differences and prejudices among homogeneous people and even heterogeneous. If we must succeed in the twenty-first century's endeavour of preaching and reaching out to all creatures in all nations to make disciples for Christ, we have to carefully tailor our ministries today in the light of Christ's cross-cultural ministry among the Samaritans.

Jericho

One of the surviving ancient cities of the Bible land: Jericho, till date retains its name as Jericho. The history of this world's oldest city dates back to 8000BC (Robertson 80). The city of Jericho was a strategic and inevitable entrance into the Promised Land for the wayfaring Israelites in their wilderness journey to the Promised Land. Even during Jesus earthly ministry, Jericho was one of the important cities he stopped over on his way to Jerusalem. It was at Jericho he healed the blind Bathmeus (Mk.11).

Self-Assessment

Write notes on the following: (i). Antioch (ii). Corinth

Give a brief historical development of Jerusalem

Suggested Books for Further Reading

Evans, Craig A. and Porter Stanley E. *Dictionary of the New Testament Background* 2000:560)

Hart Trevor A. Ed. *The Dictionary of Historical Theology Grand Rapids*. Paternoster Press 2000

Murphy O. Conner (1984), cited in Evans and Porters 2000

Chapter

4

SECTS OF JUDAISM

Introduction

Most religions of the world, in the attempt of their adherents to contextualise, interpret and express in practical realities, their understanding of what constitutes orthodox belief of the religion at different times and places, often results into sectarianism. Hence, there exist in most religions of the world in all ages, different factions, groups and sects that are most often than not, the product of the different emphases, perceptions and preferences. In most cases, each of the sects considers itself better and denigrate others because of their peculiar area of emphasis. This kind of sectarian spirit had caused the emergence and evolution of religious groups and movements that gave different cultural and traditional colouration to Judaism during the inter-testament period. These different sects had taken root before the first advent of Jesus Christ and during the New Testament period. Some of the religious sects that evolved from Judaism that had contact with and exerted much influence on Christianity include:

The Pharisees

The origin of this sect has been traced to the time of Nehemiah and Ezra when the idea of separation of the exilic Jews from the host nationals who had taken them captive in exile became very dominant. It is believed that it was the quest for and attempt of the exilic Jews to remain unadulterated and distinct amidst pervasive Hellenistic influence that gave birth to this group that was sternly opposed to anything and everything foreign to Judaism. The

sect of the Pharisees was one of the notable religious groups that exerted much influence on Judaism and that became very prominent during the time of Jesus. They were usually few in number probably, because of their rigid ascetic life. Al Maxey noted that there were only about 6000 adult male Pharisees, constituting only 0.012 percent of the adult male population then⁷. Though, not much is known about the origin of the sect of Pharisees, it is however believed that the English word Pharisee is from a Hebrew word '*perushim*' with the Greek equivalent '*pharisaioi*' that literally means a '*separatist*' or to '*set apart*'. The Pharisees were not just the religious elites among the Judaizers but they constituted a group that considered themselves to be the pious and with a superior reflection of true Judaism. This sect was more addicted to the Mosaic letters of the laws than any other group. It was their perception and claim of superior righteousness and possession of orbbed truth that was always exhibited in '*a holier than thou attitude*' that led them to separate themselves from other Jewish brethren.

The Pharisee sect, was characteristically, tended to elevate the mass of accumulated tradition up to the level and or above the written law. They believed in the resurrection of the dead; human probation and future judgement. It however, degenerated rapidly into being characterised by endemic projection of a holier than thou attitude. Almost all scribes were Pharisees and were popular with the masses. The Pharisee sect tended to be rebellious against foreign domination of nations and were vigorously opposed to the ideology of the Sadducees. Their zeal for the observance of the law had provoked their quest for complete separation from the influence of Hellenism.

7. Almoxy. The Silent Centuries Religious Groups of the "Intertestament" Period
<https://www.zianet.com>>Inter7.

The Pharisees were heirs of Hasidim (the pious ones) and were more accurate in the interpretation of the laws on ceremonial purity. The Pharisees patronised the synagogue more regularly than any other sect.

It has been noted that the Pharisees sect was probably a product of the long conflict between the faithful Jews and the influence of paganism and Hellenistic culture during the exilic years of the Jews. The religious reformation of Ezra and Nehemiah has been linked as the probable forerunner of the Pharisaic sect while the priestly court under Zerubbabel has been suggested to have given birth to the sect of Sadducees. The Pharisees were non-conformist in contrast to Sadducees' compromising principle. The Pharisee could be described as the puritans of the Inter-Testament period. During the reign of John Hyriacus (135-104 B4), they were nicknamed separatists (Pharisees), as they sought to disassociate themselves from all forms of paganism, Hellenistic cultures and all that was impure in every area of life and society. Their main aim was to presume a practical living faith for daily interaction with others in the society. Unlike the Sadducees, they were close to the common people.

Their isolation and exclusive mind-set formed in their arrogance, scorn and contempt of others, made the Pharisees to consider their religious laws and traditions to be more-weighty than God's law that they originally sort to defend.

Kohlar has identified seven extreme forms of the Pharisee sects in Judaism as follows:

1. The Shoulder Pharisee

This category of Pharisees paraded his good deeds before men like a badge on their shoulder in order to be seen and praised by men (Matthew 6: 10).

2. The ‘Wait a Little Pharisee

This form of Pharisee would deliberately draw the attention of spectators to his good works to the extent he could ask his companions or other Pharisee to wait for him while he has to perform and exhibits and parades his good deeds in their sight. In other words, he gathers around people (spectators) to watch him exhibit some good deeds and to bear witness to his good deeds.

3. A Blind Bruised Pharisee

This type of Pharisee would close his eyes when he sees a woman or any object of temptation to sin, to the extent of possibly hiding behind the walls or any other object even if he has to bruise himself in the process.

4. The Painted Pharisee

This form of Pharisee considers, paints and projects himself so pure and spotless that he regards himself defiled as he comes in contact with others he has painted defiled. It was like wearing a sign ‘wet paint do not touch me’ (Matthew 23:27, 28).

5. The Ever-Reckoning Pharisee.

This type of Pharisee counts regularly his good deeds to see if he has enough to offset his shortcomings and obtain salvation. A very legalistic work-oriented concept of justification and salvation.

6. The God-Fearing Pharisee

He trembles in fear and terror (not in reverence), before the presence of God. He serves God not out of love but because he fears the consequences of doing wrong. All legalistic religion most often are religion of fear and intimidation.

7. The God Loving Pharisee

This group was the element in the pharisaic sects that genuinely loved God and had a zeal for the observance of the law, who were probably in the category of people like Gamaliel, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea (Romans 10:1-3).

Pharisaic Schools of Thought

The Pharisees as a sect had evolved two school of thoughts during the first century before Christ. These are Hillel and Shammai schools.

The Hillel

The Hillel's teachings were more liberal and compatible with the Orthodox Judaism. Their beliefs accommodated Roman rules and rulership over the Jews perhaps as a tentative divine punitive measure that has to be accepted by all Jews.

The Shammai

They were more rigid in the interpretation of the law. They were extreme non-conformist who were greatly antagonistic against Roman rule. It is believed that it was this school of thought that bred the evolution of the zealous groups who aggressively resisted the Roman government. Generally, the Pharisees held tenaciously to the scriptural teaching on the resurrection of the dead and the immortality of soul. They believed in the existence of spirit and spirit world. The Shammai faction of pharisee were more of a political sect who wielded religious power and respect particularly because of their synagogal pious teachings and interpretation of the law.

Sadducees

The sects of the Sadducees were generally believed to be from the descendants of the Zadokian priestly lineage of the High Priests. During the reign of King David, the family of Zadok held the office of the high priest and consequently officiated in the temple. He was perhaps the last high priest before exile. The Sadducees were more politically inclined as they constituted themselves into the social elite. They were the aristocrats of their days. While the Pharisees claimed spiritual superiority, the Sadducees on the other hand claimed social superiority. Membership of the Sadducees sect unlike the Pharisees, was not opened to everybody but purely hereditary. It was by the virtue of being born into the family of the high priest or aristocrats. They were the high society people.

The Sadducees were a very small religio-political group that took sides always with the governing class. The Sadducees were tolerant and compromising with the Hellenistic culture of Greeks during the inter-testament period. They became the mediators between the various foreign governments in power and Israel as a nation. Their compromise with pagan governments officially made the Pharisees to describe them as traitors. This is one of the main reasons the common people detested them. The Sadducees were more religiously liberal than the conservative Pharisees. Even though they acknowledged the Torah (The Pentateuch) as authority, the Sadducees were not favourably disposed to the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. The Sadducees did not believe in the existence of angels and spirits. They also rejected the belief in the immortality of souls. Hence, they disbelieved in the resurrection of the dead. To them, there was neither life nor rewards or penalties after death. They were more or less a rational Judaists that placed emphasis on logic and reason more than eternal truth.

The Sadducees as the custodians of the temple, heavily taxed the Jews for the maintenance of the temple. They drained the people in their bid to maintain their own religious/political institution. Some think that Apostle John had had affiliation with the Sadducees before conversion (John18:15-16).

The Sadducees did not believe in divine providence. Rather, they strongly hold to the belief that the events of human life were at his disposal, that is, they assumed that all human actions are within his (human) power, so that, man is the very cause of his good and or evil that may befall him. This is not to say that they did not believe in the existence of God at all, but that they did not share the conviction of God's eminence. In otherwords, they did not believe that God was intimately involved in the affairs of the world or in the daily affairs of men. It is not difficult to see how after their nation had lost independence and became subservient to foreign powers for so long the Sadducees drew an ideological conclusion of no divine providence. Another typical characteristic of the Sadducees was their insistence on the doctrine of free will of man that left no room for the interference of God to persuade or to dissuade man from certain activities. According to them, man was totally responsible for his good or bad actions.

To the Sadducees, only the written law was authoritative. They consequently rejected the traditions of the Pharisees with a view that insisted on the teaching that, the ceremonial laws (Oral Laws) that were written were also obligatory. However, they believed that the priest could give directive on difficult questions of the law that must be followed but their interpretations should not be codified or held parallel with the law. This is one of the areas of their sharp disagreement with the Pharisees.

Politically, the Sadducees oversaw many affairs of the state:

- They administer the state domestically
- Represented the state internationally
- Participate in the Sanhedrin and often encountered with the Pharisees there.
- Collected taxes and also international tributes from the Jews in the Diaspora.
- They were usually equipped to lead the army
- They regulated the relation with the Romans
- They mediated in domestic grievances.

Although, the Sadducees were more conservative in outlook than the Pharisees, from all indications, they were nevertheless heretical in their doctrines. However, the wealthy class among the Jews were more sympathetic with the Sadducees and even embraced their teachings more readily.

The Scribes

The Scribes were lawyers whose primary duty was to copy and teach the scripture (Nehemiah 8:2-8). They were generally linked with the Pharisees. Scribes in Ancient Israel, according to Daniel Sweet, belonged to an elite's class of wealthy family that were generally well-educated college graduates in language and in mathematics. They were usually highly trained and well paid professional and respected copyists. They were saddled with the responsibility of creating new copies of the Torah. Also associated with the Scribes were sometimes higher functions of lawyers, government officials, judges, and even bankers.

Every Scribe had an exaggerated self-esteem; hence, they were pompous and characterised with public display of arrogant self-righteousness.

The Process of Creating Copies of Torah by the Scribes:

1. They could only use animal skin both to write on and even to bind the manuscripts.
2. Each column of the writing could not be less than forty-eight and not more than sixty lines.
3. The ink must be black and from special recipe
4. They must pronounce each word aloud while writing it.
5. They must wipe the pen and wash their entire bodies before writing the most Holy Name of God YHVH every time they were to write it.
6. There must be a review within thirty days and if as many as three pages require corrections the entire manuscript had to be re-written.
7. The letters, words and paragraphs had to be counted and the document become valid if two letters touched each other. The middle paragraph, word and letter must correspond to those of the original document.
8. The document could be stored only in sacred places like in the Synagogues.
9. No document containing God's word could be destroyed, rather they were stored or buried.

Jewish Scribe of our contemporary times are known as the calligraphers that produce the Hebrew Torah Scroll and other holy texts by hand.

The Zealots

The term Zealots is from Hebrew language and it simply means one who is zealous after the things of God or zealous for or on behalf of God. Its Greek equivalent, 'Zealotes', means emulator, fanatic, admirer or follower'. The Zealots were the epitome of fanatics especially in their defence of the Law of Moses and of the national life of the Jewish people in the days of Jesus. They vehemently resisted any attempt to subordinate the Jews in Judea under any foreign domination, particularly, under the idolatrous Rome. Their defence of the Law was comparable to that of the Pharisees but the Zealots had more violent tendencies than their contemporary Pharisees. Hence, they could be better described revolutionists who went about with daggers hidden beneath their dress. They could stab anyone found guilty of any sacrilegious acts or at the slightest provocation of Anti-Jewish sentiments.

The origin of this sect has been traced to the period of Maccabean revolts of 150 BC. The Zealots were relentlessly opposed to the rule and domineering influence of the Roman Empire. Their ultimate ambition was to overthrow the reign of Roman Empire at all costs so as to allow unadulterated Judaism. They had a pervasive influence that was very much pronounced in Galilee. Every Anti-Jewish provocation by the Romans served to trigger the increase and growth of the Zealots among the Jewish people. By 66AD, the ranks of the Zealots had grown so much that they could lead a charge against the Romans oppressors that culminated in a long costly and bitter war that ended with Roman victory and the consequent destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Unlike the Sadducees who were from wealthy upper class and aristocracy, the Zealots were unorganised children of the working-class-families. The Zealots were unorganised,

dangerous, unpredictable grass-root people that were more or less like terrorists of their time. The Bible identified one Zealot of Jesus time who probably was converted and became one of the disciples of Jesus.

The Essenes

The Essenes might mean or could be described as the holy ones or the pious ones. The Essenes were a faction of Sadducees that emerged between 200 BC and 100 AD. They shared some common religious beliefs with the Sadducees though they were not as sophisticated as the Sadducees. They were committed to a life of self-denial, voluntary poverty and abstinence from worldly pleasure. Some even took vow of chastity and celibacy as they consequently abstained from marriage. They commonly congregated in communal life. They numbered 4,000. As separatists, they mostly lived in small cities far away from major cities. The Essenes were strict observers of the Sabbath. They were said to have evolved some practices of trading in commerce among themselves and ritually immersing themselves in water every morning and eating together after prayers. They were devoted to charity, benevolence, the study of the books of elders, preservation of secrets and had much admiration and reverence for the names of angels. Among the Essenes, the expression of anger was forbidden. The Essenes had gained much popularity for the discovering of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the multiple copies of the Hebrew Bible that has been credited to be the library of the sect. They were never referred to in the Bible. History speculates that at least one of the Disciples of Christ: Apostle John, was probably a member of the Essenes before his conversion to Christianity.

Membership of the sect of Essenes was preceded with three years of probation. The membership initiation begins with the initiate living entirely outside the Essenes community

though living the Essenes' life for the first year. This followed by the initiate's participation in ritual purifications and washing in the next two years while still remaining outside the Essenes' community. In the fourth year the initiate gains admission into the full fellowship and membership

Their Beliefs

1. **Deterministic:** To the Essenes, divine providence and fate governs everything in life
2. **Apocalyptic:** They believed that the end of the world was imminent
3. **That the soul was set free at death.** That God would punish all evil souls and set free the righteous one. The basis for this was their belief in the immortality of soul. Their teaching on the immortality of soul was similar to that of the Christians' except that the Essenes never associated with any definite statement or doctrine on the belief in the resurrection of the dead
4. **Traditionalists:** The Essenes held tenaciously to the Law of Moses in a very high esteem, even though they consider this as authoritative and at par with the Law of Moses.
5. **Characteristics:** Absolute Obedience was a hallmark of the Essene Sect. Respect for Elders was obligatory as any complaint against the authority could be punished with expulsion from membership. They were scrupulously honest that they avoided oaths. The assumption was that anyone who could not be believed except with an oath or until he swore, was already considered condemned. Communalism was practiced by the Essenes: all members had all things in common without any claim of private property

6. **They were ritualistic.** Some of the common rituals of the Essenes included: rising before sunrise, regular prayers, working until mid-day, celibacy and asceticism

SELF ASSESSMEENT QUESTIONS

- 1). Identify and describe any five sects that Jesus Christ had encounter with during His first advent*
- 2). Critically distinguish between the Pharisees and the Sadducees sects in the New Testaments*
- 3). Describe the two schools of Pharisees*
- 4). Trace the historical origin and development of the sects of Pharisees and Sadducees in Judaism*
- 5). Explain the characteristic features of the following:*
 - i). the Zealots*
 - ii). The Essenes*
- 6). Enumerate five unique emphasis (beliefs) of the Essenes.*
- 7). Creating a new copy of the Torah was the exclusive prerogative of the Scribes.*
 - i). Who were the Scribes?*
 - ii). Enumerate any eight processes of creating a new copy of the Torah by the Scribes*
- 8). Identify and explain any five characteristics of a Sadducee.*
- 9). Enumerate six political responsibilities of the Sadducees*

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH

A Discuss on the Origin of the Church

Opinions on the actual date or period that the church actually started vary. Thus, dating the genesis of the church has been a controversial issue. Below are some of the different theological views on when and where the church really began. Firstly, some people like Earl Radmachar, R B Kuipar have argued that if Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden believed the promise of God that the serpent would indeed bruise the heel of the *Seed of the Woman*, and that the *Seed of the Woman* would bruise the serpent's heads, then, it may be right to deduce that Adam and Eve constituted the first church. The basis of this argument is that, the proponent perceived the church as the rise and fall of the kingdom of heaven upon earth for the glory of God and for the salvation of the world. Hence, the preparatory part of that kingdom began with the creation of Adam and consequently, the promise of serpent bruiser which relieved the loss of paradigm. In otherwords, the genesis of the hope of redemption from the curse of sin, which came down through the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets to the immediate forerunner of the Saviour: John the Baptist who pointed his followers to "the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world" (Jn.1:29).

Secondly, there is also the argument that the church actually began with Abraham. This is the view of covenant theologians. The argument is that, Israel particularly, the called-out people, who went into covenant relationship with God at Mount Sinai, functioned as God's people in the Old

Testament as the church functions as God's people in the New Testament. The church, therefore constitutes the Israel of God in the New Testament. In other words, Israel was the church of God in the wilderness. This argument has been supported by Act 7:37, where Stephen, one of the early deacons of the early church referred to Israel as the church of God in the wilderness.

The third argument is that the church began with John the Baptist. Holders of this belief have argued that John the Baptist is the first recorded baptizer in the scripture. And since Christ later commanded his church to practice the ageless and universal ordinance of water baptism (Mt.28:19) it then means that the church began with John the Baptist. The implication in this view is that the church may be indirectly portrayed as being built on the foundations of John the Baptist. This obviously, is not in accordance with the unanimous teachings of the Scripture.

The fourth view is that, the church actually began with Christ. Again, several different times and periods are suggested. Some believe the church started with the incarnation of the Eternal word of God which dwelt among men to reveal the glory of God. Others argue that the church began with Peter as the head of the church. This is on the premise that, Christ promised to build his church in the future after the appointment of the twelve apostles. Those who claim that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built (particularly the Roman Catholic Church), believe that the church only started when Christ promised to build the church in Mt.16:18. Others yet believed that the church began only with the Lord's Supper on Easter day, the night of the resurrection of Christ Jn.20. The fifth argument suggests the belief that the church started, or began with Apostle Paul.

Conclusion

In the Old Testament, God had a nation of God's people: Israel, in covenant relationship with Himself. In as much as one could be correct to refer to Israel as a type of the New Testament church or shadow or symbolic representation, but the nation of Israel in the real sense does not constitute the church. The New Testament church has a more intimate and blessed relationship with Christ than Israel had. However, in the counsel of God, the church was ever in God's mind and purpose from the creation of the world. Hence, in the Old Testament, there were types and shadows of the church. The nation of Israel that was called out of Egypt i.e. the Assembly in the wilderness, was once referred to in the New Testament as church (Acts 7:38). The New Testament church was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets.

That the day of Pentecost marked the beginning of the church seems evident and much more probable, since the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the church as being built in the future in Mt.16:18. This obviously suggests that the church did not exist in the Old Testament time. However, the "type" of church might have been intended by God in the formation of God's people in the Old Testament. From Apostle Paul's thesis in 1Cor.15:1-3, the resurrection and ascension of Christ is essential to the functioning of the church. It is built on the death and resurrection (Eph.1:19-20). Similarly, the giving of spiritual gifts is essential and required for its operation. The giving of gifts in turn was dependent on Christ's ascension (Eph.4:7-12). To suggest that the body of Christ (the church), must have been fully formed before Christ ascension, then it implies that it (the church), was an ungifted body. The church being built on the resurrection and ascension of Christ makes it distinctive to this age.

The primary and pre-eminent evidence that the church, most probably began on the day of Pentecost has to do with the need and work of Pentecostal experience (baptism in the Holy Spirit) for the church. The Christian church was born in a world that was already old. Several empires including Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, Assyrian, Persia, and Greece have already risen and fallen in many centuries behind. However, at the birth of Christianity, the Roman Empire governed the then civilized world. Thus, the church of the New Testament first appeared in history in Palestine. The actual date for the genesis or the birth of the church has been controversial issue among scholars. Some try to peg the commencement of the church of the experience of Pentecost. While others feel or opined that to say the church actually started on the day of Pentecost would mean not taking cognizance of the life and ministry of Jesus as part and parcel of the church.

The first use of the term “church” is found in Mt.16:18. It is significant to note here that Jesus spoke of building the church in the future. The next reference to church is in Mt.18:17. This also is evidently in the future. In actual sense, the faithful believers of the Lord’s time existed as individual followers of Christ but became a nucleus of the church at its formation on the day of Pentecost. The church, therefore, can be described as true believers in Christ, baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The genesis of the New Testament church could be traced to the most controversial figure in history: Jesus of Nazareth. He is from the royal house of David, the King of Judah. He was born of the Virgin Mary during the reign of Emperor Augustus in Roman Empire and Herod the great King of Jews about 7 and 4 BC. His ministry commenced about 25AD. He had twelve apostles as his chosen associates in his ministry. The biblical narrations in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell of the details of his ministry, passion and

ascension. These biblical records attest to his claim of Messiahship and redeemer of the whole world.

Self-Assessment Test

- i) Critically Examine the Origin of the church*
- ii) The church was born on the day of Pentecost. Discuss.*

Chapter 6

THE EARLY CHURCH IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Introduction

Jesus's final charge to His disciples was: '*Go ye to all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*'. This implies that the 'Good News' should be taken to all nations, people and to all the ends of the earth (Mt. 28:19, Act 1:7, 8). By implication, the gospel was to be preached and circulated in the then whole Roman Empire and beyond. This invariably, suggested the universality of the gospel message. In tracing the history of the early church, the book of Acts of the Apostle is very informative and significant for many reasons. Casual reading through the content of the book titled *Acts of the Apostles* appears misleading as it does not really concentrate its narratives on the biographies of the Apostles. Suffice it to note that it however, portrays the records of the acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. Every chapter of the book depicts notable work of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles

Importance of the Book of Acts as a Historical Narrative

The importance of the Book of Acts as the documentary records of the activities of the early church cannot be over emphasised. Even though the book was written by a second-generation Christians, as a historical narrative, modern church would have been denied much information and knowledge about: (i) the first experience of Pentecost (baptism of the Holy Spirit); (ii) the activities of the early church at Jerusalem; (iii) the accounts of the persecution of the disciples; and (iv) the dramatic conversion and the call of Saul of Tarsus (Apostle Paul) to ministry without the

book of Acts of the Apostles. Similarly, it is quite unimaginable how valuable the Christianity would have been without the book of Acts of the Apostles. It goes without saying that the church would have lost the information on the three missionary journeys of Paul that led to the first planting of the churches in Gentile nations including Asia Minor and Europe.

Acts of the Apostles therefore, as a book of history, serves to give credibility to Jesus of history, particularly, His resurrection. The changed lives of the disciples who feared and fled for their lives on 'Good Friday' (as recorded in the gospel accounts), were fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, seen preaching the risen Christ fearlessly on the streets of Jerusalem: as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Not only that, the martyrdom of those who chose to die for their faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, like Stephen, and Apostle James, further attested to the reality of the historical (rather than mythical) Jesus. The records of Jewish persecution of the church at Jerusalem, including the arrests, beatings; jailing of Christians which did not annihilate or even weaken the church but rather strengthened and served as dispersal agency of the 'Good News' proclaimed by the church are accounts that enriched the church's primitive history.

The book of Acts, traces the history of the Christian church at its infancy from 30 AD, or there about, when the gospel went from Jerusalem (the centre of Judea Christian world), in Rome, the centre of socio-political world. From the Acts, we learn how the apostles faithfully implemented the Great commission. Secondly, it shows that, initially, Rome was favourable to Christianity and would refuse to persecute Christians when instigated by the Jews and others to do so. Thirdly, as already noted, we are availed of the history of

Paul, a persecutor who later turned out to be the Early Church's Greatest Missionary of the gospel.

