The background of the cover is a photograph of a Gothic cathedral's interior. The image is dark, with a prominent vertical shaft of light coming from a high window in the center, creating a dramatic contrast. The architectural details, such as the pointed arches and ribbed vaulting, are visible in the shadows.

The  
Church  
in  
History



B. K. Kuiper

THE CHURCH IN HISTORY

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Christian Schools International

*IN THE UNITED STATES*

3350 East Paris Ave. S.E.

P.O. Box 8709

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49512

*IN CANADA*

P.O. Box 39

Norwich, Ontario N0J 1P0

*ALSO AVAILABLE FROM*

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

2140 Oak Industrial Drive N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505 /

P.O. Box 163, Cambridge CB3 9PU U.K.

Printed in the United States of America 24

26 25 24 23 22 21 20

30 31 32 33 34 35 36

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C.S.I. ISBN 978-0-87463-225-5

Eerdmans ISBN 978-0-8028-1777-8

[www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com)

# THE CHURCH IN HISTORY

*by*

B. K. KUIPER



## CSI PUBLICATIONS

Christian Schools International Curriculum Department  
under Christian School Education Foundation and  
Canadian Christian Education Foundation Inc. grants  
Grand Rapids, Michigan Burlington, Ontario



WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO.

## Preface

The story of the Christian Church is intensely interesting. It deals with some of the most dramatic episodes in history. For the children of God it is also instructive and inspiring. They regard it as a heritage that should be passed on to their children.

In recognition of this the National Union of Christian Schools (now Christian Schools International) requested Mr. B. K. Kuiper to write a manuscript that could be used for a textbook in church history. He complied, and *The Church in History* was the gratifying result.

Mr. Kuiper brought to his task a lifetime of study and research in this field, as well as his outstanding ability as a teacher of history. He drew from a rich background as he wrote this book. Yet he constantly kept in mind the needs of the student and the general reader for whom he was writing.

The first edition of *The Church in History* was hardly off the press when Mr. Kuiper began to write revisions and to suggest certain structural changes.

Throughout the six printings of the first edition, teachers were both generous with their praise and helpful with criticism. These suggestions caused the Education Committee of the National Union (now Christian Schools International) to appoint a study committee in March, 1960, to determine the advisability of a revision. The report of this study committee led to the appointment of the revision committee, which body determined the nature and extent of the revision and served as consultants throughout.

The addition of a chapter on the Church in Canada, the insertion of sections on the historical development of the sects, the updating of all current material, and the elimination of much detail improved the usefulness of the book.

All of the retained maps have been redrawn and new maps added to correlate with the text. The value of the time lines is obvious. The selection of pictures is broadened, the number doubled, and their quality improved by offset printing. The questions and projects suggested at the end of the chapters should aid the teacher and the pupil in critical thinking on the meaning and relevancy of the contents.

It is our fervent hope that those who read this book may learn to love not only church history but also the Church itself, for it is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## *In Appreciation*

Many persons had a part in the publishing of this church history. It is well-nigh impossible to list the names of all those who contributed in some way to the original edition. We wish to acknowledge with gratitude the work of Miss Beth Merizon as the chief editor of the first edition.

For co-ordinating the work of revising *The Church in History*, our sincere appreciation goes to Mr. John S. Brondsema. We are also and especially indebted to Mr. John Rooze for intensive research and rewriting; to Dr. John Kromminga for serving as chairman of the evaluating committee and composing the chapter "The Churches Seek Co-operation and Union"; to Mr. Marvin Schans, Mr. Henry J. Kuiper, and Mr. Martin Vanden Berg for their textual assistance and respective contributions to improve this book as a high-school text.

We wish to thank the Reverend John Vriend for evaluating the chapter on Canada. We acknowledge with gratitude the technical assistance of Mr. Cornelius Lambregtse. The time lines were drawn by Miss Greta Rey and the art work and maps were done by Mr. George Benes.