So then, understanding the historical narratives in the Acts has didactic and theological significance (1Cor.10:11). The stories are examples with practical and theological relevance to the church. The book of Acts of the Apostles as an inspired history of the early church, provides a definitive pattern of the activity of the Holy Spirit to be practised by the church through all ages. This historical narrative enriches the church with data for developing a doctrine of the Holy Spirit and revelation concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The numerous activities of the Holy Spirit in the history of the early church, provide the church today with standards of righteousness, witness, and power that God desires for the people in the last days. In addition, as a historical piece, the book of Acts of the Apostles is significant for the following reasons:

1. It gives us the account of the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost: that is, the first baptism in the Holy Spirit (Act 2:1-4).
2. The account of the selection of first deacons of the church including Stephen a man full of the Holy Spirit; Philip, Prochorus; Nicanor, Timon, Permenas, Nicholas: a proselyte of Antioch is found only in the book of Acts of the Apostles.
3. The accounts of the first Christian Martyrs of the church that is Stephen and James (Act 7:6, 12:2) are recorded in the book of Acts of the Apostles.
4. The record of the first Christian missionaries of the early church that is Paul, Barnabas and other members of their team, is given in the narrative account found only in the book of Acts of the Apostles (Act 13:1-3).

5. The book of Acts as a summation of the history of the early church, gives us the account of the believers that were first called Christians in Antioch (Act 11:26). Thus, it gives the origin of the use of the term Christian to describe the followers of Jesus Christ.
6. Acts also gives the picture of the genesis of the persecution of the early church.
7. From the book of Acts, it is clear that membership of the church was based on admission through genuine response to the call to repentance from dead works and faith in the resurrected Christ accompanied with water baptism and participation in communal fellowship in doctrine and breaking of bread.

The Scope of Historical Records of the Church contained in the book of Acts spanned through a period of thirty-eight years i.e. beginning with the pictorial but dramatic record of the ascension of the resurrected Jesus, the unprecedented miraculous event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and all through to the period of the Martyrdom of Paul. This account of the church as contained in the book of Acts can be described as the history of Early Christian (church) witness that could be compartmentalised into two phases. The first was the Period of Jerusalem Crusades (the operation of the church in the holy land) pioneered by Apostle Peter. The second phase could be described as a period of Global Crusades and evangelisation under the leadership of Apostle Paul (Saul of Tarsus).

Phase one gives the accounts of activities of the early disciples after the ascension of Christ and the eventual birth of the church on the day of Pentecost. It includes the Great Jerusalem crusade or what may be described as the operation of the Church in the Holy land. The principal figures and human personalities that were predominantly involved and

used by the Holy Spirit in the early ‘Jerusalem Crusades’ and for the spread of the gospel in the holy land were Apostles Peter and John (the fishermen), Stephen and Philip.

The second phase could be described as an era of global crusades or Evangelical campaigns, pioneered by Saul of Tarsus (Paul). Paul’s associates included Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and Luke the author of the book of Acts. Their missionary outreaches pioneered the planting of churches in gentile nations including Asia Minor and Europe.

Some cardinal historical facts to be noted in the book of Acts are:

- (a) The last recorded account of raising the dead in the Bible including that of Dorcas (Acts 9:40-41) and Eutychus (Act 20:9-12).
- (b) History of the early church that shows that the infant church embattled vicious attacks on the preaching of the gospel from the devil and his agents for the following reasons:
 - i) as a subtle attempt to stop the preaching of the gospel (Act 4:18).
 - ii) Imperceptibly buying off the gospel (Act 8:18) and
 - iii) Adulterating the gospel message by using people possessed with familiar spirit to advertise the gospel ministers.
- (c) The history of the early church as contained in the book of Acts clearly shows that angels are ministering spirits to saints as evident in the case of Peter who was miraculously protected and delivered by angels from prison and death sentence on him by King Herod (Act 12:1-11).

- (d) The curse on Simon the Sorcerer who was before perceived and described by the people as the embodiment of God's power because of the diabolic power, and also the case of the damsel (Acts 16: 16-20).
- (e) Also worthy of note were the three significant conversions evident in the history of the early church:
 - (i) the Ethiopian Eunuch. He was a descendant of Ham (Gen 10:6-20).
 - (ii) of Saul of Tarsus (Apostle Paul) (Gen. 10:21-31).
 - (iii) of Cornelius the descendant of Japheth (Gen. 10:2-5).
- (f) The growth of the church through conversion rose from one hundred and twenty (Act 1:15) to three thousand one hundred and twenty in Acts 2, to Eight thousand one hundred and twenty and later the multitude (Act 5:14).
- (g) Paul reached to philosophers, Pharisee, potentates and prison keepers (17:16-31; 23:6, 24:24-25, 16:24-25).
- (h) The history opened with an upper room prayer meeting and closed with prison room praise meeting.
- (i) In Acts 1-12, we find Apostle Peter and his associates calling the Jews to repentance and to change their minds toward the Messiah while in Acts 13-28 we find Apostle Paul and his companions witnessing primarily to the gentiles and calling them to believe the gospel.

Pentecost: The Church's "Birthday"

During one of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples in Galilee, He (Jesus), had commanded them to gather in Jerusalem and to wait for the endowment of power from on high (Acts 24:49, Acts:8; Mt. 3:8-11; Jn.7:37-39). This was severally prophesied by the Old Testament prophets.

Pentecost is a Greek word that means 'fiftieth'. It was so named because it was the fiftieth day after Passover. Originally Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival. It was later used to commemorate the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. In the history of the church, however, the first Pentecost was seven weeks after the crucifixion of Jesus and ten days after the ascension of Jesus Christ. Prior to Christ's ascension, He had commanded His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the '*Promise of the Father*' i.e. the arrival of the Holy Spirit as a universal and permanent blessing for the church. The eleven apostles (excluding Judas) faithfully returned to Jerusalem in the company of other disciples totalling one hundred and twenty (male and female) who had ten days prayer meeting in an upper room in a house of one of the members probably. During the prayer meeting, Simon Peter raised the issue of defection and death of Judas that had to be replaced because of his apostasy not necessarily because he had died. After all, Stephen and James were not replaced at their death. It should be noted that Judas' replacement was done through casting of lots that was preceded by fervent praying.

Just as the Old Testament's first Pentecost took place fifty days after Israel Passover in Egypt on April 14, 1491 BC, so did the New Testament Pentecost that occurred fifty days after Christ rose from the dead. Our Lord was crucified

during the Passover week in April. He then spent forty days with his disciples after resurrection and then ascended into heaven. Ten days later, the New Testament Pentecost occurred. The Old Testament Pentecost marked the celebration of the birthday of the nation of Israel (Ex 19:9). The New Testament Pentecost experience marked the celebration of the birthday of the church. The Old Testament Pentecost witnessed the death of about three thousand people (Ex 32:28), while the New Testament Pentecost witnessed the saving of Three thousand people (Acts 2:41). The Old Testament Pentecost was heralded by the supernatural mighty power of God, just as the New Testament of Pentecost was introduced in a mighty wind (Ex 19:18-19; Acts 2: 2,3).

The miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus Christ probably in AD 28 in Jerusalem was an unprecedented experience. Thus, Jerusalem is generally regarded as the home of the early Christian church. The Pentecost experience was the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus Christ to send the comforter who will be with the church to empower the church (Acts 1:6-15). At the first Pentecost experience of the church, some fundamental changes took place in the character and structure of the people of God. Such as, on the day of Pentecost the New Testament universal church replaced the strictly Israelite congregation that was expressed in temple and synagogue worship of the people of God (i.e. Israelite only). An international and universal community including the Greeks, the Jews and the Barbarians now emerged to form the people of God. Thus, the Christian church, now constitutes the new Israel, living a pattern of the Christian life that is based on the new exodus i.e. the church succeeded the old Jewish community and combined both Jews and Greeks within God's one family of converted men and women. This new fellowship of believers in Christ stood at the dawn of

new age in God's dealings with the old Israel. They became distinct by their conviction and joyful awareness of living in a new relationship to God and sharing in the new age of grace and power made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The preacher endowed with power of the Holy Spirit replaced the priest, the pulpit also replaced the altar while the sacrifice of Jesus once and for all replaced the ceremonial continual sacrifice of animals. It however, took time for the whole church to comprehend the universality of fellowship of God's people.

Features of the First New Testament Pentecost Experience

The first experience of Pentecost after Jesus' death was characterised by the following features:

1. There came a sound from heaven like the rush of a violent wind.
 2. Tongues of fire appeared and rested on the initial beneficiaries of the Pentecost at the upper room.
 3. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages they had not learnt before (Acts 2:2-4).
- Thus, the Holy Spirit appeared audibly and visibly as wind and fire to remain biblical symbols of God's presence.
 - Those who were filled spoke in strange languages: at least fifteen languages mentioned in the Bible.
 - As Jesus was launched into ministry after the descent of the Holy Spirit on Him at River Jordan, so did the Holy Spirit launch the apostles into ministry after Pentecost to preach repentance like Jesus (Mk 1:15, Acts 2:38).

- The Jews from all over the world were present at Jerusalem to observe the Festival of Pentecost at the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost.

Clarification of Pentecost by Peter

Peter rightly alluded to their experience of the Pentecost as the fulfilment of the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit prophesied by Prophet Joel (Joel 2:28). He went further to defend the Messiahship of Jesus Christ with His works, resurrection, the manifest power and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the whole book of Acts of the Apostles seems to have focused on the coming of the Holy Spirit on the early Christians and their consequent witnesses to the resurrected Lord Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit everywhere in Roman Empire. The significant role of the power of the Holy Spirit in planting the churches is vivid in the book of Acts of the Apostles. Suffice it to note that it actually concentrated on reports of some of the churches planted particularly those that were product of evangelistic efforts of Apostle Peter and Apostle Paul. The book gives a glaring portrait of the growth and spread of the Christianity after the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the 120 disciples in the upper room. That the Holy Spirit enabled the early Christians who were beneficiaries of the first out-pouring of the power of the Holy Spirit to effectively witness to their world is obvious in the Lukan narratives in the book of Acts of the Apostles. This is particularly, evident in the life of the few disciples who became suddenly changed from fearful, disillusioned men and women to enthusiastic, bold and courageous band, that soon penetrated Roman Empire with the Gospel from Jerusalem to most parts of eastern region and beyond even unto the western parts of the empire.

The First Christian Community in Jerusalem

That Christ had given priority to the proclamation of the gospel to the Jews is undoubtedly clear in the scriptures (Luke 24:47; Matthew 10:5-7; Acts 1: 8). The establishment and planting of the church followed this divinely prescribed order that Jesus gave. It is therefore not surprising that the gospel was first preached in Jerusalem among the Jews by Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost: a Jewish festival. Thus, the earliest members of the church were Jewish Christians who evangelized the Jews in Judea and Samaria. The first expression of Christianity was a product of Judaism. The church in Jerusalem remained pre-eminent and predominantly Jewish community between AD30 and AD44.

Three days after Jesus was executed for the fallacious charges of seditions, the news that He was risen from the dead as He had promised began to spread around the city of Jerusalem. Some of His closest disciples began to attest to the undeniable authenticity of Christ's post resurrection appearance. Invariably, the bodily resurrection of Christ gave birth to resurrection of faith of the early Disciples of Christ. It is doubtful if there would have been any Christianity without a firm belief by the early Disciples of Christ in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Suffice it to state here that, what seemed to be the firm roots of the Christian faith (in its infancy), was the unshakable conviction of Jesus' victory over death and that He did appear to many of His disciples. The belief in Christ's resurrection is the most outstanding explanation one can give to account for how the small band of demoralized group of believers who eventually emerged as transformed, dynamic movement in the history of mankind. There is no gainsaying that without this obit truth (that is, the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth), the Christians

would not have had any impetus to associate with Jesus any more. Rather, the Christian faith would have faded into oblivion with the dastardly death of Christ.

The bold proclamation that Jesus was risen indeed attracted a lot of followers from all the parts of Roman Empire. Many came to believe that Jesus was alive and that His vicarious death on the cross was part of God's redemptive plan to atone and save mankind from the penalty of sin. The fact of bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ did not only serve to build and strengthen the faith of His disciples, but also gave meaning to His death. Not only that, the "Great Commission" that fostered the spread of gospel around Asia Minor, and indeed the whole of Roman Empire (the then whole world), has been historically pitched at Christ's post resurrection charge to His disciples.

Several events were identified with the first Christian Church at Jerusalem. These include:

- (i) The replacement of deflected Judas by Mathias;
- (ii) The communal life of the early church including:
 - a. steadfast doctrine;
 - b. steadfast fellowship;
 - c. steadfast breaking of bread from house to house;
 - d. steadfast prayer;
 - e. baptism of new converts and
 - f. steadfast and joyful praise worship;
- (iii) the arrest and the persecution of the disciples by the Jewish authorities. The persecution that

ensued at this time produced the earliest Christian martyrs (Stephen and James) of the church;

- (iv) the appointment of the seven deacons;
- (v) the planting of the church in Samaria and the consequent conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch
- (vi) the holy spirit was given position of prominence in the early church i.e. in the earliest Christian community especially after the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they depended on the Holy Spirit for power and guidance;
- (vii) the early church experienced what could be described as a geo-metric growth. Converts were from all walks of life including a great company of priests. Between Acts chapter one to Acts chapter five the membership of baptised members had risen from one hundred and twenty to quite above eight thousand: with the addition of three thousand and another five thousand and later multitudes Acts 4: 4; 5:14).
- (viii) the early church had some mixed multitudes who thought to corrupt the church through deceits: people like Ananias and Sapphira and later Simon the sorcerer;
- (ix) the experience of divine discipline on hypocritical members: Ananias and Sapphira and
- (x) it clearly spelt the content of the message of the apostolic church: Christ the predicted O.T. Messiah who was crucified; died and buried but resurrected the third day for our justification, redemption, reconciliation and salvation.

The Early Church in Jerusalem

The first Christian congregation was at Jerusalem. Here, the Disciples of Christ and their converts participated in the temple worship. A communal sharing of earthly goods, care for the poor, especially widows and orphans characterized their fellowship (Acts 2:41-42). Miracles and wonders were performed by the apostles who preached Jesus crucified, dead and resurrected. Before the Pentecost, one hundred and twenty people including the apostles had waited in Jerusalem as a powerless static group. Suddenly, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the disciples who were now endowed with power soon had a conversion of about three thousand souls added to their membership. As the disciples continued to preach in Jerusalem publicly and privately, with signs and wonders following, the church grew tremendously in Jerusalem. Dissension also arose because of unequal or unorganized distribution of provisions to the needy in Jerusalem church. A prompt action was taken to remedy this. This led to the appointment of Stephen (the first Martyr) who was appointed along with other six deacons.

Formal meetings for the purpose of regulating the doctrine and discipline of the church were reoccurring features of the history of the church. Those types of meetings are called **Councils** or **Synods**. The first Church Council was held in Jerusalem about AD49. At the first Council, Jewish customs, laws and religion form the agenda. At that council, it was resolved that the Jewish requirement: such as circumcision should not be made a legalistic demand or prerequisite for accepting the heathen Christian converts into fellowship. The Council however, warned that, the participation in pagan sacrifices and eating of meat sacrificed to idols as well as sexual immorality associated with idolatrous practices were unacceptable to the Christian

faith. Many Jewish leaders were religious but they did not know God (Rom.9:1-3; 10:1-24). When Jesus came to explain the way to the Father, they (the Jews) rejected him. They rejected God's Precious Cornerstone. Consequently, once again they would be banished from their land. Jesus warned when you see Jerusalem under siege you will know that its desolation is near. There would be great distress in the land and wrath against God's people. They would fall by the sword and will be taken prisoners to all nations. Jerusalem would be trampled by the gentiles until the times of gentile are fulfilled (Lk.21:20, 23, 24). God had spoken, had the people listened they would not have been caught unawares by the desolation that occurred in AD 70 but they refused to hearken to that grave warning.

As the conflict between the Jews and their Roman rulers intensified (according to Tacitus, a Roman historian), that culminated in the Jews rising-up against Flavius' army, war ensued. Emperor Nero commanded T. Flavius Vespasian to subdue the Jews. Vespasian reduced Northern Palestine and secured the rest of the country except Jerusalem, Masada and two other fortresses. During this time, Nero committed suicide and civil war broke out in Rome. Galba, Otto and Virellus succeeded one another as the emperors of Roman Empire. Eastern region proclaimed Vespasian Emperor and Virellus was murdered. Vespasian put his son Titus in charge of the war and sailed for Rome in AD 70 Titus besieged Jerusalem. Over million Jews died in five months. On August 6, AD 70 Roman forces invaded the temple and just as Jesus prophesied, not one stone was left upon another, Jerusalem was burned. Titus went to Rome to celebrate his victory with his father. Although some of the Jews fled to Masada, the Jewish state went into extinction and never existed until 1948 AD. Sometimes between 72 and 74 AD, Masada also fell to Roman Governor Flavius Siva.

In AD 132 the Emperor Hadrian banned circumcision and observance of Sabbath. He also made plans to build a temple to Zeus. These actions prompted Simon Bar Kochba to lead another revolt. Jerusalem in AD 136 and named it Acla Capitolite and banned the Jews' entrance into the city on pain of death. This was enforced for about 500 years.

In AD 324, Constantine became the sole governor of Rome. In AD 330, the capital was moved from Rome to Byzantine which was renamed Constantinople after Constantine (the present-day Istanbul, Turkey) in his honour. According to the tradition, Constantine became a Christian after seeing a vision of a cross and hearing the words: "By this sign thou shall conquer". He proclaimed Christianity as the official religion of the whole Roman Empire.

Constantine's mother, the empress Helena, began the restoration of the city of David (Jerusalem) by locating Christians and building shrines over the places associated with Christianity. Helena and the city Bishop, Makarios, built the church of the Holy Sepulchre on the site where they believed Jesus was buried. By the 5th century, the Empire was divided and the eastern half became the Byzantine empire with the capital at Constantinople. Rome became the capital of Western Roman Empire. The Jews were again permitted to pray at the temple's mount on Tisha "BA by the middle of Jerusalem and was recognized as a patriarchal territory equal in status to Constantinople, Alexandria, Rome and Antioch.

Early Christian Worship Pattern

Since the first Christians were undoubtedly Jews who had accepted Jesus as Messiah and Lord, it is not surprising therefore that Jewish influence pervaded the pattern of early Christian worship. The two main Jewish worship centres were the Jerusalem Temple and the network of synagogues

that were scattered all over Palestine. The institution of synagogue had a tremendous influence on early Christianity. Synagogue scriptural readings and sermon within the framework of praise and congregational prayers were absolved by the first Christian community in their worship as could be seen in Lk 4 16-30. Synagogues which were primarily worship centres for Judaisers, evolved as the springboard for evangelism and the declaration of Christian teaching.

The setting of Christian worship was however, on the first day of the week being the day that Jesus rose from the dead. This was quite distinct from the Jewish Sabbath. The Christian-Sunday was not made a day of public holiday for rest until Constantine's decree in 321AD.

The Early Church in Antioch

During the first century, Antioch of Syria became the second centre of apostolic influence existing alongside with Jerusalem church. It was from this church that Paul (preacher and teacher) and Barnabas (a prophet) were sent out on their first missionary outreach into Asia Minor where they established Galatia churches in AD 36-98. These include Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Iconium and Derbe. In each of these locations, they ordained elders. The second missionary trip also originated from Antioch with Paul and Silas embarking on evangelistic outreach to Eastern Europe. These resulted in the establishment of the church in Thessalonica and Corinth (in Macedonia).

Similarly, from Syrian Antioch, Paul's third missionary journey was commissioned. The fruit was the establishment of third dynamic centre of influence i.e. the church at Ephesus. Other small locations established along with these were the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. These eventually became historic churches in Asia Minor.

The Planting of the Church in Samaria

The Christians that were scattered by the persecution that ensued from the opposition of the Jews to Christian teachings in Jerusalem took the gospel to Samaria. This was pioneered by Philip. The Christian community in Samaria was not purely Jewish. The church in Samaria had some identical features with the church in Jerusalem:

- i) Converts were immediately baptised in water.
- ii) Members were filled with Holy Spirit.
- iii) There were also mixed multitude of people like Simon the sorcerer.

Apostle Peter in the Early Church

Apostle Peter was one of the foundational pillars of the early church leadership. He presided over the selection of Mathias to replace Judas from among the one hundred and twenty disciples in Jerusalem. He has been described as the ‘Apostles to the Jews’. He spontaneously addressed the crowd to clarify that their Pentecost experience was scriptural. Along with John, they prayed for the lame man at the Beautiful gate on their way to the Temple for prayers.

The Jews observed three regular hours of prayers including:

- i. The third hour prayer (9:00 am)
- ii. The six-hour prayer (12:00 noon)
- iii. The ninth hour prayer (3:00 pm)

In 260 AD, St. Thomas Aquinas visited the Roman Pope Innocent IV who showed him all the fabulous wealth of the papacy. After the tour, Pope Innocent said “so you see good Thomas, unlike the first Pope (referring to Apostle Peter), I cannot say silver and gold have I none. Aquinas nodded in

agreement and replied softly and neither can you say “in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk”. This healing miracles marked the genesis of the apostolic ministry after the ascension of Christ. Peter particularly, was said to have healed many by his shadow in Jerusalem (Acts 5:15, 16); Aeneas at Lydia and also raised Dorcas at Joppa to life (Acts 9:32-35; 9:40-41).

The Pentecost experience had produced a remarkable change in the man Peter, who had denied Christ before a little girl that he had now turned out to be a bold proclaimer of Jesus to the whole world. He also boldly defended his faith in Christ before the high priest and the Sanhedrin who were amazed at the theological conviction and perception of the untrained apostles.

Peter was martyred during Nero’s persecution of the Church in the mid-60s AD, which followed the burning of Rome in July 64 AD (when Emperor Nero set fire on the residential section of the city to allow for the building of his palace). Nero blamed Christians. Consequently, many Christians were executed. According to Dionysius, Peter was crucified upside down in the city of Rome. According to history, he (Peter) had protested that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same way his master Jesus Christ was crucified. Constantine the Christian Emperor in Roman Empire (312-337 AD) later initiated the building of St. Peter Basilica, that is today the largest Christian church in the world to mark the burial spot of Apostle Peter.

Background of Paul (Saul of Tarsus)

The conversion of Saul (Apostle Paul) marked and signalled the spread of the Christian Gospel message beyond the Jewish communities to the Gentile world. Thus, Paul pioneered the activities of the Early Church that took the

gospel to the then known whole world, including Asia and Europe.

Paul was born and raised up in Tarsus (Act 21:39). His genealogy has been traced to the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1) and has been described a Hebrew of the Hebrew. Paul (Saul) was a student of Gamaliel (Act 22:3), belonging to the sect of Pharisee as a son of a Pharisee. He was quite zealous and enthusiastic about the Law of Moses. Hence, he persecuted the Church that had no regard nor observed the Law. To this end he took part in the stoning of Stephen to death, made havoc of the church, imprisoned Christians, had some tortured and beaten to death. Paul who had never thought of conversion to the Christian faith, blasphemed, persecuted and voted against every course of the church until he was miraculously arrested by God. He was said to have been in the company of those that murdered Stephen. In short, he consulted and kept the raiment of those that killed Stephen.

Conversion and Call of Paul

His dramatic conversion meant much for the Early Church. Paul was on his way to Damascus, in one of his persecution trips (Act 9). Damascus is the current capital of Syria. Saul (Apostle Paul) was on his way to hunt for those who followed the way of Jesus (Act 9:2). As Paul drew near the city of Damascus, a light from heaven flashed on and around him that he could not resist. He fell-down blinded but heard a voice that called on him, saying *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me*'. Saul replied "*who are you, Lord*". Jesus answered: *'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'*'. Saul's persecution of the followers of Jesus tantamount the persecution of Jesus. Paul was directed to go and meet one Ananias who further instructed him and told him that he was a chosen vessel to make known the name of the Lord among

the Gentiles (Act 9:6-13). Paul heard and accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour and regained his sight. He started to preach Christ at Synagogues

Paul's Missionary Journeys (AD 46-48)

(Acts 13:3-14:28)

The book of Acts gives among all other things, a historical account of the missionary outreaches and journeys of Paul that are epitome of the early churches evangelization and the unprecedented planting of churches among the Gentile nations.

First Missionary Journey (AD 46-48)

(Act 13:1-14; 28)

Paul's First missionary journey covered a period of two years that is about AD 46-48, and a distance of about 1,400 miles (2400 kilometres). The team initially consisted of Barnabas and Paul. The Missionary journey took off from Antioch in Syria. Their first place of contact was Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus (the hometown of Barnabas). At Cyprus, the team preached in the synagogue at Salamis. It was at this juncture that they had John Mark added to the team. It would seem as if the team had succeeded in planting a church in Salamis. Their next point of contact was Paphos. At Paphos, they had an encounter with a Jewish false prophet (a sorcerer) by name Elymas. Elymas was one of the government officials (probably one of the special advisers) of the Deputy of the nation by name Sargius Paulus. Elymas who had attempted to hinder Paul's mission through diabolical power was immediately plagued with blindness through the power of the Holy Spirit using Paul. This recorded miracle of blinding Elymas helped to win the Deputy of Paphos (who was greatly amazed) to Christ.