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# *Contents*

## PART ONE

### WHEN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WAS YOUNG

	Page
Chapter 1—The New Testament Church Is Born.....	3
Chapter 2—The Church Is Tempered, 33–313.....	7
Chapter 3—The Church Grows Inwardly, 33–325.....	14
Chapter 4—The Church Is Victorious, 313.....	23
Chapter 5—The Church Consolidates, 325–451.....	29
Chapter 6—The Church Deteriorates, 100–461.....	43
Chapter 7—The Church Survives and Grows Again, 376–754.....	47

## PART TWO

### THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Chapter 8—The Church Loses Territory, 632–732.....	61
Chapter 9—The Church Forms an Alliance, 751–800.....	69
Chapter 10—The Church and Papal Development, 461–1073.....	75
Chapter 11—The Church in Bondage to the State, 885–1949.....	80
Chapter 12—The Church Is Divided, 1054.....	86
Chapter 13—Monasticism and the Cluny Reform.....	91
Chapter 14—The Church Makes Efforts to Free Itself, 1049–1058.....	96
Chapter 15—The Church Continues to Free Itself, 1059–1073.....	102
Chapter 16—The Church Is Forced to Compromise, 1073–1122.....	107
Chapter 17—The Church Inspires the Crusades, 1096–1291.....	116
Chapter 18—The Church Rises to Its Height of Power, 1198–1216.....	123
Chapter 19—The Church Declines in Power, 1294–1417.....	134
Chapter 20—The Church Is Stirred from Within, 1200–1517.....	140

## PART THREE

### THE CHURCH IN THE REFORMATION

Chapter 21—The Church Is Shaken, October 31, 1517.....	157
Chapter 22—The Church Is Convulsed, 1517–1521.....	169

Chapter 23—The Church Is Reformed in Germany.....	182
Chapter 24—The Reformation in Switzerland.....	187
Chapter 25—The Anabaptists .....	204
Chapter 26—The Reformation in Western Europe.....	210
Chapter 27—The Church Is Reformed in Scotland, 1557–1570.....	215
Chapter 28—The Church Is Reformed in England, 1534–1563.....	220
Chapter 29—The Roman Church Undertakes Reform, 1545–1563.....	230
Chapter 30—The Protestant Churches Fight for Their Lives, 1546–1648.....	235

## PART FOUR

### THE CHURCH AFTER THE REFORMATION

Chapter 31—The Church in England Continues to Ferment, 1558–1689.....	249
Chapter 32—The Congregationalists; the Baptists.....	260
Chapter 33—Arminianism; the Quakers.....	266
Chapter 34—Pietism; the Moravians.....	271
Chapter 35—Socinianism; Unitarianism; Modernism.....	280
Chapter 36—The Methodists .....	284
Chapter 37—The Eastern and the Roman Church.....	296
Chapter 38—Religious Life in Germany and England.....	301
Chapter 39—The Reformed Churches Survive Persecution.....	307
Chapter 40—The Church Grows Once More, 1500 to the Present.....	318

## PART FIVE

### THE CHURCH IN THE NEW WORLD

Chapter 41—The Church Enters the New World.....	325
Chapter 42—The Church Experiences a Great Awakening.....	343
Chapter 43—The Church as the Young Nation Is Formed.....	347
Chapter 44—The Church in the Early Nineteenth Century.....	352
Chapter 45—The Church in a Time of Turmoil.....	361
Chapter 46—The Church Faces New Problems.....	373
Chapter 47—The Church in Canada.....	383
Chapter 48—The Church Seeks to Preserve the Faith.....	388
Chapter 49—The Churches Seek Co-operation and Union.....	393
Chapter 50—A Look Backward and Forward.....	398



# Maps

The World in Which the Church Developed Its Doctrine .....	16
The Roman Empire .....	26
Cities of the Five Patriarchs .....	41
Barbarian Migrations .....	51
Final Location of the Invading Tribes .....	53
Europe Is Christianized .....	56
The Expansion of Mohammedanism .....	67
The Papal States .....	71
The Division of Charlemagne's Empire .....	81
The Church Is Divided (1054) .....	89
Significant Cities of the Medieval Church .....	135
The Land That Luther Traveled .....	175
Europe as Calvin Knew It .....	195
The Religious Situation in 1648 .....	244
The Colonists Bring the Church to the New World .....	333