From Paphos they came to Perga in Pamphylia where John Mark took a leave of the team and departed to Jerusalem. The team (that is Barnabas and Paul) proceeded to Antioch in Pisidia. At Antioch, there were Jews in this Gentile community. Hence, there was a Synagogue where they (Paul and Barnabas) had a Sabbath service. Paul was given the opportunity to exhort the worshippers in the congregation. The sermon of Apostle Paul at the synagogue had provoked some of the Jews to oppose and resist the gospel while the Gentiles (that is, the religious proselytes) believed the gospel. Eventually, there ensued a division between the Jews and the gentile proselytes in the city. Some of the Jews were however receptive to the gospel and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and personal Saviour. Though, the leaders of the Jews were opposed to Paul's message. The team somehow concentrated on the Gentiles as they preached the gospel all around in that region. The Jews successfully stirred up opposition against the team and they were consequently expelled from their domain and they departed for Iconium.

At Iconium they had both the Jews and Greeks in their audience also. Many had believed the gospel seeing the miracle, signs and wonders through the missionary team. They spent a long period with the converts here. The dissenting Jews however, caused another division that resulted into assaults among the Jews and Gentiles. The apostles being privy to the plot to rough-handle and stone them, they immediately quit the town and fled to Lystra and Derbe cities.

At the first missionary journey, Paul also preached at Lystra where he healed a cripple who had been lame from the mother's womb. The people were so amazed that the crowd attempted to worship Paul and Barnabas as deities. The evidence of miracles performed by the missionaries

however, did not prevent persecution as people from Iconium came to dissuade the people until the apostles were stoned and drawn out of the city. They, in any case returned back to Antioch in Syria where he possibly wrote the epistle to Galatians.

The sum of the Paul's first missionary journey is given below:

- 1). The team succeeded in making contacts in about ten notable cites including Seleucia, Salamis, Paphos, Pamphylia, Perga, Atelia, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.
- 2). the mission witnessed severe oppositions and Persecutions.
- 3). there were miracles, signs and wonders attesting to their ministries.
- 4). most of the cases of the persecution experienced came from the religious and Jewish leaders.
- 5). that persecution did not hinder the people from going back to visit the towns they were persecuted and stoned.
- 6). the pattern of the missionary activities laid the foundation for the need of effective follow-up of converts
- 7). Paul established churches in South-East of Asia Minor.

The First Apostolic Council at Jerusalem (AD 49)

Between the first and second missionary journey of Apostle Paul and his team there was a church council in AD 49 at Jerusalem. Consequent upon the first missionary outreach to the gentile nations, the infant church grew tremendously and began to accommodate the Gentiles into the household of God's people. It became clear that the church of God (ie God's people) was no longer a nationalistic entity but a

universal assembly that embraces both the Gentiles and the Jews. The influx of the many Gentiles converts gave rise to the question of the condition of accepting non-Jewish people into the Christian church that was hitherto solely Jewish congregation. Some had argued insistently that one of the conditions for accepting the gentile proselytes into Judaism (that is circumcision of the flesh) must be applied to the gentile converts to Christianity. Others felt that the mere profession or confession of faith in Christ alone was all that was needed for the salvation of the Gentiles. The ensued controversy on whether or not the Gentile converts should be circumcised necessitated the first apostolic council at Jerusalem in AD 49.

In attendance were the apostles and elders in Jerusalem church; Apostle Paul, Barnabas (Judas), Silas, and some brethren from the Antioch church. Following the precedence of the conversion at the house of Cornelius, the unanimous decision of the council after much debates was that the Gentile converts into the Christianity through faith in Christ should:

- i) not be subjected to the circumcision rites of the Jews as a necessary pre-requisite for salvation,
- ii) abstain from meats sacrificed to idols and things strangled; and
- iii) also abstain from fornication.

The decision of the council was communicated to the churches of the Gentiles through Apostle Paul and Silas.

It is pertinent to note that these eventual unanimous decisions of the church were guided by the Holy Ghost. In otherwords, through the leadership of the Holy Ghost, certain restrictions were prescribed for the gentile Christians that would enable the Jewish Christians live harmoniously

with them. The Gentiles were therefore expected to abstain from activities and practices that were offensive to the Jews but however, they were not constrained to adhere to Jewish rudiments of the law. The Churches were charged in addition to their faith in Christ Jesus to be willing to refrain from activities that do not promote chastity.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY



Paul's Second Missionary Journey AD 49-53

Acts 15:39-18:22

Paul had a sharp disagreement with Barnabas on the issue of whether or not John Mark, who had left them during the first missionary trip should be allowed in their company again. Paul's opinion was to keep John Mark (who had left them on the mission field at Pamphylia) out of the second mission while Barnabas was in favour of John Mark being tolerated in the trip. So, due to the contention, Paul decided to go

without both Barnabas and John Mark and chose to go with Silas (who replaced Barnabas) with the blessing of the church. The original intent of Paul's second mission was to revisit all places that they had planted churches to see the brethren, encourage them and give the decrees of the church that emerged from the council at Jerusalem. The journey that eventually covered 2,800 miles (4480 kilometres) started again from Antioch of Syria. This time, the team decided to pass through the region of Cilicia to Derbe and Lystra to confirm the spiritual state of the brethren. It was at Lystra that Timothy (who had both Jewish and Greek parentage) was recruited into the missionary team after Paul had circumcised him. They canvassed the territory of Galatia and Phrygia in Asia Minor and passed through Mysia to Troas. It was at Troas that Paul had the Macedonian call. Paul immediately left Troas for Samothrace and the next day Neapolis. This probably spelt the first entrance of the gospel in present day Europe.

Philippi

From Neapolis, they came to Philippi, one of the main cities of Macedonia where the missionary team spent some time. Some women including Lydia and her household from the city of Thyatira (who traded on purple) responded to the gospel. Here also, Paul had an encounter with a damsel possessed with the spirit of divination that led to their arrest and consequent imprisonment. The miraculous opening of the prison doors for Apostle Paul led to the conversion of the Philippian jailor who was instantly baptised. Paul was therefore unceremoniously released from prison.

Thessalonica

From Philippi, Paul's team passed through Amphipolis to Thessalonica where they had a considerable number of converts added to the faith. Provoked by the huge success of

Paul and Silas' ministry among the Gentiles here the unbelieving Jews stirred up an uproar against them. Paul and Silas escaped to Berea through the mercies of the brethren.

Berea

At Berea Paul and Silas also had an opened door as many Berea Greeks (both men and women) readily received the gospel. Again the Jews from Thessalonica came to expel Apostle Paul from Berea leaving behind his missionary associates Timothy and Silas to continue the work a while.

Athens

The persecution at Berea drove Apostle Paul to the highly idolatrous city of Athens. In their superstitious belief the Athenians had raised an altar to the unknown God. At the sight of the magnitude of their idolatry and evident superstition, Apostle Paul's spirit was stirred up: he became indignant and grief stricken. According to Henrietta C. Mears, Apostle Paul preached a memorable sermon on Mars Hills (453). (Acts 17: 32). He had an encounter with the philosophers, Epicureans and Stoics who mocked at the gospel. Paul was arraigned before the court of Areopagus to defend the '*strange doctrine*' in Athens. Paul did not have much fruits at Athens. Nevertheless, Dionysius the Areopagite, Damaris (a woman) and few others were the outstanding converts during his ministry at Athens.

Corinth

Corinth is the municipal city and capital of Corinthians. Paul left Athens for Corinth where he came in contact with a certain Jew Aquila and his Priscilla. Aquila who had left Rome at the edict of Claudius that expelled all Jews from Rome. Aquila practiced the same profession of tent making with Apostle Paul. Note, Timothy and Silas from Macedonia joined him at Corinth. Again Apostle Paul was gravely

opposed by the Jews in their synagogue at Corinth but they took refuge in the house of one Justus whose residence was very close to the synagogue. At Corinth, Crispus (the chief ruler of the synagogue believed the teachings of Paul. He embraced the Christian faith and was baptised.

Encouraged by the vision he received, Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth despite the resistance and opposition of the Jews. Gallio the deputy of Achaia summarily dismissed the charges against Paul as he found no criminal offence in the charges against him.

Paul left Corinth for Antioch via Syria in the company of Aquila and his wife (Priscila). At Ephesus he had occasion to preach the gospel in the synagogue of the Jews.

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY



Paul's Third Missionary Journey AD 53-57

Acts 18:23-21:17

After Apostle Paul had gone to give an update (in Antioch in Syria) of all that God did through him and his team during

the second missionary outreach, he swiftly proceeded on the third missionary journey that was aimed at strengthening the disciples in the churches he had planted previously. Thus, he went through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia visiting the churches in Derbe, Lystria, Iconium and Antioch in Turkey which he had planted during his first missionary journey some five years ago, before departing to Ephesus.

Before now, Paul in his second missionary journey had spent some quality time at Ephesus. But this time he had an encounter with twelve believers who had been instructed by Apollos (a Jewish believer born at Alexandria). These twelve disciples had evidently displayed that their knowledge and faith in Jesus was not more than what they had heard at the baptism of repentance by John the Baptist. In other words, these twelve believers were ignorant of the complete gospel of Jesus Christ. That is, they had not the understanding of the concept of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ. That is, they lack the knowledge of being born again by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Neither had they the knowledge of the need for the experience of Spirit baptism. They were however, before now baptised in water by John the Baptist. Perceiving their gross deficiency in knowledge and Christian experiences, Paul took them and baptised them in water again after instructing them in the way of the Lord Jesus. Consequently, he laid his hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. And they (all the twelve) received the gift of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-5).

Suffice it to note here that Paul's three months period in Ephesus: preaching and teaching in their synagogue was not without any resistance and opposition of some unbelievers. In short, due to the persistent perversion of the gospel message by some of the unbelievers in Ephesus, Paul had to

withdraw himself with the disciples who were receptive to the truth, to the school premises of one Tyrannus, where he disciple them for a period of about two years. Nevertheless, his ministry at Ephesus (in this third missionary journey), as recorded in the scriptures was with notable and marvellous miracles.

Notable and Marvellous Miracles at Ephesus

Paul had become so popular in Ephesus with his gospel message, especially, with the marvellous miracles he performed. Most of the people in Ephesus heard the word of God. He had performed some extraordinary miracles including the casting out of evil spirits and healing many sick of diverse diseases through his apron and handkerchiefs. In addition, Paul had an encounter with the seven sons of a Jewish High Priest name Sceva, who were fake exorcists. In their attempt to replicate the miracles of Paul, began to use Paul's name and 'that of Jesus that Paul preached' for deceptive and fake exorcism. Unfortunately for the seven sons of Sceva, the evil spirit did not submit to their authority even though the spirit did acknowledge the authority in the name of Jesus and claimed to know Paul. Rather, the demonised person bounced on the seven sons of Sceva and prevailed on them until they fled away naked and wounded. This singular act in addition to other extraordinary miracles of Paul provoked much revered for the name of Jesus among the Ephesians to the extent that many others who were given to the practice of magic repented (Acts 19:13-19).

Paul's antennary was to continue his missionary trip before returning to Jerusalem and probably visit Rome later, to this end, he sent Timothy, and Erastus as his herald to Macedonia while he remained at Ephesus. Ironically, the works of Apostle Paul at Ephesus sparked a near riot and an

uproar in the city as the Demetrius the silversmith began to incite the populace against Paul. It is an understatement to say that Paul's preaching and way of life, undoubtedly, had gravely posed a threat to their idolatrous way of life and means of livelihood hence, the concuss. With the intervention of the town clerk, Paul quietly bid the disciples at Ephesus farewell and departed to Macedonia not without writing the first Epistle to the Corinthians at Ephesus. While at Macedonia, in addition to visiting the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, he wrote the second epistle to the Corinthians before making his way to Corinth where he spent three months.

At Corinth, Paul had planned to go through Syria before he uncovered the unbelieving Jews' plot to ambush and assassinate him. He then change his antennary and decided to return to Macedonia from where he had to retract his way back to Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi. At Philippi, he celebrate the Passover with Luke who later accompanied him to Troas where they were joined by other brethren from other churches on their way to deliver their palliatives at Jerusalem because of the famine. After about a week at Troas, the brethren had a night-vigil valedictory fellowship/communion service with Paul. At the service, the young man Eutychus fell asleep and fell from a window in a story building while listening to Paul's long farewell exhortation and died. But he was raised back to life. It goes without saying that this miracle was a great encouragement to the brethren in Troas.

From Troas Paul passed to Miletus via Assos. At Miletus, Paul sent for the elders at Ephesus who came to meet him for a word of encouragement and farewell. From there Paul and his missionary team departed to Tyre via Cos, Rhodes and Patara. On reaching Tyre, the brethren persuaded Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Their persuasion and that of prophet

Agabus who had predicted that Paul would be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles at Jerusalem fell on Paul's deaf ears. Paul insisted that he would go to Jerusalem and that he was not only ready to be bound but even to die at Jerusalem. Thus, Paul proceeded to Jerusalem without heeding the caution of the brethren. At Jerusalem however, as earlier predicted, Paul was arrested and imprisoned thereby terminating his third missionary journey of four years in about AD 57.

From Paul's third missionary journey we can learn:

- That there is always the need for visitation and church strengthening mission of new churches planted in our contemporary times.
- That often times, the different people used as instruments in the process of bringing others to the knowledge of salvation and for the perfecting of their faith in Christ are all significant as seen in the example of the church in Ephesus where we can possibly say: Apollos planted and Paul watered.
- The experience of the sons of Sceva, depicted the futility of the efforts in using head knowledge without experiential knowledge of the power in the name of Jesus.
- The fact that those who previously used magical arts turned repented and turned to God showed that no one can be too bad, filthy or evil for salvation.
- Paul's constant dependence on the leading of the Holy Spirit in his missionary outreaches is quite instructive.
- The place of miracle as gospel advertiser and encouragement to believers is clearly spelt out.

- Paul commitment to obey God in the face of many persecution is quite exemplary.

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY



Reason for the Spread and Growth of the Christian Faith in the Early Church

Undoubtedly, God was at work in the expansion and in the extraordinary spread of the Christian faith in the early church. In other words, there was a divine side in the expansion of the church, just as it is also appropriate to acknowledge the fact that God usually works with human hearts and hands. Several factors therefore contributed to the growth of the Early Church in spite of the persecutions the church went through.

1. Burning Conviction of the Early Christians

The death and resurrection of Christ was an undeniable event that had happened. To the early Christians, God had invaded time to redeem mankind. They were captivated by

the creative power of that grand news. It produced an unshakable assurance in the believers in the face of numerous obstacles including martyrdom.

2. Christ's Message Met the Need of the People

They insisted that only the active love of God rather than the individual's self-respect could make the Christian life possible and direct the believer outward to the needs of his fellow man. They came to realize that what the stoics aimed for in their philosophy the Christian love produced.

3. Practical Expression of Christian Love

The early church demonstrated practical love for their fellow members in many ways. These included the provision of burial places and burial service for the brethren. The belief of the Early Church was that man created in the image of God should not be thrown to the beast or birds as prey at death. Thus man should not be denied honorable burial at death. Consequently, the ministry of mercy upon pagans yielded positive results in converting the pagans to Christianity.

4. Persecution Helped to Publicize Christianity

The practice was to gather a lot of witnesses in their amphitheater. There were several conversions of spectators at the witness of martyrdom of several courageous Christian believer. At the instances of courage in the face of persecution, tremendous courtesy toward enemies and joyful acceptance of suffering as a divinely appointed way be the early Christians.

Self-Assessment Questions

- *Show five importance of Acts of the Apostles as a historical document*
- *Why would you consider the book Acts of the Apostle a very significant New Testament document?*
- *Describe the scope of the historical record of the church contained in Acts.*
- *Give five reasons for the fast spread of the early church*
- *Give detailed accounts of Apostle Paul's three missionary journeys.*
- *Discuss the events that led to the first Apostolic Council in Jerusalem in AD 49 and the decisions of the Council.*
- *Describe the events leading to the conversion of the notable persecutor of the church that was turned a preacher in the early church.*
- *Write notes on the man Saul of Tarsus to include his early background and conversion to the Christian faith.*
- *Enumerate the characteristics of the first Christian community in Jerusalem.*
- *Briefly summarise Paul's first missionary journey.*

HERESIES AND SECTS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction

In the history of the early church, the second and third centuries were very crucial periods. This was the era when Christianity had external foes and a more deadly and subtler enemy within. Thus, while the church was battling to preserve its existence amidst the several Roman decrees, edicts and policies that were aimed at the extinction or better put, annihilation of the church, it had to also fight doggedly to preserve its orthodox doctrine and faith. As the Imperial Roman authorities persecuted adherents of the Christian faith, the definition of the orthodox Christianity of the infant Church was also threatened by the legalistic and philosophic influences from Jewish and Greek converts respectively.

Early converts to Christianity were either from Jewish background of salvation by works or from intellectual environment of Greek philosophy. The attempts by the Jewish converts to interpret and express Christianity in consonance with the legalistic demands of Jewish laws and traditions on the one hand resulted to heretical ideas that were alien to the orthodox theology of the infant church. Especially, as converts from Judaism had lenses of monotheistic religion on. Similarly, the philosophical pagan Greeks thought to dress Christianity in pagan philosophies. The implication of all these was the attempts of the leadership of the church to redefine and develop the authentic tradition of the church that led to schism and even the consequence emergence of heretical sects.

We shall examine some of the sects that were either legalistic or philosophical or otherwise in their approaches.

EBIONITES

The Ebionites were generally Jewish-Christian sect. They were Judaizers who had thought to safeguard the monotheism and the deity of Christ under the leadership of Bar Kokhba between 132AD and 135AD, who was holding tenaciously to the supremacy of Jewish law. The Ebonite believed that both the Jews and Gentiles were bound by the Law of Moses. The Ebionites taught that Jesus did not possess any unique status other than a mere son of Joseph who eventually acquired or attained a measure of divinity at baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on Him. They insisted on circumcision as pre-requisite for salvation in addition to faith in Christ. The Ebionites extolled the gospel according to Matthew but had no regards for the writings of Paul. Their argument was that since Apostle Paul was not an eyewitness of Jesus, his authority was illegitimate. Ebionites were legalistic and ascetic to the extent they saw poverty as a blessing. The influence of the teaching of the Ebionites began to abate after the destruction of Jerusalem even though there were still traces of them till AD 135.

Ebionite rejected virgin birth of Jesus. Hence to them, Jesus was a natural son of Joseph and Mary. To them, Jesus is just a true prophet that was in accordance with Old Testament scripture (Deu. 18:15-22). The Ebionites insisted that Jesus was a second Moses, a reformer and a teacher that perfectly fulfilled the law. Jesus was not a priest, in him was the abolition of the sacrificial cults to restate the spiritual meaning of true Mosaic Law. In other words, the sacrificial death of Jesus was adopted messianic at His baptism when He was named Christ. Concepts of incarnation and atonement were played down by Ebionites as the espouse

baptism and peruses in Christology. To be converted to Christ, to the Ebionite, was to fully embrace the law of God and tradition of Moses. No wonder the Ebionites were renowned opponents of Marcionism. Early church traditions associated Symmachus as a leader of the Ebionites.

GNOSTICISM

The word gnosis is derived from Greek meaning 'knowledge'. In church history, Gnosticism is a religious movement of the early Christian church that probably emerged in the first century but was denounced as heresy by church fathers like Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian and Ephiphamus. The Gnostics were followers of a variety of religious movements that posed the greatest philosophical threat in the early church. It was seen as a product of amalgamation of Christianity with Greek philosophy. Gnostics lacked unified teaching but its influences have been traced to New Testament periods. Christian traditions have traced its origin to Simon Magus (Acts 8). The Gnostics were therefore a variety of religious movements that stressed that people can obtain salvation through secret knowledge (gnosis) that was only accessible to its members. Gnosticism, though of pagan origin, shared common beliefs in apostolic Christianity: the need for salvation for man, the idea of the existence of being (or deity) alongside with heavenly beings that are at work in the universe.

One of the fundamental beliefs of Gnostics is the principle of dualism. Every Gnostic believed that the world is ultimately divided between two cosmic forces of evil and good. In Greek philosophy, evil was associated with matter. Gnosticism therefore was an attempt to account for the problem of evil and human predicaments in the world. Gnostics have been described as one of the natural desires to create theodicy and give explanation of the origin of evil.

Gnosticism is a philosophical system that was tended to proffer alternative solution to the problem of evil but that eventually robs humanity of the responsibility of sin. Rather, they attempted to trace the origin of evil to a pre-mundane fall. To the Gnostic the Creator God is wicked, evil and far removed from the Supreme Being that has no contact with the material world. The Gnostics disparage the world and all that belongs to it. To the Gnostics human beings do not essentially belong to the world but to a higher realm but trapped in a body. Hence the deliverance that man craves for is not from sin and death but from the imprisonment in the world. That man in this world is at the mercy of hostile powers that govern the seven heavens. Consequently, salvation is not through any redeemer or a Saviour but by gnosis that supplies the knowledge of the truth about the true nature of man.

Theology of the Gnostics

i. God

As already noted, the underlying principle in the teaching of Gnosticism was a sharp dualism. In Gnostics' belief, the transcendent God is over and against an ignorant creator God of the Old Testament. The compartmentalization of the worlds of matter and spirits is basically assumed by the Gnostics. Material world is always associated with evil while the spirit is associated with good. There is therefore a gap between God (the Supreme Being) and the world of matter as the ultimate God (Deity) has no contact with the idea of demiurge. Demiurge is one of the supernatural powers (in the series of emanations. These supernatural powers were capable of producing other inferior powers until they have fashioned a long chain of divine creatures, each weaker than the parent. The last in the chain was the demiurge. That though the demiurge was powerful enough

to create but was silly enough to see that creation was wrong. This demiurge, the Gnostics identified as Jehovah of the Old Testament that is the God of the Jews whom they classed as wicked and evil God.

ii. Creation

In the tenets of Gnosticism, the creation of the world was the effect of the fall of Sophia (wisdom). To the Gnostics, the whole of the material world was evil except some few spiritual individuals destined for salvation who have some sparks of divinity enveloped in their bodies. Nevertheless these 'spiritual' are ignorant of the heavenly origins. Hence the need for gnosis (secret knowledge) to bring them to salvation. Thus, salvation is to have full knowledge of themselves, their origin and their destiny. The awakened (the spirituals) are freed from the prison of their bodies. At death these can safely pass through the planetary regions controlled by hostile demons so as to be united with God.

iii. Christology

Since matter is evil, Christ could not have put on human body. Gnostics believe that Christ was absolutely spiritual and good and therefore could not have contact with material body contrary to Bible teaching. Gnostics teach that Christ could not be human. Rather, Christ being one subordinate powers of the ultimate Deity was sent into the world to free men from the chain of matter. The mission of Christ was to teach a special gnosis or give the knowledge so that man through intellectual process could gain salvation.

According to the Gnostics the process of salvation of the soul of man requires faith but more importantly the special gnosis which Christ gives to the elite is far more needful. The body (material) does not need salvation as it is destined to be cast off. It is however necessary to bring the body

under strict ascetic practices. Salvation is meant for only spiritual Gnostics. In short only the pneumatic and psychic gnosis will get to heaven while the hylic are destined to eternal loss. To the Gnostics there is no resurrection of the body.

MARCIONISM

Marcion was a second century heretic born at Sinope on the Black Sea (a sea port) in the province of Pontus (modern day Northern Turkey). Marcion, the son of a bishop was a very wealthy ship-owner. He left his nativity in 137AD for Rome where he came under the influence and teaching of a Gnostic teacher; Credo who taught that the God of the Old Testament (the creator God) was different from the God of the New Testament (the father of the Lord Jesus Christ). To Credo the Old Testament God was an evil God of Justice, while the New Testament God is loving and gracious. This belief of Credo formed the conceptual frame work for Marcion's theology. Marcion was not only a chief proponent of this heresy but also developed his own distinctive teachings in Rome between 137AD and 144AD that led to his excommunication from the church in 144AD. Marcion believed that Judaism was evil as it was founded on the belief of Jehovah (an evil God). He set out his own canon of scripture because he did not want to have anything to do with the Jewish scripture. He believed that the Old Testament favoured the Jews exclusively. Marcion's concept of Old Testament God, was that He (God) was prepared to destroy all other nations for the sake of the Jewish race that was in contrast of the Christian God of *grace and love* for all who was manifested in Jesus Christ.