*part one*

# *When the Christian Church Was Young*

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS BORN

THE CHURCH IS TEMPERED

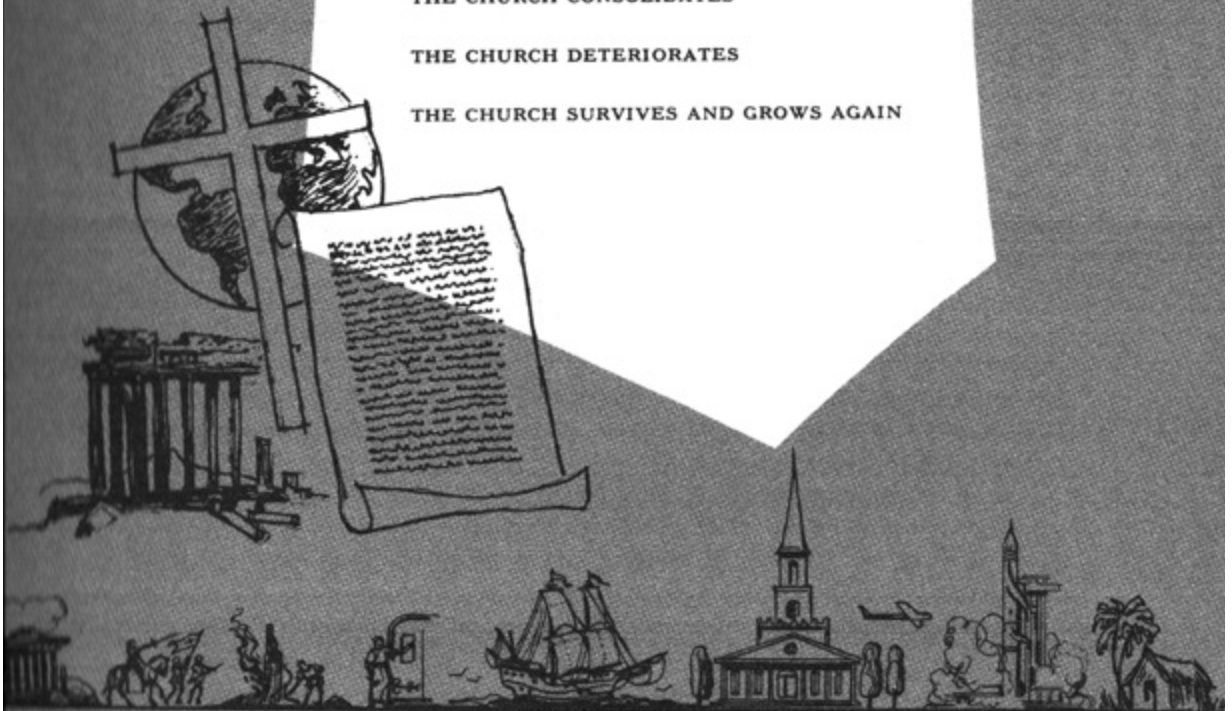
THE CHURCH GROWS INWARDLY

THE CHURCH IS VICTORIOUS

THE CHURCH CONSOLIDATES

THE CHURCH DETERIORATES

THE CHURCH SURVIVES AND GROWS AGAIN



## *Part One*

### *WHEN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WAS YOUNG*

In this first part of our book we are going to observe the early growth of the Christian Church. We shall see it develop from one small congregation in Jerusalem to a giant organization reaching into many lands. As the Church grew in numbers and in territory, it developed a form of organization and government. As it grew in its understanding of the truth, it issued carefully worded statements of belief.

Not long after the Church's beginning it began to suffer persecution, first at the hands of the Jews and then at the hands of the pagans. We shall see how the Church was delivered from this persecution and how Christianity became the approved religion of the State.

In this early period, too, the Church had to withstand a great invasion of barbarians from the North, who plundered the towns and cities of the great Roman Empire and overthrew the government. As the first section of our book closes we find the Church carrying on the stupendous task of Christianizing and educating the newly established barbarian kingdoms.

When beginning the reading of each new chapter it will be well to take note of the dates given in the heading, for often a new chapter will cover the same period of time covered in the previous chapter. If we bear this in mind, we shall know just where we are in point of time.