Theology of Marcionism

i. God

Marcion held to the Gnostic's dualism that consequently led him to the idea of division between the God of the Old Testament and New Testament. To Marcion the Old Testament God was not only the author of evil but a vengeful God who had only the Jews at His heart. Marcionism projected an idea of New Testament God that was distinct from the creator God of the Old Testament. The God of love and grace of the New Testament disclosed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ his son.

ii. Christology

To Marcion, Jesus was not born of a woman. Rather, Jesus suddenly appeared in Synagogue in 29AD as a fully-grown man. Christ was a new being altogether that was different from all human except in His appearance only. Thus, Marcion held a Docetic Christology that denied the human origin of Christ's existence. They claimed that since matter was evil and unworthy of dwelling for divinity, Christ could not have had a natural human body. Jesus Christ the Redeemer was pure spirit and the body in which he appeared on earth was only a ghost-like substance that could assume the appearance of the real flesh like the case of angelic appearances in the scripture. This faulty Christology has been described as the fatal virus that infected the overall system of belief. However, Marcion believed that Christ's life and crucifixion was necessary for salvation. Even though he taught that Christ's human experiences and sufferings were merely apparent but not real.

iii. Cosmology

In his cosmology, Marcion claimed that the God of the Old Testament was the evil Demiurge God of the Gnosticism

that created matter and the author of evil. This creator was imperfect and self-contradictory. Creation was not the act of the good God of the New Testament.

iv. Salvation (Soteriology)

Since humanity was fleshly, and the material product of an evil God, all men therefore need to be freed from the ignorance of their human predicaments. To Marcion the body must be denied and discarded since the soul and the spirit are redeemable. Marcionism does not believe in the resurrection of the body. The crucifixion of Christ was essential for the salvation of man. However, this Christ could not have been the offspring of the Old Testament God but of the pure spirit who has manifested himself in redemptive works and person of Christ. The true gracious loving God revealed his identity when he sent his son Jesus to redeem humanity from the evil world. To this end, Christ's crucifixion and shedding of blood was inevitably important not so much for the forgiveness of sin but for the cancellation of the evil creator's claim upon creatures and their bondage to creation itself. Evil was therefore more of the physical reality of suffering and not of the reality of sin. Consequently, to Marcion, the difficulties of the human predicaments and environment are what he needs salvation from and not the theological meaning of sin.

v. Canon of Scripture

The main elements in the theology of Marcion which contributed to his role in the shaping and development of Christian thoughts was largely what can be defined as his world-view and understanding of the boundaries of the biblical canon. History shows that Marcionism was antagonistic against Paul's development of theology outside the New Testament. This was because Marcion believed that the God of the Old Testament was prejudiced against all

other nations in favour of the Jews. Marcion completely rejected the entire Old Testament scriptures and even those New Testament scriptures (Luke, Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Hebrews) that tended to lean towards the Old Testament or that appeal more to the Jewish reader. Marcion's New Testament excluded all the pastoral letters of Paul (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus). His own canon of scriptures therefore included gospel of Luke (omitting the accounts of Jesus' genealogy and nativity) and only ten letters of the New Testament especially those associated with Apostle Paul. This was because to him, only Apostle Paul had a proper understanding of Jesus' message and did not corrupt the gospel of Jesus. In spite of his wealth and benevolent influence on the church in Rome, the orthodox-church expelled Marcion for holding unto his heretical ideas.

Marcion essentially founded his own church. The Marcionites Churches were modelled after orthodox congregations with their own clergy; liturgy or rituals. For instance, the Marcionites did not use wine at communion service because of their teachings and undue emphasis on the need for ascetic life by members. The world view, ideas, teachings, tenets and beliefs of Marcionites were perceptibly injected into various Gnostics sects because of their common ground of the principle of dualism. Similarly, the Marcionites were very much indebted to and influenced by the ideas of Gnostics. The teachings and beliefs of the Marcionite sects were very pervasive in Italy, and the spread was as far as Arabia, Armenia and Egypt. In the East they exercised a considerable influence for many decades to the extent that a number of Marcionite communities existed near Damascus as late as the fourth century. On the other hand, in the West, their influence waned away because of their link with the Marchaeonite.

Marcionism posed one of the earliest grievous challenges to the infant church which however contributed unwittingly to the following developments of the church. One, Marcion's canon of scriptures immediately triggered the church to self-defense that promptly gave attention to the formation and determination of the New Testament canon that were authoritative for doctrine and for life. Two, it prompted the need for the formation of Apostolic Creed that was to serve as a test of orthodoxy. Three, Bishop's prestige was enhanced by emphasis on his office as a Centre of unity for the faithful against heresy. This in turn led to the prominence of the Bishops of Rome.

Apart from the Marcion's rejection of the entire Old Testament, another heresy of Marcion was the presentation of the New Testament that was shaped in the image of Apostle Paul. Marcion deifying portrait and worship of Apostle Paul was little short of idolatry. To the Marcionites Apostle Paul was the greatest enemy of the law and the true apostle of grace. Apostle Paul was the supreme figure in the Marcionite churches. This was rooted in the belief and teaching that Christ had descended from heaven twice; first to suffer and die, second to call Paul to reveal to Paul the true significance of His death. Marcion taught that Paul presently sit at the right hand of Christ who also sits at the right hand of God.

The Orthodox Church was therefore pushed to define the true authoritative and canonical scripture to include the following:

- i. The retaining and reaffirmation of faith in the Old Testament writings that serve as historical foundation for the Christian faith. Christianity as a historical religion is associated with a historical character: Jesus Christ of Nazareth; and

- ii. The restoration of the pastoral letters of Paul and the letters of the other apostles. They linked all the letters to the four gospel narratives by using the book of Acts of the Apostles as a bridge.

MONTANISM

This movement was named after its founder, Montanus. Montanus was an enthusiastic young Christian and a self-proclaimed prophet of the second century in Phrygia, Western Asia Minor. Montanism emerged precisely in AD 154 as an attempt of Montanus to bring the church out of formalism and the dependence on human leadership into a life of absolute dependence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church was born on the day of Pentecost: that signaled the fulfillment of the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit (the Paraclete) in the church. Thus, Christianity started as a religion in which leaders depended on the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3). However, by the second century, the prominence of ecclesiastical bishops in the local assemblies emerged. As already discussed, the heresies of Marcion had led the church to the formulation and canonization of the New Testament scripture. Consequently, the church had agreed that all the inspired books are to be found in written, as the word of God have been concluded. The result was that the church then depended on books more than the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus enthusiasm, dynamism that was characteristic feature of the early church, was by the second century giving way to ecclesiasticism. Spirit of prophecies gradually faded away from the church by the second half of the second century.

It was at such a time that Montanus rose up with a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit and eschatology to combat secularism, formalism and human organization of the

church. Montanus became very fanatical in his emphasis on the Holy Spirit that together with two prophetesses: Prisca and Maximillia they all claimed to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit (Paraclete) calling the church to a life of clear distinction between the church and the world.

Montanus was a charismatic teacher that was able to command many followers that were attracted from among the peasants of Asia Minor. His activities were concentrated in Pepuza and Tymion near Laodicea and Colossae where he thought to establish a prototype of the eschatological New Jerusalem. Montanism was generally called the New Prophecy: demanding higher standard, greater discipline and sharper separation of the church from the world. Montanus believed that he and the two prophetesses (Prisca & Maximillia) were divine instrument for end-time revelation.

Theology of Montanism

i. Inspiration

Montanism's undue-emphases on prophecies led to their questioning the authoritative claim of New Testament Canon of Scripture. By virtue of their fanatical emphasis on prophecies, Montanus and his associates contended that inspiration of scripture was not restricted to any particular dispensation. Rather, according to their claim, inspiration was immediate and continuous. Montanus even asserted that he was the Paraclete and the advocate through whom the Holy Spirit spoke to the church. According to him, just as the Holy Spirit spoke through Apostle Paul and other apostles to the church to reveal great mysteries, the Holy Spirit in like manner had spoken through him (Montanus). Even though the predictions of Montanus were not fulfilled, Montanists nevertheless, believed that the church rejected them as the Paraclete because the church had become carnal and uninspired. Montanus thus, denied that normative and

decisive revelation had occurred in Jesus Christ. The allegiance of the New Testament prophesies inevitably sparked off discord at a time when the Church Fathers and Bishops were working towards a united and stable church that conformed with apostolic traditions that should be adopted as orthodox. There was the need to make Christian worship; teaching; lifestyle to center on Christ and apostolic witness. The church therefore resolved that in the face of free utterances of the spirit by Montanists, the original apostolic gospel should be held as basic and that the apostolic writings were uniquely authoritative. The implication was that all later faith actions, practices, beliefs and life were to be judged in the light of that central message.

The orthodox stand of the church does not suggest or mean that the church, in anyway disbelieved or denigrated the power and place of the Holy Spirit. This should rather be understood to mean that, the church believed that, in the early days of the church, the Holy Spirit had enabled (inspired) men to pen down the revealed truth (sacred books) of the Christian faith, while in these latter day, the Holy Spirit enables (illuminates) men to understand, perceive, interpret and to apply what has been written down.

It is not surprising to note that as far back as AD190, the churches had clearly accepted the idea of defined Canon of Christian Scriptures alongside with Jewish scriptures. This first list of New Testament books was discovered by L. A. Muratori who first published it in 1740. It was popularly known as Muratorian Canon. It included Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts 1&2, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Titus, 1&2 Timothy, Jude, 1&2 John, the Apocalypse of John (Revelation), the Apocalypse of Peter and the wisdom of Solomon. The last two did not survive canonical test and were not in the approved list.

It should be put right that while the decision on the list of books to be accepted as part of the Christian scripture remained part of history, it should be understood that this historical event was a way of recognizing those writings that have made their authority felt in the churches.

ii. Eschatology

Montanists believed in the eminent second advent of Jesus Christ. Montanus taught that the heavenly kingdom of Christ was imminent and was to be established in Pepuaza in Phrygia where he (Montanus) would be a prominent member of Christ Cabinet. According to him, qualification for the entrance into Christ's Kingdom included apparently, rigorous demands for a strict regime of fasting. Montanists also advocated for sexual continence within marriage, celibacy at the death of a partner, eating dry food as necessary preparation for soon coming Christ heavenly kingdom.

iii. Lifestyle and Morality

The content of the prophecies of Montanists were contextual as they were more or less on issues related to morals, chastity and discipline in addition to emphases on the soon coming of the kingdom of Christ. History has it that the discipline, moral and ascetic life of Montanists had attracted Tertullian to join the sect at his conversion in 207AD. He embraced the teaching of Montanists. In his moral life, Tertullian was very much indebted to Montanism. The Montanist seemed to have lived exemplary life.

iv. Prominence of Women

One major feature in Montanism was the prominence of women. Specifically, prophetesses Maximillia and Priscilla played major roles. They were the prime movers of the sect

at least for their role in the original prophesies of the Montanists.

ARIANISM

One of the fundamentals and distinctives of the Christian faith is the belief in the three persons in one God (Trinity). No other major religion confesses such a belief i.e. three persons in one deity. Even the Muslims and the Jews find the doctrine offensive while Jehovah Witnesses and Unitarians claim that such a dogma is deplorable. The controversy in the belief (that is Trinitarian concept of God) assumed a major importance after Constantine's conversion. When he turned to Christianity, Emperor Constantine counted on the church to build a united empire and build a new life in the weary empire. The church needed to be united to help build united societies in the empire. This was why Arius controversy was perplexing to Emperor Constantine.

The trouble started when Arius an influential clergy in Alexandria challenged his Bishop, Alexander in AD 318. He claimed that the Logos (word) that became flesh in Jesus Christ was not the true God. That Jesus had entire different nature from God. Thus, Jesus was neither eternal nor omnipotent. To Arius, when the Christian called Jesus Christ God, they do not mean He was a deity except in a surface of approximate sense. To Arius, Jesus was half God that was not equal to the changeless eternal creator God. Christ was a created being i.e. the first and the greatest created being. In other words, Jesus has a beginning, therefore, He was not coexistent with the eternal God.

Arius' teachings were popular because he used his eloquence and flair for public relation to dose out teachings that made it easier to understand and comprehend Christianity. Bishop Alexander of Alexandria resented his

teachings and called for a synod where the teachings of Arius were condemned; but Arius was backed by Eusebius the Bishop of Nicomedia. Arius, who was excommunicated on the basis of his heretical teachings but was later returned to Alexandria. As the disputes on Trinitarian controversies continued in the church, Emperor Constantine summoned the first general Post-Apostolic Council of the church to meet at Nicaea. Constantine personally presided over the preliminary sessions of the council he had convened and sponsored in AD 325. The aim of the council was to decide whether the earlier excommunication of Arius by Alexander was right or wrong. Arius was called to make his defense. He insisted that the Son of God was created, being made from nothing; and that there was a time when He (Jesus) had no existence; that He (Jesus) was capable of alternating between good and evil.

The Council condemned Arius's teachings and affirmed that Christ was true God, begotten not made; and that He was of one substance with the Father. They immediately introduced the expression 'Homo-ousion' one substance. There emerged the Nicene Creed.

APOLLINARIANISM

Christological debates ranged in the church for many centuries of the early church. The church was over and over again challenged to answer the question 'who is Jesus Christ; man or God?' One of the people who was poised to answer this question was Apollinarius, a pastor of the church of Laodicea. According to Apollinarius the human nature of Christ embraced the soul and the body that at incarnation the divine Lord (Logos) displaced the animating and rational soul in human body thereby creating a unity of nature between the word and body. According to Apollinarius humanity was only the sphere and not the instrument of

salvation. His stress was on the deity of Christ at the expense of His humanity. The teaching of Apollinarius was opposed by the orthodox Catholic theologians like Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory had declared that what has not been assumed cannot be restored. In other words, if the word displaced the rational soul of human nature with its power of choice and sin, how can man be fully redeemed? The second general council at Constantinople in AD 381 effectively silenced Apollinarian teaching. The council declared that Apollinarian teaching was not an adequate description of incarnation.

NESTORIANISM

Nestorius was a famous preacher in Antioch before he was made Bishop of Constantinople by the Emperor in 428. Nestorius tried to defend the position of his teacher, Theodore, the Bishop of Mopsuestia near Antioch. Nestorius' teaching included the rejection of the popular designation of Mary as the "God bearer" or the "mother of God" i.e. "theotokes". He did not deny the deity of Christ but he emphasized the reality, integrity and humanity of the Saviour. He refused to attribute divine nature to the human acts and sufferings of the man Jesus. He held the nature apart but united in the worship. To him, calling Mary the mother of God was tantamount to declaring that a woman gave birth to a divine nature of that God has age limitations; Nestorius incurred the wrath of Cyril the patriarch of Alexandria.

Emperor Theodore II summoned a general council of the church of Ephesus AD 431. After much intrigues, Nestorius was expelled from the capital and died in exile in about AD 450 in Egypt. His followers refused excommunication. Nestorius appeared to have suffered as victim of misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

EUTYCHIANISM (Monophysitism)

After the Council of Ephesus rose, Eutyches, a follower of the 5th-century Byzantine monk, who taught the doctrine that Jesus Christ has only one nature known as *Monophysitism*. According to Eutyches, the human nature is absorbed with the divine; just like a drop of water that falls in the sea.

The humanity of Christ was lost in the divine nature. Theodosius II summoned Eutyches to an imperial council who had earlier been condemned by Flavian (one of the patriarchs) in AD 451; Marcian (450 – 457) called for the fourth general council of the church of Chalcedon.

DONATISM

During the persecution of Christians under Emperor Diocletian in about AD 312, many Christians including clergy men were made to denounce and recant their belief. There emerged a controversy in North Africa over the appointment of Caecilian who was consecrated as Bishop by Felix that was said to have surrendered his scripture to be burnt during Diocletian persecution. For this, Felix was not only regarded as a traitor but an apostate who had denied the faith and had committed unpardonable sin.

The controversy that ensued was from the belief of certain group of Christians who felt that Felix was fatally disunited and therefore was not qualified to administer the sacraments (baptism or ordination). Their argument was that the integrity of the sacrament notably, baptism and ordination was, dependent on the worth of the minister who administered them. The worth here included not only the moral probity but also a historical trace of genealogy and freedom from apostasy. The Donatists claimed that failure to remain faithful during persecution invalidate the

ecclesiastical power of Felix and therefore could no longer ordain anybody. Consequently, Majoriums, was elected as a rival Bishop that was later succeeded by Donatus after whom the group was named.

The teachings of the Donates were repealed by Augustine who insisted that the sacrament belong to Christ hence the unworthiness of the minister do not invalidate Christ sacraments even though the Holiness of the minister is much to be desired.

The controversial position of the Donatists gave birth to the principle that the reality of baptism and ordination does not depend on the moral character of the person who performs the rites but on Christ and the Holy Spirit. Consequently, it became a practice that those who had lapsed from faith could be accepted back into the church and fellowship on the basis of evidence of repentance. The Donatists rejected this position.

In conclusion, the controversial heresies and error of the early church to some extent drove the church to develop an authoritative canon of scripture, formulated Creed and rules of Faith.

MANICHAISM

The founder of Manichaeism was a Persian by name Mani (216–76) born in Mesopotamia. Mani had a Jewish-Christian background and orientation until when he started claiming to have received a final universal revelation as an Apostle of Jesus. Mani founded a syncretic religion, and philosophical thoughts that borrowed much from Christianity, Zoroastrianism and other oriental religions. Fundamental to Manichaeism is the dualistic philosophy of the existence of two independent eternal principles of light and darkness; God and Matter. Mani taught that in the

beginning light was separated from darkness. According to him, along the line, light and darkness got intermingled which has to be separated. Mani therefore taught that the first man actually emanated from a being who himself was a high emanation from the ruler of the kingdom of darkness ruled by a king that tricked the first man into intermingling with darkness. To Mani, man's soul has a link with the kingdom of darkness.

Salvation, according to Mani, was to be attained through the release of the light in the Soul from its thralldom to the body. This was to be achieved through exposure to the light: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and other religious leaders came into the world to release to the Soul's light and from the prison of the bodies.

The clergy or priestly class were made up of the elite or the perfect ones who practised asceticism and some regular ceremonial rites considered to be essential to the release of light. To be in attendance of the teaching of any of the elites, automatically qualifies the hearer to partake in the Holiness of the elite group especially when he supplies the physical needs of the elites.

Much emphasis was laid on the ascetic life to the extent that the sex instinct was considered evil. Therefore, the unmarried were considered superior. Manichaeism's emphasis on the distinction between layman and clergy must have contributed to laying the foundation for priestly class in the church. Thus, the major class division emphasized by Manichaeism were:

- i. The Elect (the elite circle)
- ii. The Hearers (the mass of layman who lived the life of ordinary citizens).

The hearers were charged with the responsibility of ministering to the needs of the Elect (who were vegetarian) such things like fruits and cucumber and melon. The elect wore white robe regularly that distinguished them from hearer. The hearer cannot hold any office. Only the Elect that were eligible for any office through ceremonial rites.

Augustine of Hippo was said to have been a disciple of the Manichaeism for Twelve years before his conversion. After his conversion, Augustine was at the fore-front of antagonists refuting the teachings of the Manichaeism. Mani started the ministry with members of his family but later spread to Syria and as far as Palestine, and North Africa. Emperor Diocletian was said to have evoked a harsh edict of AD 297 against the Manichaeism who were doomed to be executed as a hostile Persian agent.

MONARCHIANISM

The belief in monotheism, that is: “*the Lord our God is one God*” had remained one of the uncompromising tenets of Judaism that was passed on to the Christian faith. However, the Christians similarly insisted on the Lordship of Jesus Christ and ascribe to Him (Christ) the Old Testament Status of Yahweh. Hence, they worshipped Christ as God. Christian’s fundamental worship of Christ as God and yet claiming the oneness of God soon ignited tension and conflict with the Jews and the pagan communities who saw the Christianity as religion of two gods. This led to the development of the doctrine of “Trinity” that later evolved from the difficulties of resolving the Greek concept of unity as perfect oneness. That exclude any internal distinctions in an attempt to safeguard monotheism and the deity of Christ with the Logos theology.

It was towards the end of the second century that the Monarchianism theology emerged in Asia Minor,

particularly in the West. It was an attempt to ascribe deity to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit while defending their unity or oneness. Monarchianism, therefore claimed that God existed in different modes but only in one mode at a time. They are sometimes called modalists or Sabellianism named after one of the prominent leaders. To the Monarchians the different names that God takes include Father, Son and the Holy Spirit which are used to describe the different roles of God played at different times.

Thus, the Monarchians were out to defend Monotheism. (The Unity of God) in opposition to Tri-theism (any attempt to conceive of God as three separate or distinct personalities. Sabellius who was the proponent of modal Monarchianism, insisted on the Trinity of manifestation of forms rather than essence. In other words, God manifested Himself as Father in Old Testament era, later as Son (the Saviour God or Redeemer) and then as Holy Spirit after the ascension of Christ. Monarchians claimed that there were not three distinct persons in Godhead but three different manifestation. Sibelius illustrated this with a possible relationship and roles that a man can have: a man exists in one relationship as a son; in another he is a husband while in another relationship he is a father. In all these relationships, there is but one-real personality.

Self-Assessment Test

- i) Why would you consider the second century a very crucial period in the history of the early church?
- ii) Describe the heretical teachings of the Ebionites
- iii) The Gnostics' teachings constituted a grievous threat to the early church. Highlight their erroneous

teaching on (a) Creation (b) God (c) Christology
(d) Salvation

- iv) Write notes on (a) Marcionism (b) Montanism
- v) How is Montanism significantly identical to modern day Pentecostalism?
- vi) Identify and Critically examine any four major emphasis of Montanism
- vii) Write notes on (a) Arianism (b) Nestorianism (c) Donatists (d) Eutychianism (e) Appollinarianism (f) Manichaenism

Chapter 8

DEFENSE AGAINST HERESIES

Introduction

In the face of falsity and heresies propelled by several heretical sects that threatened the orthodoxy of the Christian faith in the second century, there emerged Apologists, Polemists, and Church Fathers (people like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian of Cartage, Augustine of Hippo and many others) who stood to defend the faith. Some of the strategies coined by the early church to detect and silence the heretics are discussed below.

Exposure: An attempt was made to show the falsity of heretical teachings. Irenaeus for instance, produced the first antagonistic work. Its approach was to describe vividly the Gnostic. To him, this is the best way to refute heresies. However, since the Gnostics had many secret teachings, it was difficult to describe them accurately. Similarly, the Montanism were exposed in different ways by examining the lives of the leaders. Alexander was one of the pioneering adherents, who was accused of robberies.

Focus on Authority: The Orthodox Church was challenged and was asked the basis for calling some groups heretics. That is, what gave it the authority to call the divisive Movements heretic? This led the early church clinging to only the materials that had apostolic origin. The standard they then used to determine documents were mainly three:

Apostolic Tradition: The Gnostics secret tradition was opposed to the deposit of faith handed down by the original apostles. Because of the several heretical writings in

circulation, the early church insisted on apostolic deposit. These deposits were summarized into statements of faith known as creed. This gave birth to what was later known as apostolic creed. Several denominations still recite the apostolic creed till date.

Apostolic Succession: In an attempt to distinguish and weaken the authority of any heretical movement over the early church, the early church fathers resorted to apostolic succession as a measuring yardstick. Irenaeus and Tertullian and some others held that the succession of bishops stemming from apostolic lineage only would guarantee the unbroken handing on of apostolic doctrines. A list of apostolic successions was then drawn up for several churches. One of such lists that has survived till date is that of Rome.

The canon of the New Testament: With multiplicity of Gnostics gospel appearing in the mid-second century, it became necessary for the Orthodox Church to define the authoritative writings. The criterion for selection was apostolic authorship. The debates on what should constitute the canon of the New Testament however, continued till fourth century.

The Emergence of Canon: comes from the Greek word meaning “a measuring” or “a rule”. This is the word given by the early church fathers to those first apostolic writings, that alone, could be the measuring rod or rule to evaluate all scriptures. Acceptance of the Old Testament books as the rule and norm of faith was general in the early church. The varying acceptance or rejection of the apocrypha was not a problem until fourth century. It was the fixing of the New Testament that was a major task for the early church. In the face of certain circulating Gnostic gospels and epistles, Irenaeus insisted that the test of validity of any inspired writing was whether it was written by the apostles or by men

closely connected with them. These writings: the New Testament, were considered equal to the Old Testament in regards to divine inspiration. Already in about AD 100, the thirteen letters of Paul had been collected and by the year AD 192, the term New Testament was already in use. By about AD 200, the western Christendom had recognized a New Testament canon basically including Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans, Philemon, Titus, 1st and 2nd Timothy, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, Jude, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, Revelation and Peter's epistles of apocalypse. Thus, the development of the New Testament canon into its final form as we now have it could not be until second century AD in the Latin branch of the church. In other words, formation of the New Testament Canon of the scripture and the apostolic creed came about the same time. It is important to note that the creed was not written by the apostles. But it embodied the apostles' doctrine. This constituted the baptismal confession for new converts later.

Defenders of the Christian Faith

Those who shaped, defined Christian orthodoxy and or defended the Christian faith either against the attacks of the state or against heretics could be categorized into three main groups: Apologists; Polemicists and Apostolic Fathers.

Apologists

The Apologists, generally were pagan converts who were well schooled in secular philosophy of their time before conversion. They sought to give rational justification for the Christian faith to the Roman Authorities who had severally misunderstood Christianity. These apologists used their knowledge of philosophy and literal skills to create a rational setting for Christianity (from the Old Testament perspective) as a superior religion to the Pagan practices of

the Romans. The Apologists primarily based their arguments on the philosophy that, they were able to deduce from the Old Testament in their defence or explanation of Christianity. Succinctly put, the second century apologists were Christian writers who wrote to defend the Christian faith against false accusations and slanders of antagonists of the church. The true church was always destined to be misunderstood and slandered. The audience of their apologetic writings were:

- i. The Heads of State
- ii. The Jews and
- iii. Pagan Intellectuals.

To the Head of state or Roman Authorities, the Apologists needed to convince them of the fact that the Christian were actually innocent of the various crimes: including immorality, atheism and cannibalism that they were accused of. In most cases therefore, their apologia were well articulated answers to the false charges against Christian. Hence, their consequent demands for clemency for the innocent Christians who had become victims of unverified allegations.

To the Jews, the apologists like Justin Martyr, needed to convince the Jews of the authenticity of Christianity on the basis of the Old Testament. While to the Pagan Intellectuals, the Apologists' missive was to refute their Pagan idolatry and all the associated immoralities. Hence, they presented moral code of Christianity as a superior religious ethics.

Towards the end of the second century, Christianity was fast becoming a compelling movement that was penetrating into the main stream of the religions in Roman Empire. More so that it had attracted the keenest minds of the day as adherents of Christ's teachings that were popularly known as *followers of "the Way"*.

It was then needful to defend the infant church's theology against popular accusations, and sophisticated attacks that were levied against the church. The apologists sought to convince the educated elites of the day while defending Christianity against so many grievous charges especially during the persecution under Marcus Aurelius (70–80). The general public perception of Christianity was bad due to several unverified allegations. The state charged the Christians for impieties, atheism, incest and even cannibalism.

Most of the early gentile Christians were converted into Christianity from Pagan background. Their new found faith indeed demanded complete renunciation and abstinence from the gods of the cities that were generally believed to be responsible for the peace and welfare of the state and of its people. So, as the Christians abstained from the gods of the cities or nation; their sports, theatres, government and military functions, they were accused of being anti-social people. Other common charges against the Christians also included the seemingly secrecy of the church. Especially their exclusion of the unbaptised from participating in all their ritual meals (the Lord Supper); their refusal of any inter-marriage between Christian and unbelievers, blow-drinking and immoral orgies.

The apologist also led the challenges of proving to the people that the Christians who were imageless, believed in God more perfectly than their critics. They had to attest to the moral behaviour, honesty, faithfulness and sexual purity of the Christians. For instance, Herophilus wrote, using the Ten Commandments to portray the Christians as the soul of the world. People like Athenagoras, wrote to denounce the allegation of cannibalism and incest which were actually factors in Pagan myths and worship which the Christians do not subscribe to. Justin Martyr on the other hand, wrote to

give vivid description of the Christians' rites of Baptism and Eucharist so as to dispel rumours of dark deeds associated with them.

There were sincere efforts to change the public opinions concerning the gospel of Christ; project it as good religion and consequently convert the Pagans. Some of the Apologists of the early church that are worthy of note here included Justin Martyr; Titian, Athenagoras, Herophilus of Antioch, Miletus of Sardis.

The Polemicists

Quite unlike the apologists, the polemicists had Christian orientation but had to confront internal heretical foes of the church. The polemicists emerged towards the end of the second and early third centuries of the church. The Polemicists included the early theologians of the church that helped in formulating and defining the orthodox theology of Christianity amidst several pervasive and heretical teachings. While the apologist stood to defend the Christian faith against external threats that was eroding the church, the Polemic theologians were well cultured in faith and were mainly concerned with saving the church from heresies that threatened the peace, purity of the orthodox Christian church. Most of the polemicists appealed to the Old Testament prophecies to forge and emphasise the New Testament Christian Doctrine. People like Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandra and Origen could well be classified as polemicists.

Apostolic Fathers

The Apostolic Fathers on the other hand were the early education teachers of the first and second centuries whose literary works were meant to edify the church; re-iterate the teaching of Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

Early Church Apologists, Polemists and Theologians

As already noted, the second century apologists were Christian writers who wrote to defend the Christian faith against false accusations and slanders of antagonists of the church. Some of these include:

Justin Martyr (100 AD-165 AD)

An Apologist in the East

Justin Martyr was one of the most popular second century apologists. He had a pagan background but got converted to Christianity and was executed together with some of his pupils at about AD165. Justin Martyr was born in Flavia Neapolis (present Nablus in Palestine). His quest for truth took him to several philosophical schools. He came across an old man in Ephesus who pointed out to him the futility of all philosophical thoughts, and then expounded to him the scripture especially those that bore witness to Christ. Justin, who before his conversion had been impressed by Christian's moral attitude even in the face of death was converted. With zeal, he took the Christian faith into his philosophical schools. He grew to become a teacher in Ephesus and had Titian as one of his pupils.

Justin wrote controversial works against Marcion and Gnostics. Similarly, he wrote two apologies. His first apology was addressed to Emperor Antonius Pius (AD 137–161). The intent was to clear some prejudices and misunderstandings about Christianity. He insisted that the allegations that the Christians were atheists were not only false claims by the Pagan communities but unfounded. He argued that the Christians both in principles and practices do demonstrate higher standard of morality and sense of reasoning. The second apology was more of passionate protest against injustices of the Roman on the citizens. He

addressed it to the Roman Emperor toward the end of his life.

Justin's longest work was Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. It was aimed at refuting the Jewish objection to Christianity and proving the authenticity of Christianity from the Old Testament scriptures.

Irenaeus (130 AD-200 AD)

The Bishop of Lyons and Anti-Gnostics Polemist

Irenaeus, with his disciple Hippolytus, stood out as the earliest theological voices and teachers. Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor about AD 130. He was a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna who was himself a disciple of John the beloved, the disciple of Jesus Christ. From the Eastern part of the church in Asia Minor he left for the West as a missionary, particularly to Lyons in Gaul where he served as a Bishop until his death around AD 200. His major contributions were his five volumes "Against Heresies" written primarily to refute Gnosticism. His principal concern was the proclamation of the divinity of the Godhead while insisting on monotheistic character of the God of Christian religion. Irenaeus emphasized incarnation of Christ as well as His redemptive attributes. He spoke highly of the church and the episcopate. He acknowledged the Canon of the Scripture. Associated with Irenaeus was the controversy regarding the issue of Easter Victor, Bishop of Rome from 189-198 excommunicated the churches of Asia Minor for not celebrating Easter on the Sunday after the fourteenth of the month of Nisan. Irenaeus defended the "Quarta decimena" as the Christians were called, who observed this date and sanctioned Victor for his actions. Irenaeus was also noted for his opposition of the Montanists. Irenaeus' name was derived from a Greek word that means peace. He was said to have proved himself to be a peace maker in the paschal

controversies. Irenaeus was a Bishop of Lyons in AD 177 whom early church tradition commended as a Martyr of the disturbance of 202AD.

In addition to his pastoral duties, Irenaeus wrote to refute the heresies of Gnosticism, thus, over throwing their so-called 'knowledge'. Similarly, he wrote another book as the proof of the apostolic preaching. The former was more of polemical thesis while the later was more of catechetical teaching for the *Followers of the Way*.

The fundamentals of Irenaeus' write-ups included the affirmation of church threefold Godhead: the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the scripture. Irenaeus insisted on the unity of God in contradiction of the Gnostics demiurge. To Irenaeus, the world was created by one God, and that Jesus Christ the Son of the Creator God died to save mankind. Irenaeus believed in the bodily resurrection of the dead.

Theology of Irenaeus

The work of Irenaeus that earned him the status of the first ecumenical theologian could be summed up as follows:

God and Creation

Irenaeus taught that there is only one God. His idea or theology of oneness of God could safely be put as a Trinitarian: that is, the belief in the existence of the Creator God (The Father) who eternally co-existed with the God the Son. He also taught that, the Son was at the same time the very man and very God. He first developed the idea that Christ was fully man and fully God. He debunked the Gnostics claim to the possession of a secret traditions passed down from apostles with a counter claim that the church had preserved public standard beliefs handed down from apostolic times by the teachers in the church. He developed a claim of apostolic succession.

In accordance with the scripture, Irenaeus taught that the world was created out of nothing. He therefore taught that the entire universe was the handiwork of God, which He (God) had affirmed to be good.

Christ and Reconciliation

Irenaeus was the first to coin the term “incarnation” in an attempt to clearly portray both the deity and humanity of Christ. To the Gnostics, the divine Christ was different from the human Jesus. In line with the scripture, Irenaeus held to one and the same Jesus Christ, the Mediator and Saviour of all mankind who is the “true God” and “true Man”, which guaranteed God’s intimacy with the world. Irenaeus rejected the Docetism’s view of resurrection. To Irenaeus, Christ’s perfect work of reconciliation included the inward and outward sanctification of all human beings. He insisted that, Christ is not only our mediator, and reconciler but the very basis for our existence. In his perception, the incarnate one is the very cornerstone of the fact of creation and as well of the new creation. Thus, the incarnation of the Son of God was for the purpose of both reformation and consummation. To him theology, worship and salvation are all connected. In otherwords, he taught that the body could not be saved, if the Lord did not redeem us with his own blood. Neither is the cup of the Eucharist the communion of His blood, nor is the bread the communion of His body. His popular Christological maxim was: Christ became what we are that we might become what he is. He was always conscious of the position of the unity of the church that could be used to resist any heretical teachings of any sect.

Clement of Alexandria (155 AD-215 AD) (A Polemist)

The church moved through history to a special beat in separation from the world yet penetration of the world. That

means a struggle. This was because the Christians often differ in the boundaries of their withdrawal and engagement. In other words, witnessing to some was compromise.

Clement and his pupil, Origen, were noted for their scholarship and favourable leadership role (in catechetical school of Alexandria) in theological thoughts in Greek school. They were the first and the greatest University Men in the early church. Their school was a centre of philosophical and scientific learning as well as of theology. To the Alexandrian all knowledge had to contribute to the understanding of the truth which has its culmination in Christian theology. The Greek philosophical school of thought therefore, interpreted God and Christ by blending the philosophies of their day with the message of Christianity thereby producing Gnosticism.

Clement believed in the apostolic character of faith and its divine revelatory nature. However, he held that, philosophy supplemented but did not contradict the faith. To him, ignorance and falsehood is the greatest sin. Hence, God sent the word i.e. Logos into the world to reveal God so that man may attain immortality

Clement was born AD 150-220 He was the first Christian scholar who thoroughly understood the Holy Scripture alongside with his vast knowledge of Greek philosophy. He understood the problems of the philosophical youths of his days who had encountered Christianity from the background of Gnostics' theory. Clement had to enter their world, disentangled their conception and slowly gave them the knowledge of Christianity. Clement lived and taught like a philosopher. The aim of Clement was clear. He wanted to be the Apostle to Hellenistic intellectual world. His purpose and approach were more of pastoral than theological. That was why he laboured and aimed not to win arguments, but to win men for Christ and to lead them on to salvation. Like the

Gnostics, he brought Christianity into touch with the philosophies. To him, philosophy was a preparation for Christianity. Philosophy is a school master for the Greeks just as the law was a school master to the Jews.

Clement differed from Gnostics (who were not interested in the training of character) in his emphasis in Christian behaviour. To Clement, spirit insight comes from a pure heart to those who are humble enough to walk as a child with his father. Clement taught that God had implanted good seeds in all creation. He believed that Christians can learn from Greeks because all truth and goodness come from the creator. Clément's efforts were to find relevance in Greek thought for Christianity.

Tertullian of Carthage (155 AD-225 AD)

An Apologist in the West

Within the church of second and third centuries, there began to appear a difference in theological thought between the Greek churches and the Latin churches. Latin theology principally represented by Tertullian and his successor Cyprian both of Carthage in North Africa, tended to be more realistic and practical in their dealing with the issues of church and salvation. Precisely, he was more pointed and hostile to Gnosticism and all philosophies that threatened the Christian faith.

Tertullian was the son of a pagan centurion of Carthage. He received his education as a pagan. He was converted from paganism in his thirties. Partially, because of his own personal ascetic conviction he broke away and joined the puritanical but orthodox charismatic sect of the Montanist about AD 207. He affirmed that the church of the apostle was the only true church that contains valid deposit of apostolic truth. He attacked the lukewarmness of the church.

Also, in his extensive writings were teachings on prayers, penance, patience, baptism and Trinitarian Christology.

According to him, truth is found alone in the church which has been given the Bible. He insisted that heretic has no right to interpret the scriptures. In his vigorous views of the law he denied that capital sin could be forgiven after repentance. He upheld the messianic character of the Son and his atoning work. He majored on Paul's theme of sins and grace. Thus, he laid the foundations for the latter theology of that Great North African thinker: Augustine Bishop of Hippo.

Tertullian was not only from Carthage in North Africa but he lived most of his life in Carthage the capital of the Roman province of Africa. He was a trained lawyer from pagan background. After his conversion he came back to Rome to serve as catechist. Tertullian eventually rose to the rank of a Presbyter at Carthage. He was converted to Christianity at Rome in AD 196. Tertullian was one of the major Latin voice against the many theological teachings that seemed to pose threat to the Christian orthodoxy in the second and third centuries. He detested and negated the moral laxities that were gaining prominence in the churches in Rome.

Tertullian was well known for his extensive literary career of apologetic defense and definition of orthodox Christianity. His *Apology* was addressed to the heathen, the Jews and the state. This work (Apology) succinctly argued that the Christians should be tolerated especially in the face of many frivolous accusations. He defended the Christians against the charge that they were poor because they had refused to worship the pagan gods and the Emperor. He insisted that, rather, the exemplary life of the Christians was contributing to the welfare of the state. Thus, he expressed some major interests: the injustice of the state against

Christians, defense of the Christians against false charges; urging the Christians to maintain a distinct lifestyle particularly that they should separate themselves from the idolatrous, immoral practices and the pagan amusements of the people. Part of his writings to the church, he insisted that Christian women should be simple in dress and ornaments. In addition, he was very vigorous in his denunciation of the heresies of the Gnostics. He insisted that the truth is only found in the church which has been given the Holy Scripture.

Tertullian was the first to use the term Trinity to describe the concept of the three persons in Godhead. Thus, he was a Trinitarian theologian. He was the first major Christian theologian to write and express his concepts in the Latin language. He was the Founder of the Latin theology. Tertullian used the term trinity to distinguish between the personalities of the Father from that of the Son. The statements '*the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church*' and '*what has Athens to do with Jerusalem*' were credited to Tertullian.

Hence the coining of many technical words in theological circle were traceable to him. Quite unlike Origen, Tertullian's theological thoughts were typical of the West or the Latin world that were not speculative but realistic and practical. Tertullian was more interested in issues of salvation, sin, grace of God, church government, and doctrine relating to the church. He firmly projected the Messianic character of the Son (Jesus) and his vicarious and atoning death. Tertullian was very rigid on his emphasis on the necessity for water baptism after repentance. He taught that sin committed after baptism was mortal that is not pardonable or forgivable. In any case he was opposed to infant baptism.

Tertullian also wrote five volumes against Marcion to defend the Christian use of the Old Testament books. To this end he emphasized the oneness of God (who is both Creator and the Saviour). Similarly, he was against the 'New Prophecy' of the Montanism as he clearly claimed that the Holy Scriptures is the sole property of the church.

Some of the excesses of Tertullian include his undue emphasis on ascetic life and strict church discipline, marriage and his opposition to any attempt to avoid persecution or martyrdom.

ORIGEN (185 AD-254 AD)

A Polemist

He was the son of a Christian Martyr Leonides. He was a student of Clement. He took over leadership mantle from Clement at the age of eighteen years. He was a magnetic teacher who attracted students from many quarters even from hundreds of miles away. One of his earliest students was Gregory from Asia Minor. Origen saw philosophy far more than matters of idea but as a way of character formation. He therefore endeavoured to instill in his students love for virtue. His students came to see their teacher (Origen) as a model of a truly wise man. Origen produced six versions of the Old Testament titled Hexapla. He taught that the scriptures were the treasury of divine revelation which must be seen as a whole. In other words, if there was an apparent sense of a passage that contradict the necessary morality or nature of God, then there must be deeper lessons underneath the surface of the passage. He used much of allegorical interpretation. He believed there are three levels of meanings in every Bible passage: the literal sense; the moral application to the soul and the allegorical or spiritual sense i.e. the mysteries of Christian faith. Origen believed that the Bible must be allowed to speak for itself. It must

speak for God who inspired it. He did not allow the heretics to twist passages of the scripture to entrench some rigid and erroneous perpetrations. Hence, the whole Bible must speak to teach the central message, Christian truths of Catholic Christianity. What would have happened to Christianity without the rationally interpreted Bible to field the mind and control the development of Christian thought? He saved the scripture for the Early Church and for all ages as a historical foundation of the Christian faith. He had a pioneering work on systematic theology. He was the first theologian to clearly define the whole intellectual framework of Christian faith. He produced an unmodified work titled, '*the first principle*' that was addressed to educated readers. He knew very well that if Christianity was to succeed in the age of shaping civilization, the Christian truths must be presented in a way that it must justify itself to the intellect and as well as the hearts of mankind.

Origen was sometimes charged with heresies as he was always bold to speculate where the church had not definitely spoken. For instance, he taught that:

- i. All creatures including the devils would one day be restored in communion with God.
- ii. Hell would be raptured.
- iii. All these were rooted in his extreme emphases on the belief (that is today shared by many) that God's love would eventually and someday triumph over the sinful and rebellious.

Suffice it to say that these assumptions and teachings deny the free will of man and its eternal consequences. Origen proposed as a doctrine that can only remain as a desire. He was singled out for attack in the persecution of Decius. He died in AD 254.

Clement and Origen made much difference in their Christian faith. They were aware of the meaning of salvation. They preserve humanism for Christianity. They made possible the career of other great Christian leaders like Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom. They demonstrated that the best of classical culture could find a home and future within the church.

Cyprian of Carthage (AD 200-258)

A Polemist

Cyprian was born in AD 200 and was martyred by beheading on September 4, 258 AD. He became converted to Christianity at the age of 46, that is, twelve years before his death. He rose to the post of Bishop of Carthage. He regarded the Roman bishops as *primus inter pares* (first among equals). However, he resisted the attempt of bishop Steven of Rome to bring all the churches under his authority on the controversial subject of water baptism of heretics.

North African Christianity had produced many rigorous Christians who viewed martyrdom as ideal. Cyprian, who was born to a wealthy family became the bishop of Carthage in AD 248 after his conversion to Christianity in AD 246. Cyprian was a good example of the rigorous Christian life demonstrated by North African Christians in the early church. David F. Wright had noted that Cyprian's conversion experience, produced a remarkable change in his life. He asserted that Cyprian claimed that: *'the new birth created in me a new man by means of the Spirit breathed from heaven'*⁸. Due to his commitment to chastity he was a dedicated celibate as he was under the vow to remain single all his life. In addition, though he had a rich parentage, he

8. Wright F. David. Encyclopedia of the Reformed Fourth Edition Donald Mckim Pg 133

chose to remain poor. To this end, in literal obedience to the scripture, Cyprian was said to have sold his luxurious estate and gave the money to the poor. Cyprian was so committed to his newly found faith in Christ that within the space of two years after his conversion he rose to the rank of a bishop. So, he was consecrated the bishop of Carthage in September 14, AD 248. Though, educated in rhetoric before his conversion, he would not read any literature other than the Bible and distinctively, Christian books. Cyprian was a skilled and a clear-headed administrator. According to Earle E. Cairns Cyprian was opposed to Bishop Stephen's (the bishop of Rome) claim to supremacy over all other bishops. Cyprian taught that all bishops were equal just as the apostles were.

During the Decius' persecution of AD 250, Cyprian fled from the city of Carthage to hide but returned to the city in AD 251. When he returned the council of bishops met to stipulate conditions for re-admitting people who lapsed from faith. The stipulated conditions were however controversial issues for debates which later caused division of the church.

The main contribution of Cyprian to the church in third century was his most important work on: *The Unity of The Church* in which he developed the Episcopal Catholicism. To Cyprian, everybody must be subject to the episcopate in order to be in the one universal church. In his writings Cyprian insisted that:

Whosoever is he and whatever his character he is not a Christian who is not in the church of Christ. There was no salvation outside the church. It is not possible for him to have God for his father who would not have the church for his mother. He who is not with the bishop is not in the church.

On the issue of whether or not Christian baptism could be received outside the Catholic Church (that is, whether heretics could be baptized), Cyprian's stand was that the Spirit's gift of life and salvation were restricted to the Catholic Church. To Cyprian, the ministers were to be seen as priests of the New Testament. The Lord Supper was to be taken as the sacrifice on the cross.

He regarded the Roman bishops as *primus inter-pares* (first among equals). Hence, he resisted the attempt of bishop Stephen of Rome to bring all bishops under his superior authority. It was later that the Roman bishop declared himself as the unchallengeable head of the Catholic Church in the West.

Cyprian had much influence on the church in the West. He eventually died as a martyr: as he was beheaded in AD 258.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Augustine of Hippo, who at birth was named Aurelius Augustinus, was born in November 13, AD 354 in Tagaste, Numidia (modern-day Sauk Ahras, Algeria). He was born to African parents. His mother, Monica, was a well devoted Christian who earnestly prayed for the conversion of her son Augustine, even though his father, Patricius, was a heathen man. Augustine's parents were determined and actually laboured to give the best education of their time to Augustine. But the man Augustine was a man who had no control over his sexual urges. He eventually had a son Adeodatus for a girl he fell in love and stayed with for thirteen years. As Augustine struggled with his seemingly irresistible sexual passion, he could not find solace in the Bible that he was introduced to in his tender age. His quest for solution for his depraved and insatiable passion for sex led him to join the Manicheanism between AD 374 and AD

383 (for nine years) before he got dissatisfied with the Manicheans teachings and quitted.

Augustine who had gone to the church to study the sermon of Bishop Ambrose, was touched by the preaching of Ambrose. Coupled with the personal example of the monks of his time, including the stories about Anthony and Egyptian Hermits who were able to resist and triumphed over the temptations and allurements of the world. It was at this backdrop that Augustine was said to have heard a voice of a girl singing '*Take it and read it*'. It was this voice that prompted him to pick up the Bible (a book he has long scorned and disdained in his life) to read. As he picked the Bible, particularly, the New Testament to read, the very first place that drew his attention was ***let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof, (Romans13:13, 14)***. He was immediately convicted of his inordinate passions at the end of the passage. Consequently, Augustine was baptized in water in AD 387 along with his son Adeodatus during the Easter.

Few months later Augustine left for North Africa with the mother as a completely changed and converted person. He lost his mother on the way and later his son. He was ordained a priest in AD 391 in Hippo as a result of the pressure of the people who were amazed by his convincing testimony and the influences he exerted on the people after the dramatic change in his life. Not long after he was ordained a priest he became the assistant bishop at the request of his bishop i.e. Bishop Valerius. He eventually succeeded Bishop Valerius at the age of forty-three years when the latter died.

He was one of the earliest Christian philosophers, theologians and important Church Father that contributed immensely to the development of the orthodox teachings of the church. He was popular for his orthodox defence against Donatists, Manicheans and the teachings of Pelagius' controversy. Some of the notable works of Augustine of Hippo included Confession, City of God and Christian Doctrine.

Doctrine of Sin and Grace

Pelagius' Concept of Sin and Grace

Pelagius had insisted that every man was created in his original form to be neutral (i.e. neither sinful nor holy), though, with a capacity for both good and evil. According to him, man had the free will options to choose either good or evil. In otherwords, man could either sin or refrain from sinning. His argument was that Man (the first Adam) without the antecedent of evil in him chose to sin. He aassisted that Humanity did not inherit any sinful nature, (guilt of sin or original sin) from Adam at his fall. Sin therefore is not a product of man's desire or affection but rather the act of the exercise of his will. Pelagius therefore, taught that sin is universal because of the habitual bad examples and wrong education.

He further argued that all human beings today are still born with the same condition of Adam before his fall i.e. being free from any form of guilt of sin and the pollution of sin. Thus, Adam's sin affected himself only. By this, Pelagius meant that man naturally has no any inherent evil tendencies or desires in him. The only difference between Adam and all his descendants is that the former had no evil example which the latter have.

In his teaching, he posited that man was created mortal as he insisted that mortality was neither the result of man's choice

of sin, nor a factor of man's choice at all, as man would have still died if he had not sinned. And that man does not necessarily require the grace of God to be free from evil even though he (Pelagius) considers the presence of grace helpful for man to overcome evil in life. However, his concept of grace did not include the inward working of God or the influence of the Holy Spirit that empowers man to do that which is good. Rather, he conceived grace as any external natural endowment or talent including man's rational nature, the revelation of God in scripture and the examples of Christ. Nevertheless, Pelagius would insist on the need for infant baptism as a necessary rite for the consecration or anticipation of forgiveness.

Augustine's Concept of Sin and Grace

Augustine's concept of man and grace was greatly influenced by Paul's teachings in his Epistle to the Romans. In his perception, the nature of sin in man was inherited from the fallen Adam. According to him, Adam was the representative of human race. Hence, all humans were in the loins of Adam. Therefore, the sin of Adam was the sin of all humanity. Man, by nature, is consequently depraved and has no inherent goodness in his nature. Man's guilt, dominion and reign of sin has so separated him from God that only grace of God can reconcile him back to God.

To Augustine, grace is completely the work of God and the only source of good in man. Man's renewal is therefore, dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit. Man needs the grace of God to believe. He holds the idea of different stages of grace such as: (i) Prevenient Grace by which God uses the law to convict man of his sin. (ii) Operative Grace by which the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to generate the believer's faith in Christ and his atoning work that procure for man salvation, justification, and peace with God. (iii) Co-operative Grace: this is the renewed will of man that

operates within his holiness. This grace produces entire sanctification of man who is already renewed in the image of God.

He believed in the predestination of those whom God foreknew that they would believe even though he thought that man is a free moral agent. Augustine's doctrine of salvation triumphed over Pelagius at the synod of Orange even though his emphasis on predestination was not accorded the same fate. They all agreed with Augustine that through the sin of one man all men became sinners.

Anselm

Like Augustine, Anselm emphasised the concept of Natural Sin (original sin). He described sin as natural not as in the essence of human nature but that the fall of Adam, made man guilty and polluted. Thus, guilt and sin are passed from father to the son and are inherited. He was however opposed to the transmission of the sins of one's immediate ancestors to his descendants. According to him the unique sin of Adam was not to be compared with the sin of our ancestors.

Self-Assessment Test

- i. Identify any five measuring standards or yardsticks used by the early church to preserve the orthodox faith and teachings of the church in the face of several heretical teachings.
- ii) Distinguish among Apologists, Polemicists and Church Fathers of the early church
- iii) Highlight the contributions of Justine Martyr and Irenaeus in the defence of Christian orthodoxy in the early church.
- iv) Explain Irenaeus' teachings on (a) Creation and God (b) Christ and reconciliation

- v) Critically examine the role of Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian of Carthage in the formulation of Christian theology in the Early Church
- vi) Show that Augustine of Hippo helped to lay the foundation of orthodox teaching on Sin and Grace in Christian theology.
- vii) Explain Pelagius' Teaching on Sin and Salvation.

EARLY CHURCH IN THE FIRE OF PERSECUTION

Introduction

From the beginning of Christianity in the first century to sometimes a quarter of the fourth century, the church had passed through innumerable ordeals of both organised and unorganised persecutions. Thus, hundreds of years after the birth of the Christian church, it suffered and was in danger of persecutions. The blood of the martyrs was then said to be the seed of the church. Persecutions of the church in the empire were extremely painful but very fruitful as the church grew in the face of sufferings. There were several inter-related reasons for the persecution of the Christians in the early church. These are discussed below.

Issues at Stake

Christianity, as a Jewish sect had enjoyed initial protections under Romans policy of freedom for local religions. But, as soon as the early believers came declaring that there is another King Jesus, they immediately incurred the wrath of the emperors who saw that as a threat to emperor worship in Roman Empire. Secondly, Christianity was totally incompatible to Rome's world view system: politically, socially, economically and religiously. Thirdly, the persecutions were closely related to the political situation in the empire. The empire had become unstable, chaotic, with the decline in moral values. Hence, the consequent search for source of strength from existing establishments. It was considered necessary for religion to be united and in support of the state. They (the Roman Emperors) therefore,

demanding an outward agreement with paganism, especially in complying to the heathen rites and cultic practices. The Christians who were opposed to and resented pagan rites and practices became victims of sore persecutions.

Persecution of Christians in Roman Empire could be traced back to the first century, under Emperor Nero. It was alleged that in AD 64, Emperor Nero caused an outbreak of fire which destroyed much of Rome. According to Tacitus, Nero resorted to accusing the Christians of causing the fire outbreak to exonerate himself of the scandalous report. He did not only stop at accusing the Christians but also released the most exquisite, fearful tortures on the Christians who were hated for their 'abominations'. The forms of persecution include mockery, death penalty: some Christians were covered with animal skin or doomed for flames.

Other reasons for these persecutions were not unconnected with the fact that the generality of the people of Roman Empire misunderstood what Christianity was all about. Hence, they accused the Christians of various crimes, including black magic. For instance, the Christians Lord's Supper was misunderstood for cannibalism. Similarly, because the Christians would not participate in their public entertainments at their theatres and or in other worldly parties, they were regarded not only as anti-socials but as haters of mankind. In the same vein, many Christians who refused participation in military services incurred the wrath of the emperor as they were considered unpatriotic.

The causes of the persecution in addition had some economic undertone also. For instance, the practice of idolatry was a common feature in the whole empire. It made the goldsmith or silver smith profession that produce various materials for idol worship a lucrative business. With the mass conversions of pagans to Christianity in the empire, some of these traders and craftsmen for the materials for idol

worship were fast losing their sources of income. Another reason was that, the earliest Christians who were of Jewish origin (Jewish seed), spurred an anti-Jewish sentiment vented on the Christians who were also hated by some of the Jews for their anti-Judaism practices. More importantly, one of the fundamental reasons for the persecution of the early church was their refusal to worship the Roman gods. Those who would not worship the Roman gods were regarded as atheists. This was because every disaster was attributed to be the disfavour of the gods. All efforts were therefore made to keep the gods happy in the empire. It was then considered a height of heinous crime for any Christian to refuse to worship these gods. An act that was tantamount to provoking the gods to wrath. Such was considered a great threat to the peace and stability of the whole society.

Particular instances of Persecutions that ensued during the early church abound. Under Domitian (AD 81 96); many Christians were massacred and during Emperor Trajan (AD 98 117), Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch was thrown to the wild beasts in the colosseum at Rome in AD 115. Simon of Jerusalem, the relative of our Lord was also tortured for many days and finally crucified in AD 107. The saintly Polycarp of Smyrna, who was a disciple of Apostle John was burnt at the stake in AD 155 under Emperor Antiochus Epiphanes. Polycarp vowed in his own testimony, that he would not blaspheme the King who had saved him. Under Marcus Aurelius (AD 161 – 180) the persecution continued for years and included the beheading of Justin Martyr, the apologist in Rome in 166 AD. The persecution of the Christians and the church, predicted by Christ had begun during the Apostolic Era *'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake'*. (Mt.5:10, 11). The blood of the

Martyrs became the seed of the church. Others were tortured and martyred.

Christianity as a religion, particularly perceived as a Jewish sect in her early days, was initially favoured by the Roman's policy of freedom of religion for her citizens. A good lot of the believers (i.e. adherent of the Christian faith) were peasant. In the face of several persecutions, the Christians remained faithful. The Christians were neither known to be bad neighbours nor disloyal as long as that did not contradict their beliefs. For instance, Apostle Peter was said to have exhorted his readers to submit to blood thirsty Emperor Nero the initiator of the first organized persecutions of the Christians. The socio-political and religio-cultural life of the then Roman empire soon considered the Christian ethics and beliefs alien and incompatible to the idolatrous practice in the empire. An organized intolerance range against the Christian folks soon began, particularly as the early believers declared and pledged their absolute fidelity and loyalty to another supreme king – Jesus. This made the freedom enjoyed by the early Christians to be invariable short lived. The loyalty of Christianity that threatened the observance of idolatrous emperor-worship in Roman Empire was soon the reverse. There were pockets of attacks and persecutions on the Christians in Acts of the Apostles. Suffice it to note that the official protection against the Christians by the enemies of Christian faith, under Roman citizenship was announced by Apostle Paul (Acts 22).

Many reasons have been adduced for the emergence of the unprecedented barbaric persecution of Christians in Roman empire (especially the Jews) being foreigners should have different religion and customs but there seemed to be no reason why others should want to be different and refuse to join in the ordinary activities of the rest of the citizens empress Poppaea was a pro-Jewess. The Christians

uncompromising attitude to Judaism soon triggered the wrath of the emperor. Many Jewish leaders were religious but they did not know God. This must have informed Apostle Paul's heart desire and prayers for the whole nation of Israel to know God (Romans 10:1-3). They had rejected God's precious cornerstone (Acts 26). It is not surprising that the early Christians strove to maintain clear distinct stand from Judaism without any compromise. In addition, there was a problem of Jewish intolerance for polytheism and idolatrous practices in the empire which aggravated to a conflict between the Jews and the Romans Empire. Furthermore, the causes of persecution of Christians in Roman Empire also include the fact that the gentiles and the unbelievers misunderstood Jews what Christianity was all about. Hence, they accused them of diverse crimes. For instance, there was no official rest on Sundays. So, the people (i.e. the believers) had to meet for fellowship and the breaking of bread from house to house at nights after normal working hours. Such meetings, that included both sexes as typified in the upper room experience and the prayer meeting in the house of Mary (Acts 1:12-14; 12:12-17). Consequently, there were tales of sexual ague and cannibalism attributed to their love feast and Lord Supper celebration. Similarly, because the Christians would not participate in their public entertainments of theatres and other worldly pursuits, they were regarded as haters of mankind. The practice of idolatry was a common feature which eventually became a compulsory practice. The implication was that the condemnation of idolatrous practice did not go well with the goldsmith and silver smith, whose professions were beneficiary and lucrative business in the production of materials for idol worshipers. Thus, the sporadic conversion to Christianity (that was in a geometric acceleration) posed threat to the trade on materials for idol worship. There is no gain saying that the goldsmith and

silver smith were fast losing their customers to Christianity. This implied serious jeopardy of their sources of income. In addition, the Jews were gradually acquiring the attribute of hated race. Unfortunately, a number of the early Christians were of Jewish origin. Hence, Christianity was seldom associated with Jewish sect. On the other hand, anti-Jewish feelings were vented on the Christians (who now disdain the ceremonial rites of Judaism, as unnecessary pre-requisites for salvation) for their non-distinctive mixture of gentile and Jews in their assemblies. More importantly, one other basic reason that spelt the cause of the fierce persecution in the early church was the uncompromising attitude to the demand for emperor worship and the worship of Roman gods. Those who dared to be deviants were regarded as godless atheists. The fear was that, Christian's refusal may ignite the disfavour of the gods of the land and consequently an inevitable disaster was envisaged. All efforts were therefore made to compel the Christian to comply to the worship of idols to keep the gods happy in the empire.

Persecutions from biblical examples to the immediate past apostolic era were generally very fierce and frightening but very fruitful. As the blood of the saints dropped, it fertilized the harvest fields for the planting and germination of churches. There were no clear evidences or records of ever extinguishing the fire of the church through persecution in the early church. Rather persecution appeared to have fanned the fire of the surviving saint to be ablaze with enthusiasm for the defence of the truth and the spread of the gospel. It may be that the early church had very well understood that *they that will live godly in Christ Jesus in this world shall suffer persecution (2 Tim.3:12)*. No wonder, it has been noted that next to righteousness and chaste attribute of the early believers was the phenomenon of persecution which they faced expectantly.

Any persecution that the contemporary church may be presently passing through may not be altogether strange. In short, student of eschatological studies would confess that the nearer the coming of Christ the worst the relationship between the uncompromising church and the state. However, the faith of our fathers and the footsteps of uncompromising martyred heroes of faith may serve to encourage all persecuted churches, local assemblies and Christian groups and even individual believers.

Reason for Persecution

Succinctly put, the sum of the varied reasons for the persecution of the early church include:

1. Roman Policy

Roman policy was tolerant to all religions of the conquered nations. All that was required was a common homage to the emperor. As long as the Roman authorities had considered the Christians as one of the sects of the Jewish religion, they enjoyed immunity granted by the imperial authority to the Judaisers. The moment the Romans discovered that the Christians were opposed by the Jews the former lost their immunity in the Empire. They were then subjected to one unfavourable edict or the other, from one Emperor to another.

2. Distinctive life style

Man, always view with suspicion those who dared to be different. Conformity or compromise and not distinctiveness is generally regarded the way to trouble free life. So the more the Christians took to the rejection of pagan gods, (as the Christian ethics was opposed to pagan life) the more they incurred the wrath of the people who saw them not only as anti-social people but also as godless and atheistic humans.

3). Sex and Slander

The Christians were accused of a host of practices including sexual sin and cannibalism.

4). Atheism

They could not understand the imageless worship of Christians. They accused them of insulting the god.

5). Lord of the Emperor

This was one of the supreme cause of persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire: the conflict between the lordship of Christ and that of Caesar. The Christians would not for any reason bow or confess the Lordship of Caesar to contradict their belief in the Lordship of Jesus.

6). Problem of Identity

Christianity was initially perceived as a sect identified with Judaism but it was not long when the people realized that it was a different religion altogether. As a new religion, its fast spread across people groups, and geographical boundaries was perceived as a threat to many people of Roman Empire. This was so especially, as the Jews saw their teachings as alien to their religion (Judaism). This consequently robbed the Christians of the recognition, and protection under the Judaizers which they were previously enjoying in Roman Empire.

7). Religious Activities of the Christians

Roman Empire was characteristically dominated by pagans and consequently the worship of pagan gods was an integral part of their socio-cultural life. So then, Christians' non-involvement and non-participation in pagan rituals, infuriated the idolatrous people of the then Roman Empire who perceived the Christians as anti-social and atheistic set of people. As Christians persistently kept themselves from

all pagan gatherings, the imperial police could not help but associated them with secret societies. Thus, their leaders became great suspects and serious threats in Roman Empire.

In addition, since the Christians avoided all pagan religious activities that were unavoidably placate of their gods (that were thought to be responsible for the economic well-being and peaceful co-existence), they were seen also as threats to the progress of the community. They were then held responsible for every public disaster, misfortune that befalls the people. Thus, Christians were blamed for any earthquakes; flood disasters, famine or plague etc.

On the other hand, some of the Christian religious activities were misunderstood by the pagan societies in Roman Empire. For example, Christians' celebration of the Lord's Supper that is one of the Christian ordinances (that was a symbol of taking the body and blood of Jesus Christ), and the customary greetings of Christian with holy kiss were misunderstood and misinterpreted. Consequently, charges of cannibalism and incest were brought against the early church.

8). The Content of Christian Beliefs

In the pagan world view, the early church, and Christian beliefs were not only abominable but also deadly superstitions. Hence, they (the Christians) were perceived by the pagans as class of people in the empire who were worthy of nothing but annihilation.

9). Christians' Refusal to Worship the Emperor

Christian's reluctance to worship the emperor and the gods was considered a height of madness and absurdity in a plural society, considering what would happen to them if they didn't. Most of the pagans did not see anything wrong in making a sacrifice of a pinch of incense to the image of the emperor. They were therefore counted as people who were

not worthy to live if they can dare go against the opinion of the populace and the sanctions of the authority of Roman Empire.

THE SUCCESSIONS OF PERSECUTORS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The church was born amidst misunderstanding reviling, criticism, threats, oppositions and persecution. So then, persecution had been part of the identity of the true church of God right from apostolic age. Account of the first and second Christian martyrs, Stephen and James, at the least attest to the sporadic experience of persecution of the early church (Acts 7:12). From AD 30 to 311 a period in which about 54 emperors reigned, only a few did in one way or the other persecuted the Christians. There was no empire-wide persecution until the reign of Decius in AD 249-251. Thus, Christianity had not been officially prohibited in the state (i.e. by Roman Empire), from the regime of Emperor Caligula (37-41), being the first Roman Emperor to attempt the demand of self-worship as god. There were however, the indications of threatened prohibition of any monotheistic religion of Judaism. The eggs of grudges laid by Emperor Caligula were actually hatched during the reign of Nero, who has been described as 'a blood thirsty emperor'.

Nero has further been described as the cruellest of all the emperors of Roman Empire. He was with barbarian temper. On July AD 64, he occasioned the setting ablaze of the Roman city which caused the destruction of large part of the city. Thousands of the city dwellers were rendered homeless and many valued idols and shrines went under the flames of the callous Emperor Nero's fiddle strategy. The dreaded conflagration lasted for at least six days, according to Forbush. Nero was said to have been accused of a boast to "see the ruin of all things before his death". It was therefore not surprising that during his reign that, the Roman circus,

several palaces and houses were not spared in addition to the thousands of people who were either smoked to death or buried in the inferno. Nero needed to divert attention from the rumoured reasons (for the alleged Nero' most unimaginable, most inhuman action) including his being dazed with a craze or ambition to rebuild the city of Rome. Others have felt this was just one of the wicked ways of this monarch who had murdered his own mother in AD 59.

It may interest you to note also that the Nero ascended the throne through blood treachery, at the age of 17. It is believed that Emperor Claudius was murdered by his wife Agrippina to allow Nero on the throne. Nero, a man described to be with extravagance temper, soon began annihilation mission on his enemies. For instance, he had to see to the demise of his step brother through poison. In AD 62 his murderous traits were vented on his wife Octavia.

In the face of all these, coupled with the unprecedented fire devastation of Rome for which he was blamed, Nero needed to divert attention and exonerate himself from the severe odium cast on him which made him unpopular. Nero found the easiest ways to excuse himself of the barbaric act of burning the city of Rome in fixing the guilt on the Christians who were the unpopular minority. Tacitus, a Roman historian who was a governor in the province of Asia had this to say:

'Nero fixed the guilt on a class of people, hated for their abominations who are commonly called Christians. Christ from whom their name derives was executed by the governor, province Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius checked for the moment, this deadly superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the source of the evil but even in Rome. An immense number of Christians was (sic) arrested.'

Nero had many arrested and tortured to death. In what appeared to be the first organized persecution, multitudes were condemned to death, not apparently for causing the fire but at the least for being haters of human race. Also the Christians were a set of people who remained distinct from the socio-religious life of the general people in Roman Empire. The natural belt of persecution ranged from the victims who were covered in skins of wild animals and paraded before hungry dogs that were meant to yearn them into pieces. Others were made living Torches by being fixed to crosses and with fire set on them for the entertainment of crowd in the emperor's garden. Nero, according to Tacitus personally presided over such sports. Nero was probably insane. He later flung into annihilation of all influential people who posed threat to his murderous actions.

It was no longer a seldom occurrence to unleash vehement tortures on Christians for remaining different and unique people. Some historians have suggested that it was not only for the world's hatred, but for the success of the church witness. The first persecution of the church may not have spread beyond the city of Rome. Tacitus argued that the persecution of this time was not carried out for any religious reason but "to satisfy one man's (Nero) cruelty". In any case, the persecution made Christians everywhere feel insecure.

Heroes of faith (men and women) in the early church were put to death just because they professed the Christian faith. During this period, Apostle Peter was said to have been crucified in AD 69, Apostle Paul, Erastus Aristarchus, Trophimus, and Joseph nick named Barsabbas and Ananias were all probably martyred during this time.

The tenure of this sadist, and the most notorious emperor who became an ethos for all other persecutors of the Christians ended in suicide by the emperor at the age of 31.

“The wicked runneth when no man pursueth. But the righteous are as bold as a lion”. (Prov.28:1). Though the Christian remained vulnerable to fire, sword and to the most unimaginable infernal tortures, Nero died a coward while the church remained militant. The great fire of Nero’s persecution could not burn the church out of existence but rather refined it. Neither did the deep rivers of the blood of the martyrs drawn the church. For Christ has already said the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Mat.16:18). Below is a portrait of gallery and extra biblical chronicles of persecutions by the successive Emperors in Roman Empire:

1. Persecution under Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41 – A.D. 54)

In the history of the church, Emperor Claudius was probably the first Roman Emperor who persecuted the church. Emperor Claudius had lived a quiet life. He ascended the throne after the murder of his nephew, Emperor Gaius in A.D 41. He tried as much as possible to avoid wars. To this end, during his tenure he formulated policies that even extended Roman citizenship at home and showed tolerance towards a variety of religions including Judaism. However, he later expelled the Jews from Rome in A.D. 52, for persistent disturbance that was said to have been instigated by one “Chrestus” who was a thorn in the side of Roman politicians anxious.

Claudius was the first Roman Emperor that persecute the Christians, probably inadvertently (as they were perceived as a part of Jewish sect that was disturbing the peace of the Roman Empire).

2. Persecution under Emperor Nero (AD 54 – AD 68)

Emperor Nero was a cruel and pleasure-driven emperor that had been associated with the nature of his upbringing. His mother, Agrippina had convinced the husband, Emperor

Claudius to adopt Nero as a heir of the throne instead of Claudius', the first son. Agrippina consequently murdered Claudius to ensure the realisation of her quest and Nero ascended the throne at the age of seventeen years. Emperor Nero, a blood thirsty murderer had his mother accused of treason and consequently stabbed her to death. He beheaded his wife: Octane, for an alleged case of adultery and killed his mistress, Poppaea, with pregnancy. He behaved monstrously towards his own family.

Nero blamed the Great inferno of A.D 64 on the dissident group of the Jews (the Christians), whom he meted out the most barbaric and gruesome punishment as he burnt many alive. The martyrdom of Apostle Peter and Paul were as a result of Nero's spectacular massacre.

The empire wide subjection of Christians to varied forms of persecutions and harassment all started as localized persecution in Rome under Emperor Nero. Tradition had it that Nero succeeded in pegging the citizens of Rome against the Christians as he (Nero) attempted shifting the blame of the rumour that he was responsible for the Great Fire which destroyed much of the city of Rome on the Christians. To kill the rumour, Nero charged and tortured Christians that were now perceived and held as bad and evil sect, particularly, for the crime of allegedly burning the city of Rome.

This was a time Christianity was beginning to take roots not only in Judea but also in the city of Rome where all kinds of sordid and shameful activities became inherent practices of the popular religion: paganism. At this time also, the identity and confession of being an adherent of the Christian faith was enough to attract severe persecution and torture. Hundreds of Christians were arrested and convicted of anti-social behaviour in addition to those who were victims of the alleged cause of inferno in Rome. Nero was so cruel that

he allowed the practice of covering Christians with wild animal skins and then throw them to dogs to feed on. There were also instances of Christians being set on fire to serve like torches in the dark as they became guilty of being Christians that deserved death. However, some of the citizenry of Roman Empire soon realized that the Christians were being massacred to satisfy personal ego of one man and not for public interest.

3. Persecution under Emperor Domitian (AD 81 – AD 96)

Emperor Domitian has been described as one of the heinous blasphemers of all times. Some think Emperor Domitian appropriately fit into Apostle John's description of a blasphemous beast from hell who set himself to blaspheme God and drink the blood of saints. However, he was a master builder and one of the best administrators of the empire.

Emperor Domitian set the precedence of ascribing to himself a defying title as an Emperor. He officially arrogated to himself the title "God the Lord" and demanded that people should as a mark of honour hail his greatness with such titles as "Lord of the Earth", the "Invincible", "Glory", Holy and "Thou Alone". He would compel the people to give him divine honour.

It was the enforcement of such deifying titles and honours that made the Jews and particularly the Christians to incur the wrath of Emperor Domitian. They refused to pay the imperial levy in support of the construction of Capitoline's Jupiter. The despotic Emperor Domitian did not take it kindly with the Jews and the Christians that were closely associated with the Jews. Tradition has it that the execution of Flavius Clement, the exile of Domitila were personally ordered by Domitian because they were Christians. Apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos (where he wrote the

Book of Revelation) during the reign of Domitian. Emperor Domitian was murdered by one Stephanus who was an ex-slave of Clement.

4. Persecution under Emperor Trajan (98 – 117)

Generally, Emperor Trajan was a well skilled ruler. His tenure was popularly admired and became a reference point to many leaders after him. Trajan had Julius Caesar as his mentor, whom he aspired to excel. Trajan's successful conquest of Dacia was probably the last major conquest of ancient Rome. He was a conservative civilian that was well known for impressive public works especially, the Aqua Tariana, magnificent forum of Trajan and Trajan's Baths.

It was during Trajan's reign that the Christians experienced the first organized persecution that gave Christians opportunity for defence. In Bithynia, the Christian had recorded outstanding penetration into villages and rural areas as well as cities. Many had deserted temple worship for the choice of Christianity. Governor Pliny of Bithynia had written to Emperor Trajan for an advice on how he ought to deal with the growing population of Christians in his province. Generally, Trajan was known for his concern for the welfare of his province, but for the Christians his concern for their welfare was mixed with suspicious preoccupation with the perceived security threat that the growing church seemingly posed to his government. More importantly, the perceived threat of possible interference in the internal affairs of self-government of the cities. In Trajan's reply to Pliny's quest on how to deal with the Christians in his domain, he ordered that:

They are not to be hunted out, anyone who is accused and convicted should be punished with the provision that if a man says he is a Christian and make it obvious by his actual conduct – namely by

worshipping our gods. Then, however suspect he may have been with regards to the past, he should gain pardon from his repentance.

So, the practice was that Christians would be brought before tribunal and they were given opportunity to recant and deny their faith and identity as Christians at the tribunal. Some questions were asked. Are you a Christian? About three times and the three times given opportunity to recant and worship the Roman gods. If he however refused, then he was punished.

Therefore, during the reign of Trajan, if someone brings a sealable charge against a Christian: the Christian should be sentenced unless he/she recanted with a proof of invocation of pagan gods. Before this time, Christians were persecuted in connection with the Jews. Emperor Trajan was the first to order the first distinctive persecution of Christians. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch was martyred during the reign of Trajan. Persecution was particularly fierce in Syria and Palestine during the reign of Trajan. In AD 107, Trajan was said to have demanded that everybody in Antioch should make sacrifice to the gods. It was this imperial order of Trajan that the Bishop of Antioch Ignatius, the disciple of Apostle John flouted that earned him martyrdom by being thrown to wild beasts. On his way, Ignatius was said to have written letters to another church father and disciple of Apostle John – Polycarp in Rome: showing adamant refusal to pagan sacrifice. He was said to have said:

Let the fire, the gallows, the wild beasts, the breaking of bones, the pulling asunder of members, the bruising of my whole body, and the torment of the devil and hell itself come upon me, so that I may win Christ Jesus.

5. Persecution under Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138)

Trajan was succeeded by the most brilliant of the Roman Emperor: Hadrian. Emperor Hadrian's reign was a continuation of Trajan policy. He, however, insisted on credible specific charges against Christians, rather than clamorous demands and or frivolous outcry as basis for judgement. In other words, he prevented frivolous lawsuit against Christians even though he also insisted on loyalty to the state and pagan religion of the empire. It was a well-known fact that Emperor Hadrian hated the Jews and with seemingly indifferent attitude to Christianity probably because he was not well conversant with their tenets.

Christianity generally, being perceived as a sect of Judaism, Emperor Hadrian was said to have thought to profane the religion of the Jews and Christians by erecting the temples of Jupiter and Venus at the site of the Jewish temple and at the supposed spot for the crucifixion of Christ respectively. Nevertheless, Hadrian was more tolerant to Christians as he did not always demand denunciation of Christ but a mere homage to the deified emperor who has acquired the character of divinity as the personal embodiment of sovereign state. So, simple evidence of loyalty to the state was required of all citizens. That was to be demonstrated by a sacrifice of a pinch of incense in honour of the emperor or swear by his divinity or affirm and invoke his Lordship.

6. Persecution under Antonius Pius (AD 138 – 161)

Emperor Trajan and Hadrian's policy of non-aggressive pursuit of the Christian was adopted by Antonius Pius. The persecutions that most Christians suffered during this time were mostly perpetrated by zealous local town people who sought to foster the pagan religion of the people. In other words, many Christians suffered in the hands of these zealous pagans without any direct encouragement or

enforcement from any government officials. In any case, it was during Emperor Antonius Pius that Polycarp was martyred at the age of 86 years.

7. Persecution under Emperor Marcus Aurelius AD 161 – 180

To Emperor Aurelius, the Christians were nothing but superstitious elements. Such that he had no atom of sympathy for. Some of his edicts were directly or subtly coined against the Christian faith. The Christians were however, resolute even in the face of most severe persecutions, sufferings and even multiple deaths that they won the respect of the people. To Emperor Marcus Aurelius, it was understandable if one should die for some significant idea, thought or belief but not for something superstitious and silly as Christian's beliefs. He therefore did not have any soft spot for Christian's obstinacy. Rather, he considered the Christian willingness to suffer martyrdom as a theatrical display that was grossly not only unnecessary and anathema to the calm spirit appreciated by the stoic. It is not surprising therefore that occurrences of some disasters during Aurelius were blamed on the Christian's refusal to sacrifice to the pagan gods.

In AD 177, a severe persecution broke out as a mob action against Christians that saw many Christians martyred. The corpse of those martyrs that littered the streets of Gaul were cut in pieces and burnt to ashes to completely annihilate the enemies of the gods that could desecrate their land. It was this persecution during the reign of Aurelius that Blandina, a slave Christian girl, was said to courageously face all martyrdom that her tormentors exhausted themselves in their attempt to make her renounce Christ. Her courage however, so strengthened other Christians that the tormentors eventually grew weary of slaughter and the persecution eventually died down.

8. Persecution under Emperor Septimius Severus (AD 193 – 211)

Another Roman Emperor who enacted hostile policies against the early church, was Emperor Septimius Severus who reigned in AD 193-211. Attesting to the barbaric persecution during the tenure of Septimius Severus, was one of the early church fathers: Clement of Alexandria who noted that it was an era of many martyrs on daily basis. Tradition showed that many were either burned to death, confined or beheaded publicly. There was the first of its kind a universal decree of Septimius in AD 202 that prohibited the spread of Christianity and Judaism in the empire. Thus, conversion to Christianity became a criminal offence in the whole of the Roman Empire.

History holds that, following the edict of AD 202, a violent persecution ensued in Egypt and North Africa during which Leonides (the Father of Origen, a Christian apologist) was martyred. He was among those beheaded in the spate of the persecution. Origen had aspired and wished to die as a martyr of the Christian faith, narrowly escaped the swords of the murderous persecutors during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, because the mother hid his clothes. History also recorded that one noble woman: Perpetua and Telicitas courageously held their hands and exchanged kiss before being thrown to the wild beast at public festival. Similarly, a young girl was cruelly tortured before being burned in a kettle of burning pitch with her mother. The death of Severus spelt a period of cessation of persecution for fifty years.

Severus was a soldier. He successfully waged a military campaign against a rival Emperors; Pescennius Niger in the east in 195 AD and Claudius Albinus in AD 197 in the west respectively. In AD 205, he targeted Britain before he took ill and died in AD 211. Severus was very benevolent to

soldiers. He was said to have increased their pay by 67 percent and counselled his two sons, Caracalla and Geta, *“to keep on good term with each other, be generous to the soldiers and take no heed of anyone else.”* Indeed, generosity to soldier was his trademark. Because of his favourable disposition towards soldiers, the deity of the Sun God, Mithras, that was very popular among the soldiers gained pre-eminence and began to edge out the competition in the Roman pantheon.

Initially, Severus was not unfriendly (both in attitude and policies) toward the Christians. In short, history holds that some members of his household were converted to the Christian faith. It is believed that the admiration of Severus for Christianity made him earlier to leave his son, Caracalla for a Christian nurse, to be tutored. There was however a change when Severus enacted an edict of AD 202 that prohibited further conversion to Judaism and Christianity.

9. Persecution under Emperor Decius Trajan (AD 249 – 251)

Emperor Decius was the leader of the first empire wide persecution of Christians in Roman Empire. Decius had thought that the invasion and incessant harassment from the barbarian tribes that the empire had suffered were due to the neglect of the traditional polytheism. He felt he needed more of spiritual attention than military. He invoked the devotion to the deified Roman rulers of the past to restore Roman strength. Though in minority by this time, the Christian belief in monotheism was not favourable to his quests for the revival of paganism in the empire. Provoked by the resistance of the Christians, Emperor Decius initiated an empire wide persecution of the Christians with much intensity.

It was at this time the Bishop of Rome, Fabian, was martyred by Decius who claimed “I would far rather receive news of a rival to the throne than of another Bishop of Rome”. Decius ordered all citizens of the empire to compulsorily perform some pagan religious rites without exception. This was to earn them a certificate of sacrifice (libellous). As expected, the Christians refused to compromise and would not comply with the worship and sacrifice. Some, however, compromised, while others bought the certificate without actually making the sacrifice. Many of those who refused to compromise their faith were tortured and executed. Origen was arrested at this time and tortured. He eventually died few years after his release. Decius produced more martyrs than any other emperor.

Christians were generally given opportunity to offer sacrifice to gods in the presence of the commission. Certification issued were proofs of loyalty of the pagan religions of the empire. As already noted many Christian gave in and those who would not were imprisoned. As rulers were becoming thirstier for the martyrs, they pressured the Christians to conform through repeated questionings. Those who remained adamant were subjected to exile or confiscation of property, torture and even to death. Those who obtained the certificates but did not sacrifice, were excommunicated from the church on the ground that they had died in the faith.

10. Persecution under Emperor Valerian (253 – 260)

At that time, it was a tradition to blame the church (i.e. the Christians), for any natural disaster, woes, epidemic or invasion in the empire. Valerian had inherited an empire totally plagued with civil strife by Germanic tribesmen to the East and also imminent attacks from the North. Decius turned to blame the Christians for the calamities of the empire. Consequently, Valerian decided to intensify

Decius's policies by ordering all clergies to sacrifice to the gods of the state in August 258 AD. However, the Christians were still allowed to worship Jesus Christ personally in private. By AD 258, any obstinacy of clergy attracted capital punishment. It was at this time Sixtus, the bishop of Rome, was burnt to death along with St. Lawrence in Rome. Similarly, Cyprian was martyred in Carthage. Many Christians had their properties confiscated.

11. Persecution under Emperor Diocletian AD 303 – 311 AD

This was the worst era of all the persecutions of Christians in the infant church of Roman Empire. The persecution at this time was so severe and terrible that the people forgot their persecutors before it. Before Diocletian, his successor had promulgated an edict of toleration. Emperor Diocletian's wife and daughter were Christians, together with some of his court servants and eunuchs. Influenced by his regent, Diocletian later turned against the Christians that he consequently issued four edicts in two years. These included the demand to:

- Burn all Christian churches.
- Burn all copies of Bibles.
- Deprive all Christians of all public offices and civil rights.
- Make sure all without exception were made to sacrifice to the gods upon the pains of death.

The fifth edict was issued by Galerius in 303 AD which demanded that:

All men, with wives, children and servants were to offer sacrifice to the gods, and that all provisions in the markets should be sprinkled with sacrificial wine.

Those who refused to comply were subjected to different forms of tortures that included all the pains with iron and steel, fire and sword, rank and cross world beasts and beastly men could be inflicted against the church. It was so pervasive that the execution got tired. The persecution during Emperor Diocletian turned out to be a struggle between paganism and Christianity in Roman Empire. Diocletian took ill in AD 304 and he in an unprecedented manner abdicated the throne and eventually retired to farming in Dalmatia in modern Yugoslavia. However persecution continued until Galerius issued an edict cancelling the persecution of Christians in AD 311. Thus, AD 311 saw the triumph of Christianity as Galerius began to allow Christian gathering again inasmuch as they did not constitute nuisance or disturbance to the order of the state. He even began to covet the prayers of Christians for the welfare of the state. It was the following year that Emperor Constantine became the emperor after the battle at Milvian Bridge. Though there were still some forms of persecutions until in 313 AD when Emperor Constantine (emperor of the west) in conjunction with Licinius in the Eastern part issued an edict of Milan which moved from hostile neutrality to friendly neutrality toward Christians. He himself eventually professed the Christian faith as he declared himself as the follower of the God of the Christians. When in 324 AD Constantine became the Emperor of the whole Roman Empire, he enacted an edict of toleration for the entire empire. The reign of Emperor Constantine brought cessation of the era of persecution of the church that eventually ushered in the era of Christianity as a legal religion in the whole of Roman Empire.

In conclusion, it should be noted that history held that, the more the Early Christians were mowed down, through execution, barbaric tortures, prey of beast and crucifixion, the more in number of churches grew. Hence, the general

and popular saying that: *‘the blood of Christian martyrs is seed of the church’*.

The suffering of some Christians spurred others to be more faithful in living out their Christian life and even induced the conversion of many to the Christian faith. Through all the terrible persecutions, the early church continued to grow.

Diocletian took ill (in AD 304) that made him in an unprecedented manner to abdicate the throne and eventually retired to farming in Dalmatia in modern Yugoslavia. However, persecution continued until Galerius issued an edict cancelling the persecution of Christians in AD 311. It was the following year that Emperor Constantine became the emperor after the battle at Milvian Bridge. A full legal toleration of Christianity followed with the AD 311 Milan edict that marked the end of any form of persecution and harassments of Christian by any emperor in Roman Empire.

Self-Assessment

- i) *Advance any eight reasons why the Early Church was persecuted*
- ii) *‘The blood of the Martyrs is Seed of the church’. Discuss.*
- iii) *Compare and contrast the nature of persecution of Emperor Claudius and Emperor Nero.*
- iv) *‘The persecution of the church under Emperor Domitian was significantly different from that of his predecessors. Discuss.*
- v) *Highlight the nature of the persecution under the following:*
 - a) *Trajan*

b) Hadrian

c) Antonius

Suggestion for further Reading

Persecution in Early Church: A Gallery of the Persecuting Emperors <https://chrianhistoryinstitute.org> 2019

Mark Galli Christian History in *Christian history institute* 1990

Chapter 10

CHRISTIANITY IN THE REIGN OF CONSTANTINE

The Milan edict of AD 311, issued by Emperor Constantine that made Christianity to be once again recognized as a legal religion. The pluralistic nature of Roman society was recognized by Constantine. He favoured the Christian church. All these were in the face of internal dissension within the empire and outward pressure by the barbarians. Emperor Constantine recognized the church as the one main hope for unity and stability within the Roman Empire. On the other hand, the church itself was torn by strife and dissension over Trinitarian and Christological controversies. The internal strife that began to rage did not allow the church to enjoy the external peace that ensued after Constantine's conversion. It all started with Arius of Alexandria who thought that the second person of godhead (Jesus Christ) is a creature. Athanasius vehemently opposed Arius teachings. Because of the threat posed by such schism in the church to the entire Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine convened the first general Post-Apostolic Council of the church in May 325 AD at Nicaea, North West of Asia Minor. In attendance were not less than 318 Bishops of the whole church. They all to attend at government expense.

The decision of the council was that the teachings of Arius were condemned. It was decided that Arius and all his followers should be anathematized. The council therefore declared the Nicaea creed as follows: *We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, begotten, not made, of one substance with the father.*

Arius was banished with two others to Illyria. Two years later, the strife erupted again when the erratic Constantine accepted Arius back and banished Athanasius the Bishop of Alexandria who refused to reinstate Arius at the order Constantine. Constantine was baptized by Arius on his death bed. Athanasius however, remained to be known in the church as the father of orthodoxy

Shortly before his death in AD 337, Constantine moved the capital of his empire to Byzantium and renamed it Constantinople (i.e. the modern-day Istanbul) after himself. That meant that Rome then had a rival city which further worsen the growing rivalry between the Greek churches and the Latin churches especially as he elevated the Bishop of Constantinople to a position equalled the Bishop of Rome. Consequently, this led to the division between Western and Eastern Church i.e. between the Greek and the Latin churches. While it is true to say that the founding of Constantinople was not the cause of the rivalry but it however, provided a pivotal point for the rivalry groups.

During the reign of Constantine, an imperial decree established Sunday (Christian's day of rest and worship) as a day on which the people should not work was promulgated. All legal businesses were forbidden on that day. This was later generalized sixty years later in the council of leaders.

The second ecumenical council was held in May 381 in Constantinople. This time around, the council was summoned by Emperor Theodosius. The council was attended by 186 Bishops mostly Greek. The orthodox doctrine or the Nicene confession was affirmed with additional pronouncement that Christ was truly human as well as divine. This was necessary because after the Nicaea Council there appeared to have emerged the tendency of emphasizing the deity of Christ at the expense of his

humanity. Similarly, the person and deity of the Holy Spirit were affirmed thus:

Holy Spirit who is the Lord and Giver of Life, who 'proceedeth from the father, who with the father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified' . . . The council also gave the Bishop of Constantinople a standing second only to the Bishop of Rome.

Self-Assessment

Why would you consider the conversion of Emperor Constantine as a mixed blessing to the Early Church?

TRINITARIAN AND CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES AT ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Introduction

The fourth century ushered in the era of the cessation of persecution of the Christians in Roman Empire under Pro-Christian Emperor (Emperor Constantine). Paradoxically, it also spelt an era that was generally credited with what could be described as a long period of protracted theological, Christological and Trinitarian controversies in the early Church. Indeed, with the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity and the consequent cessation of persecution of Christians in the whole of Roman Empire, a new haven for the doctrinal debates aimed at forging a united and universally accepted Christian Creed and Dogma ensued. In other words, the cessation of the varied persecutions which could be best described as ‘foes from without’, pave way for another turbulent era of formulating creeds and doctrines, and resolving theological controversies in the church, between 313 AD and 451 AD. Undoubtedly, the church needed to define her unprecedented concept of three persons in Godhead (monotheism), as against the popular polytheism. The zeal to affirm the oneness of God on the one hand and to defend the Triune God, created conflicts that the church could not easily play down. While persecution raged, the church’s projection of a common allegiance to the scripture and Christ, was all that was needed from faithful follower and adherents of the Christian faith. The church was forced into internal unity and a common front against the state to survive fierce persecutions.

The conversion of Constantine spelt the upsurge in the adherents of Christian faith across the Roman Empire. The infant church therefore needed a unified doctrine, or theology and dogma to hold the different people from different religious-cultural background together in one empire. This was what informed the several ecumenical Church councils. More so, that Emperor Constantine thought to use the church to strengthen and unit the varied factors in the empire. We shall examine four of such councils that helped to shape the theology of Christianity below.

The conversion of Emperor Constantine as already noted, spelt the cancelation of the Roman policy that declared Christianity a state religion and the consequent later termination of the centuries of persecution. The theatres that were previously used as arenas for the torture and martyrdom of thousands of courageous believer became Christian worship centres. With the Milan Edict of 313 AD, Christianity in Roman Empire had assumed the status of a state religion. The tranquillity that ensued favoured the long period of prolonged three centuries (4th-6th centuries) of Christological and Trinitarian controversies, particularly in the Eastern Church. The crux of the debates was argument on the DEITY and HUMANITY of Christ. That is, how Christ, the Son of God, was Himself God (the doctrine of trinity) and how Christ was both God and man in one person (the doctrine of the person of Christ Christology). The growth of the church that brought in so many Greeks who wanted to express the Christian faith in their philosophical orientations then, posed a great threat to the Church's orthodoxy. Passions ran high because the fundamentals of the Christian faith were gravely threatened by the controversies. To address the problem of heresies in the early church several councils of bishops were convened and

many creeds and statements of doctrines were formulated. These include the famous Nicaean Creed and the Chalcedon Definition that became one of the corner-stone of orthodoxy in Christendom in all ages. This period was not only described as an era of unparalleled importance in the formation of Christian theology but also as an age of interference, domination and control of the church by the state.

DOCTRINE OF TRINITY

The Background

Trinitarian controversy ensued resulting from the different perceptions of God between Arius and Athanasius in the early church. This was as a result of the absence of a well-defined concept of trinity at that time. Many had conceived Jesus as the impersonal one that was not co-existent with the Father, while the other yet saw Jesus as a personality who shared the same essence with the father and co-eternal with the Father but subordinate to the Father. At this time, the person of the Holy Spirit did not feature in the discussions and debates.

The belief in monotheism, that is: The Lord our God is one God remained one of the uncompromised tenets of Judaism that was inherited by Christian faith. However, Christians' insistence on the Lordship of Christ and the consequent worship of Christ while claiming the oneness of God somehow ignited questions of whether or not Christianity is a religion of two gods. The influence of Monarchianism (that was out to defend monotheism) with its emphasis on the church of God and the deity that was tilted toward the denial of the Trinity was problematic. It was at this juncture that people like Tertullian, Hippolytus came out clearly to oppose the Monarchianism's concept of Godhead in the west Origen, in the east, similarly affirmed the trinitarian concept as expressed in the Apostolic Creed. Although

Origen may rightly take the credit of being the first church Father to explain the relationship of the Father to the Son as that of eternal generation but he however subordinated the Son to the Father. Hence, the Origen's defence of the doctrine of trinity has been described as the stepping stone for Arius heresy.

The Anti Trinitarian View of Arius

Arius, greatly influenced by the teaching of Monarchianism's monotheistic principle insisted that there is only one eternal God that was distinct from the incarnate Logos that had a beginning. Hence, according to Arius' teaching Jesus (the incarnate Logos) was not co-eternal, co-existent, co-substantial and co-equal with the Father. Arius' teaching was opposed by Athanasius. Athanasius in their time seemed to have had a proper grasp of the concept of the unity of God the Father and the Son that abhor subordination. He properly acknowledged the nature of the person of Christ as co-equal, co-eternal, co-existent and co-substantial with the Father while insisting on the construction of the doctrine of trinity that would not contradict its unity. The unequivocal position of Athanasius could be summed thus: The Son is of the same substance with the Father, but the two differ in personal substance. It has been argued that the sound construction of truth was based on his conviction that no creature but only the one who in himself is God can unite us with God.

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

This was the first Post-Apostolic Ecumenical (world) Council of the Church. It was at the instance of the First Pro-Christian, Emperor Constantine. Soon after the cessation of persecution, the church found herself in a dilemma of defining the relationship between God the father and His Son Jesus Christ. On the one hand in the West, people like

Tertullian had insisted on the co-equal, co-eternal, co-existence and co-substantial nature of the triune God (three persons in one God). Hence the evolution of the concept of Trinity which appeared to have negated the assumed 'Unitarian' concept of God by Judaizers.

During the second decade of the Fourth century, there arose what could be described as theological controversy in the church that bothered on the relationships of the persons in Trinity. It all started in Alexandria, one of the cities in the East of Roman Empire. The city, like many other cities in the empire had witnessed a tremendous conversion of pagans into Christianity. To many, it was like turning from Polytheism (belief in many gods) to monotheism (belief in one God). However, in AD 318, Alexander the Bishop of Alexandria, in his sermon had insisted that the new converts should be instructed to believe in God and believe also in Christ. He had used Origen's pictorial language to illustrate the relationship between Christ and God thus: 'the source of light and the brightness which we see as separate entity. In other words, the visible Christ who reveals the invisible God is one with God the Father. Alexander was vehemently opposed by one of the clergies, Arius (AD 250-336AD), who felt his bishop's teaching failed to establish a distinction among the three persons in Godhead i.e. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Arius' position was to zealously guard against any projection of the concept of Godhead that could tantamount to polytheistic conception of God in the Christian faith. According to him, God the Father alone is the true and eternal God who does not share His nature with any other personality. By implication, Arius, uncompromisingly taught with much eloquence that the Father and the Son cannot be the same. He insisted that "there was (a time) when Christ was not". Thus, Christ is neither God nor man but with a unique nature that is in between God and man. Arius in his position thought to

disabuse the minds of converts from pagan background to Christianity, of any Pagan orientation. He intended to prevent any carry over ideas of demi-gods attributes that were credited to heroes that were perceived as partly god and partly human. Consequently, Arius' teaching did not only stand to rob Christ of His deity but created doubts on the possibility of ever obtaining Salvation through the vicarious death of Christ. In other words, if Christ is a demi-God, (less than true God and of different essence from the Father, and was no time God), how could Christ save man from sin? To Arius, when Christ is referred to as God, it does not mean that Christ is eternal, or that Christ is equal to God or that He is co-existent with God. Rather, it just meant that He is a being who could by approximation be termed so for He is the first created being and the first creature ever. He sternly maintained that Christ was not the changeless Creator that has been from the dateless eternity. Arius had the support of Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia who in support of Arius stated that the "Son has a beginning but God is without beginning".

Even though Arius' teaching was more easily understood by converts from pagan background who found it difficult to comprehend the orthodox teaching that Christ is the word that has been from the dateless eternity, Bishop Alexander did not only disagree with Arius but also declared his teachings heretic. Arius' teaching was therefore condemned and he was consequently, excommunicated by a Synod convened by Bishop Alexander in 320 AD. Arius eventually took refuge in the support of Bishop Eusebius. The ensued theological acrimonies between the Bishop of Alexandria (the centre of intellectualism) and Bishop of Nicomedia, the political capital of Asia Minor, threatened the unity of the Empire and that of the church that had just survived the most dastardly persecutions. More to that, Emperor Constantine had looked forward to enhancing the unity of the whole

empire through a united front of the church. The report of the contentions within the church had seen the church asunder, particularly, the Greek part of the empire that was the largest part of the Empire. Constantine was never at ease with the divisions created by the theological divide in the empire. Dismayed by the split orchestrated by the theological trite, he assiduously made efforts to unite the rivalry parties by sending his adviser on religious matters, Bishop Ossius, with a letter to Bishop Alexander in Alexandria but the move failed to achieve its aim of reconciliation and making peace.

Heresies of Arius

The controversy that triggered the first post apostolic ecumenical council of the church emanated from the teachings of one Arius in the fourth century. Arius was born in 280 AD in Alexandria in Egypt but left for Antioch in Syria to enrol in the Lucian school where he was later ordained a priest. He rose to become one of the senior presbyters in charge of Baucalis. With his ascetic life, he commanded a lot of followers. Due to his unorthodox teachings on Christology and trinity he had a clash with the Bishop of Alexandria in 318 AD.

Arius' heretical teachings that owed much to secular Greek concept of God were that:

- i) He claimed that God the Father alone was really God and that the Son was essentially different from the father.
- ii) He insisted that the Son did not possess any of the divine attributes of eternity, immortality, sovereignty, perfect wisdom, goodness and purity.

- iii) He further taught that the Son- Jesus Christ never existed before he was begotten by the Father and that the Father produced him as a creature.
- iv) He believed that the Son of God is not therefore co-equal with the Father.
- v) He similarly believed that the Son is not of the same substance with the Father.
- vi) He asserted that the Son is not co-eternal with the Father.
- vii) He emphatically preached that the Son is created and therefore cannot be God. That the Father produced the Son as a creature even though as a creator of the rest creation, the Son existed apart from time before all things. Nevertheless, Son did not share in the being of God the Father.
- viii) He affirmed that the Son who was sinless and unchangeable at least in practice if not in nature was called God by grace and favour.

On the one hand, Arius attempted to distinguish the being of the Son from the being of creature though he accorded the Son the highest place next to God. On the other hand, he insisted that there is a difference between the being of the ingenerate God and the being of the created Son. *'God is only one God, alone is ingenerate, alone is everlasting, alone is unbegun'*. Arians' defence of monotheism and the utter transcendence of God favoured its ascendancy.

The position of the Orthodox Church, led by Athanasius saw Arius' teachings as heresies even though he found Eusebius the bishop of Caesarea, who canvassed for support for him. Only the bishop of Nicomedia dared to rise in support of Arius' teachings. Athanasius (one of the deacons of Alexandrian in company of his bishop that is the bishop

Alexandria sternly opposed Arius' teachings. The position of the Orthodox Church that was projected by Athanasius was that: if Christ was anything less than God, then he could not be the saviour of the world, as only God could restore man to communion with himself.

The whole empire now divided on the theological controversy on Trinity by the persisting split views of East and West, Emperor Constantine summoned the meeting of the council of bishops at Nicaea on the 20th May 325 AD to settle the controversy because of its political implication on the empire.

This informed the earliest instance of the conveyance of the council of Bishops under the auspices of the Emperor in AD 325 at Nicaea to forge a pathway for peace. It was attended by Bishops from Europe, Rome, Libya, Asia, Persia, Scythia and Spain. Indeed, it was the first world council of churches in the history of the church. It attracted not less than two hundred and twenty bishops in attendance who all enjoyed imperial sponsorship as they all did not only have their expenses catered for but were also honoured as the guests of the Emperor. Suffice it to note that Constantine presided over the opening session of the first ecumenical council meeting. The thorny, theological debates at the meeting had closed their eyes to the perianal question of the relationship between the state and the church, especially with obvious pre-eminence of political leadership of Emperor Constantine

At the council, Arius courageously stated his stand that, Christ was divine but not a deity. Hence, according to him, Christ was not co-equal, nor co-eternal, nor co-existent, nor co-substance with God. He was opposed by Athanasius (The successor of Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria). Athanasius who was well theologically schooled in the catechetical school of Alexandria opposed Arius' doctrine. Athanasius` who then was in his thirties, thought that Christ

had existed from eternity past with the Father and that Christ was co-substantial i.e. of the same substance (homooousios) with the Father but a different person from the Father. His argument was that any theological position that makes the Son Jesus to be less than God, disqualifies Him from being the Saviour of mankind. Thus, to Athanasius, eternal relationship of the Son with the Father is essential attribute of the Saviour that can procure for mankind eternal salvation. To Athanasius therefore, Christ was co-equal, and co-eternal and co-existent and co-'substantial (homooousios) with the Father. Thus, it was Athanasius' teaching that eventually emerged as the orthodox position of the church while Arius' teaching was condemned. The council formulated an orthodox creed known as Nicæan creed thus:

“We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substances (ousios) of the Father; God from God, light from light, very God from very God, begotten not made, of one substance (homooousios), that is co-substantial with the father, through him all things are made, both in heaven and on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, was made man, flesh, suffered, and rose again. On the third day, ascended into heaven and is coming to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit.

“and those who say there was a time when he was not”, and: Before he was begotten he was not and: “He came into being from nothing” or those who pretend that the Son of God is “of another substance (hypostasis), or essence (ousia)” (then the Father) or “created” or “alterable” or “mutable”, the

*catholic and apostolic church places under a curse”
(Anathema).*

Nicaea Creed of AD 325 as could be seen above clearly defined the Christian belief in the Three-Persons of the Trinity with the following emphasis:

- i) The Son is of the same substance (or essence) with the Father and
- ii) That the son was incarnated ie He came down from heaven and was made (flesh) for the salvation of humanity.

The implication of the Nicaea Creed was that the orthodox stand of the Early church included the fact that Christ was fully God and truly human.

Secondly, the implication of Nicaea Creed was that Christ was to be understood to be no less divine than the Father and that both the Father and the Son were one in single Godhead. Thus, ruling out Arian misconception. Nicaea Creed should not be confused with Nicene Creed in the liturgy of some churches today: including the Anglicans, the Roman Catholics and many other mainline churches as statement of orthodoxy. The triumph of Orthodoxy in Nicaea that was celebrated with a banquet with all bishops in attendance was short-lived as the defection of Arian did not in any way put to rest the theological debates and acrimonies that spurred up the banishment of many children of God particularly the adherents to orthodoxy by the emperor.

Post-Nicaea Council Controversy

The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD did not in any way annihilate the Arian controversy that led to conveyance of the Nicaea Council to address and clarify the authenticity of the condemnation of Arius teaching. Arius and his

supporters like Eusebius of Nicomedia who were earlier exiled were admitted back into the church after ostensibly accepting the Nicene Creed. Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, the most outstanding vocal opponent of Arianism was ultimately sent on exile. So, for a period of about five decades, orthodoxy was in the crucible of Arianism and anti-Nicene creed. The triumph of orthodoxy in Nicaea as already noted did not actually spell the death of Arianism but rather fostered continued debates because of the apparent change in Christian thought that took place in the late third century. Before then, it would appear as if the notion of the generality of the people about Christ was that of a Creator that was subordinate to the Father. But with the influx of people into the church and with eventual emphasis on Christ as Redeemer it became impossible to conceive of a Redeemer other than God; otherwise, He Himself would need redemption. This is the basis of Athanasius rejection of Arius' view and the adoption of the formula of Nicaea Creed that stated that Christ was of one substance with the Father". He could redeem and save" because he was not part of the created order.

Even with this the people still needed to understand that Christ was co-substantial with God. Thus, as the Council of Nicaea seemed to have clarified the position of three persons in one Godhead the issue of the two natures (God-nature and human nature) of Christ called for clarifications.

In response to the challenge of understanding the dual nature of Christ, there were diverse theological positions from the three Christian centres:

i. Antioch ii. Alexandria and iii. Rome

i. Antiochians' View

The Christians at Antioch held the belief that Christ was man but that the significance of his life was that God lived

in Him. The Christians of Antioch who had much Jewish influence, insisted that God being God and human are separable and distinct. It was the projection of this school of thought that led to the development of the Monarchianism movement. One major proponent of the thought was Paul of Samosata the Bishop of Antioch.

ii. Alexandrians' View

Alexandria was a Greek centre for intellectualism. There is no gain-saying that Greek philosophy had strongly influenced the Christian thought in Alexandria. In the view of the Alexandrians, the puzzle of dual nature of Christ could be solved through the understanding of the "union" of God-nature and human-nature that made the God-man who was fully divine and fully human (divine-humanity).

Suffice it to note here that even in Antioch there were two extremes. On the one hand was Nestorius who thought that the man whom Mary bore was different from the divine personality that lived in Jesus. He opposed the use of the term "*theotikos*" (Mother of God). To him the nature could be separated but combine the worship.

On the other hand, the Eastern cities stressed the union of the two natures of Christ (divine and human) but fused them into one divine nature. This would mean that Christ was not real man. If Christ was not real man then He could not be human Saviour.

iii. Roman View

The stand of Church in Rome was that of Christ as a Mediator who stands where the need was. Thus, Christ was both God and human. This is the belief projected by people like Tertullian of Carthage and Augustine of Hippo.

Council of Constantinople AD 381

The demise of some of the principal actors in the first General Council of Bishops at Nicaea did not favour the church. Although some three days after the declaration of the Nicaean Creed, the three bishops of Nicaea, Nicomedia, and Chalcedon who were signatories to the Creed backed out from the stand of orthodoxy to affiliate with Arian faction. Athanasius who has been elevated to the position of bishop remained a faithful champion of orthodoxy in spite of the several incarcerations. Constantinus, the son of Constantine, had abrogated the Nicaean Creed in 350 AD and sent Athanasius who had just returned from exile back to exile.

It was amidst these rivalry stands that Emperor Theodosius thought it wise that there could not be any other way of bringing about peace in the empire except through restoration and religious adherence of the Nicaea Creed, particularly, the '*Homo-ousion*' doctrine. He then summoned another general Council of bishops that met in 381AD at Constantinople. The objective of the meeting was the reaffirmation of the Nicaean Creed and the '*Homo-ousion*' formula. Only about 150 bishops attended with Miletus, the bishop of Antioch, as the presiding bishop. Apart from the reaffirmation of the Nicaean Creed and the doctrine of *Homo-ousion*, the meeting also served to refute the teaching of one Macedonius (the priest of Antioch). As a bishop of the city he began to teach a strange doctrine known as *Macedonianism*: that the 'Holy Spirit is a mere creature and a ministering angel. Thus, the Holy Spirit is not God'. This led to the deposition of Macedonius. The council deemed it necessary to formulate a clear doctrinal statement on the third person of the Godhead.

Controversy on the Person of the Holy Spirit

According to Arius, the person of the Holy Spirit was the first created being by the Son. On the contrary Athanasius had taught that the Holy Spirit was of the same essence with the Father, though the Nicene Creed was silent on the nature of the Holy Spirit.

Arius and his ardent sympathizers had survived the Nicaea Creed of AD 325 with more than five decades of theological discords, disunity and debates in the Empire. The issue at stake was the divergent views on the God-humanity nature of Jesus Christ. The term “homoousios” adopted was not a satisfactory solution rather, it further triggered more theological enigma. On the one hand Athanasius solidly stood and championed the Nicæan Creed without any compromise that earned him five times exiles from Alexandria. Constantine himself remained a watchdog over the decisions of the Nicæan Council so that no one ever openly attacked the council’s decision when he was alive. His zeal for unity made him to recall Eusebius and Arius from exile.

After the death of Emperor Constantine, his three sons; Constantine II; Constantinus and Constancy had the Empire shared among themselves. The Eastern part (that was Anti-Nicaea creed) went to Constantinus. Constantine II and Constancy who had taken the West (the Pro-Nicene Creed), had a tussle that claimed the life of Constantine II in a war of AD 340, In AD 350, Constancy was murdered by Magnenthius who also was later defeated by Constantinus in a battle. Consequently, the Empire came under the leadership of Constantinus who was Pro-Arianism. Between AD 354, and AD 360 Constantinus made efforts to force the Anti-Nicene Creed on the Church. In AD 355 he had summoned some bishops whom he ordered to condemn Athanasius. Their appeal to the standing Canon fell on the

deaf ears of the Emperor who claimed. *“Whatever I will, shall be regarded as a Canon” ... Either obey or go into exile”*.

To Athanasius, Emperor Constantinus was worse than the Old Testament Saul and Ahab and the New Testament Pilate. Athanasius saw Constantinus as the fore runner of the Anti-Christ especially after banning the use of *“Ousios”* which invariably implied the imposition of Arian beliefs on the church. Thus, Constantinus fostered the belief of the extreme Arians that taught that the son was unlike (anomalous). The Church Fathers (people like Marcellus and his successor, Basil,) thereafter, taught that Jesus was like the Father in all respects including His essential being. Hence the use of term *homousios*”.

Basil in collaboration with his brother, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus (of Cappadocia), insisted that the Nicæan Creed (*homousios*) does not in any way nullify the distinct personalities (hypostases) of the Triune God (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit). So then, the Cappadocian Fathers affirmed *“Ousia,”* the Greek equivalent of the Latin word *substantial*. According to Basil the Trinitarian baptismal formula demanded that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are equal but distinct. The three Cappadocian Fathers argued that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit operated inseparably. Thus, *“every action begins with the Father, proceed through the Son and is completed in the Holy Spirit”*.

Thus Cappadocia theology appeared to have been a palliative panacea for the theological controversies for decades until Pro-Nicene Emperor Theodosius (from West) ascended the throne in AD 379. Emperor Theodosius who conclusively made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in AD 380 summoned the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 to mainly reaffirm Nicæa Faith

and theology as the orthodox belief of the church. The Council of Constantinople eventually put to rest the bickering of Arianism in Roman Empire.

The Council also confirmed the appointment of Nazianzus as the Bishop of Constantinople

The decision of the council included:

- i. The Reaffirmation of the condemnation of any form of Arianism and Macedonianism and Apollinarianism, and
- ii. The Council accepted Niceno-Constantinople Creed, to modify the original Nicaea Creed of AD 325. Niceno-Constantinople was similar to Nicene Creed but with additional article on the Holy Spirit that is therein described as: *'The Lord and Giver of Life', who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified, and who spoke through the prophets*". Between AD 340 and AD 360, Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople had thought that the Holy Spirit was a Minister" and 'Servant' on the same level with the angels. Thus, the Holy Spirit was created and subordinate to the Father and the Son, thus denying the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Constantinople, Council affirmed that the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit as co-equal, co-eternal and co-substantial with Father and Son.

The council deemed it necessary to formulate a clear doctrinal statement on the third person of the Godhead- the Holy Spirit thus:

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who spoke through the prophets; and the holy Catholic Church. We look forward to the resurrection of the body and of the world to come.

The Creed also had additional article about the Church as *'one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church'*. *We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins (and) we look for the resurrection of the dead and life of the world to come, Amen.*

- iii. The council renewed the legislation imposing upon the bishop the observation of diocesan and patriarchal limits.
- iv. The status of Constantinople, the Imperial Capital of the Empire in the East was given the prerogative of honour as the New Rome.
- v. The council rejected the consecration of Maxims as the Bishop of Constantinople.

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, Apostolic Creed and Athanasian Creed were the three greater universal creeds of the Church. However, Niceno Constantinople Creed is the only authoritative and authentic ecumenical statement of the Christian faith accepted by the Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox; oriental orthodox, Anglican and most protestant denominations. It seems to have suppressed, other creeds such as Apostolic' Creed, Athanasian Creed. Thus Arianism (the root of Modern Unitarianism and modernism), was rejected at the Cardinal of Constantinople.

Council of Ephesus

The preferred answer or solution to the Trinitarian controversy (i.e. eternal relationship of the Son to the Father) at the Council of Nicaea had triggered Christological controversy (i.e. debates on the relationship between the human and divine natures of Christ. The schools of theological thought in Alexandria and Antioch were divided on this with the former's laying more emphasis on the deity of Christ and the latter on the humanity of Christ at the expense of his deity.

A typical instance of this was Apollinarius Christology. Apollinarius had taught that Christ had true body and soul but the Spirit was replaced with the divine “Logos” that dominated the passive body and soul in the person of Christ. Apollinarius projected the deity of Christ at the expense of His true human nature. On the other hand, Nestorius who was one of the popular theologians in Antioch before he was made bishop of Constantinople by Theodosius II had developed a teaching on Christology in Antioch that rejected the use of the title Theotokes (the Mother of God) for the Virgin Mary. On his consecration as the Bishop of Constantinople, Nestorius found out that, what he had always taught in Antioch was opposed by the See of Constantinople. He emphasized the dual nature of Christ and suggested that theotokes be replaced with ‘Christotokos’ (Christ bearer). This was his attempt to answer the question of: How can Jesus Christ be a man and not be a sinner since all humans are sinners by nature since the fall of Adam”. Nestorius therefore taught that the incarnate was given birth to by Mary and not the divine Logos that is eternal and existed even before Mary. He insisted that on the union of human and divine natures of Christ: fully God and fully man.

Nestorius’ teaching brought him into dispute with Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria. The Council of Ephesus was therefore convened in AD 431 by Emperor Theodosius II. This third ecumenical council was to further confirm the Nicaea Creed as the orthodox doctrine of the Church in Condemnation of Nestorius teaching. The Council had in attendance about 250 bishops.

At the council, the treaty of Nestorius was anathematized (condemned). Nestorius was deposed from his See and the Council approved the use of the title “Mary the Mother of God. It has been argued that the rejection of Nestorius was

more of a play of political rivalry between Alexandria and Constantinople. Nestorius was declared heretic with all his followers. Similarly, Pelagius was also condemned. The Council consequently passed a decree of excommunication or deposition for a clergy who did not accept and or consent to the council's decrees. The Council insisted on the orthodoxy of the Creed of the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Any departure from the tenets of the Nicene Creed, was condemned. The Council declared that all Bishops should be restricted to their dioceses without interference with any other bishop's church affairs.

Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)

This was the Fourth ecumenical Council of the Church that took place AD 451. The council made a very significant contribution in the definition of the church's orthodox statement on Christology. Emperor Mercian had convened the Council of Chalcedon to affirm the dual nature of Christ, thereby repudiating the teaching of single nature of Jesus Christ. In AD 444 Eutyches, one of the elderly monks of Constantinople, had began to teach that there was only one "physic" (Nature in the incarnated Christ. Thus, Eutyches had denied that Christ had human nature. He insisted that Jesus had one single nature that was Divine. He blurred together two natures.

Eutychian

Eutychian believed in the fusion of the two natures (the divine and the human) in such a way that the humanity of Christ was completely absolved in His divine nature. In other word the human nature was assimilated in the divine. The implication of this was that, according to Eutychian, the human body of Christ was different from our normal natural human nature. This view was rejected at the Council of Constantinople in AD 448, not without an appeal to Leo the

then Bishop of Rome. The dispute ended up with the proposition of a Christology as follows; that:

- there were two natures (which are permanently distinct) in one personality,
- the two natures (divine and human were united in one Person with each one performing its own proper function in the incarnate life,
- from the unity of the divine personality and human personality follows the communication,
- the work of redemption requires that a Mediator that is both divine and human, possible and impassable, mortal and immortal,
- the incarnation was an act of condescension on the part of God but that in it the Logos did not cease to be the very God and
- the manhood of Christ is permanent. Thus, an inference to the rejection of the Docetism (i.e. the denial of the reality of the suffering).

It was at this Council of Chalcedon that the definition of Jesus Christ's dual nature was clearly spelt out as Orthodox belief of the church. Thus, it spelt the universal church's acceptance of the teaching that: "Christ is the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man". He is consubstantial (homoousios) with the Father owing to the Godhead and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood. Jesus was therefore to be acknowledged in two natures in confusedly, "unchangeably", "indivisibly", and "inseparably". The implication was that the Council maintained the distinction in the divine and human natures of Christ and yet united in one person. The co-existence of the two natures of Christ was known as hypostatic union.

The Council of Chalcedon also ratified the creeds of Nicaean and Constantinople while affirming the single personality of Christ and condemned the teachings of Nestorius and Eutyches. The council rejected the Monophysite doctrine: that is, the belief that Christ has just one nature. The Council of Chalcedon rated the churches of Constantinople and Rome on equal status. It declared that Constantinople held position of authority equal to Rome.

Chalcedon's Definition

The sum of Chalcedon's definition of Christology was that Christ is "truly God", perfect in "Godhead", the Son of God who was "begotten of the Father before the ages". Yet, he is also "truly man" "perfect in manhood" and was born of the Virgin Mary. The deity and humanity are not parted or divided into two persons but Christ is "one person and one being". Nor are His deity and humanity to be blurred together. The difference of the divine and human natures is in no wise taken away by reason of the union but rather the properties of each are preserved". This Christ is "made known in two natures which exist without confusion, without change, without division and without separation.

The Chalcedonian Christology and Creed

After much debates and acrimonies on the dual natures of the one person of Christ, it was at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon that a final orthodox stand was taken. The orthodox definition of Christology that was formulated at Chalcedon spelt the utter defeat and condemnation of Eutyches and all the adherents of his teachings of Monophysite in AD 451. The decision and the consequent Chalcedonian Creed formulated was:

We following the holy Fathers all with one consent teach men to confess and one and same Son our Lord Jesus Christ The same perfect in Godhead and also

perfect in manhood; truly God and also truly man, of reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to Godhead and consubstantial with us according to manhood; in all things like unto us without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to Godhead and in these last days, for us and for our salvation born of virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to manhood one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, in-confusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly inseparably, the distinction of nature's being by no means taken away by the union but rather the proper being of each nature being preserved and assuming one person and in one substance, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son the Only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us and the creed of the Only Fathers has handed down to us.

The Christology formulated at the Council of Chalcedon was in no doubt quite comprehensive. The following could be deduced from the orthodox position of the council:

- i. That the properties of both divine and human natures are applicable to the one incarnate Person. In other words the incarnate Christ was both omniscience and as well limited in knowledge
- ii. that the suffering of the God-man was as a result of the reality of the infinite human nature while yet the divine is impassable
- iii. that is the divinity and not the humanity that constitutes the root and basis of the personality Christ; and
- iv. that the Logos did not unite with a distinct human individual but a human nature. There was not first an individual man with whom the Second Person in

Godhead associated Himself. The union was affected with the substance of humanity in the womb of the virgin.

In conclusion the Council of Chalcedon is the fourth crucial clarification on the person of Christ. The chronological sequence of Early Church Council's decisions are as follows:

- i. In Nicaea, the deity of Christ was affirmed against Arius,
- ii. In Constantinople, the full humanity of Christ was affirmed in condemnation to Apollinarianism's teaching,
- iii. In Ephesus, against Nestorius, Christ was affirmed as one person, and
- iv. In Chalcedon, contrary to Monophysite teaching of Eutyches, it was affirmed that the deity and humanity of Christ remain distinct and are not blurred together.

Self-Assessment Test

- i) *Explain the Trinitarian controversy that led to the first Post-Apostolic Ecumenical Council*
- ii) *State the Anti-Trinitarian views of Arius that were declared heresies at the Council of Nicaea*
- iii) *Highlight the Anti-Trinitarian views of Arius*
- iv) *What were the major decisions of the Nicaea Council of AD 325?*
- v) *Identify and explain the various Post-Nicaea positions of the Early Church*
- vi) *State the controversy that led to the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 and what was the decisions of the Council?*
- vii) *Write notes on*
 - a) *The Council of Ephesus and its decision on the use of the term theotokos and*
 - b) *The Council of Chalcedon*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achunike, C.H. What is Church History? An African Perspective, Nigeria: Re Carles and Patrick Ltd., Nimo, 1996.
- Boer, R. H. *A Short History of The Early Church*, Grand Rapids Michigan: Daystar Press. 1976.
- Cairns Earle E. *Christianity through the centuries A History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapid Zondervan, 1996.
- Dowley, Tim. ed. *A Lion Hand Book the History of Christianity*. Great Britain, Lion Publishing, 1980.
- Evans, A. C. and Porter E. S. *Dictionary of New Testament Background A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, England: Inter Versity Press. 2000.
- Foster, John. *SPCK International Study Guide 5 CHURCH HISTORY 1 The First Advance AD 29-500*, London: SPCK. 1972. 144.
- Galbraid, Vivian H. *An Introduction to the study of history*. London, C.A. Watts, 1964.
- Hart, A. T. *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2000.
- King James Version Bible.
- MacGregor, J. and Prys, M. *1001 Surprising Things You Should Know about Christianity*, Benin City: Praise God Christian Publication. 2002.
- Mark Galli Christian History in *Christian history institute* 1990

- Mayey, the Historian's Craft 1969.
- McDowell, J. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, USA*: Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1999.
- Meyer, S. C. *THE CHURCH: From Pentecost to the Present*, Chicago: Moody Press.1969.
- Michael Williams Aug 28 2014 and 2011-2017 Got Questions Ministries [www, compelling Truth](http://www.compellingtruth.org).
- Murphy O. Conner, cited in Evans and Porters Persecution in Early Church: A Gallery of the Persecuting Emperors [https//chrianhistoryinstitute.org](https://chrianhistoryinstitute.org) 2019.
- Robertson, O. P. *Understanding the land of the Bible a Biblical Theological Guide*, New Jersey 1996.
- Schmitt, P. C. *Root Out Of Dry Ground: A History of The Church*, Grand Rapids: Minnesota U.S.A. Fellowship Publications. 1979.
- Schmitt, P. Charles. *Root Out of a Dry Ground a History of the Church*. Minnesota, Grand Rapids 1979.
- Schwarz, John. *The Compact Guide to the Christian Faith*. Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers, 1999.
- Shelley, Bruce L. *Church History in Plain Language 3rd ed.* Nashville Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- Thomas, P. C. *General Council of the Church (A Compact History)*, Bandar 145 Boer, R.H. A Short History of the Early Church, Grand Rapids Michigan: Daystar Bombay: St Paul Publication, 1993. Pp 1-129
- Willmington, H. L. *Willmington's GUIDE to the BIBLE* Sri Lanka: Christian Literature Crusade. 1995.
- Yates, T. *The Expansion of Christianity*, England: Lion Publishing; 2004.