# *The New Testament Church*

## *Is Born*

1. *The Background of the Church*
2. *The Nature of the Church*
3. *The Physical Preparation for the Church*
4. *The Spiritual Preparation for the Church*
5. *The Expansion of the Church*
6. *The Character of the Church*

### **1. The Background of the Church •**

Those who know the Old Testament story, the promise of the Messiah, the account of the life of Jesus, and the records of the acts of the apostles have had the finest possible introduction to the history of the Christian Church.

Originally God's revelation was to all men. Only with Abraham, the first Hebrew, did He limit the scope of His promised redemption to the Old Testament

people, and even then He assured this father of all faithful that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed. When the New Testament Church was founded, this promise was fulfilled (Galatians 3:8) by the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Now, as at the beginning, all men would come under the preaching of the true religion.

The Hebrew people were the recipients of the Old Testament Truth, and to them

Jesus came as the great final revelation of God (Hebrews 1:1-2). But they rejected their own kinsman as the Messiah. Following their rejection of Him, the Gospel was sent by direction of God to the Gentiles.

Our Christian faith, therefore, has its ancestry in the Hebrew religion. Jesus is the Messiah who is the fulfillment of the promises made to the Old Testament people. Time and again this relation is brought to mind by Matthew. Often when recording some incident in the life of Jesus, he says, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets."

## 2. The Nature of the Church •

When through His preaching, His atoning death, and His resurrection Jesus transformed the Old Testament national "Church" to the Church of the New Testament, He distinctly indicated the spiritual nature of this new institution. He did not arrange for an organization; He taught the principles upon which it should be built. He did not tell His disciples what the mechanical structure of the Church was to be; He sent them out to preach a salvation by faith in His name. Even when He warned about the opposition which they were to experience, He talked not about Roman emperors, but about the "gates of hell."

When He was ready to leave this earth, Jesus promised the Spirit of Truth who would lead the disciples into all truth. Jesus stated that the coming of this Spirit was to be the prearranged sign that His followers should now go out from Jerusalem to the "uttermost parts of the earth." All of these teachings are evidences of the fact that this new Church was to be a

spiritual entity—one founded and directed by the Holy Ghost.

## 3. The Physical Preparation for the Church •

Scripture says, "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son." (Galatians 4:4). Such a statement is a clear indication that the world was prepared by God for the arrival of Jesus to do His redeeming work. In what way was it prepared? What were the conditions in the world when the New Testament Church began and when it first spread out from Jerusalem?

Rome ruled the "world." (See map page 26.) That this fact was of significance to the coming of Christ is evident from Luke's frequent references to the historical events of the Empire. He makes such statements as these: "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus" and "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar."

This great Empire prepared the physical scene for the spread of the Gospel. It gave peace in place of constant tribal warfare; it built a great network of roads and bridges that made travel possible all over the then-known world; it cleared the sea of pirates so that trade by sea and travel by ship became common practice; it protected its citizens from robbers and rioting. All of these conditions favored the easy movement of the messengers of Christ so that along the many roads which Rome had set up for her military purposes the Gospel of peace went out to the world.

## 4. The Spiritual Preparation for the Church •

Not only did these physical conditions help the cause of the new missionaries, but the spiritual and intellectual climate was also readied for their

work. Greece had spread her culture throughout the Near East and had "conquered" Rome with her civilization.

The Greek language had become the world language, one that would enable Paul to communicate with all his hearers in that part of the Roman Empire where he did most of his work. When Paul quoted the Old Testament to the Jews whom he met on his journeys, his quotations were from the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament made as early as two hundred years before Christ.

Greek philosophy had made many people doubt their gods whose strange activities now began to fade into myth and legend. The Roman gods came into disrepute, and many officials of the Empire continued to encourage religion only because such belief served to curtail revolt among the common people. The Roman state religion was clearly a political affair that offered no peace of mind to a disturbed soul. All this left a moral vacuum that boded no good for the world.

Under such conditions the Gospel came

with its promise of peace, pardon from sin, rest for the heavy laden. Here was assurance, forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ. This was the message that struck home, and the fullness of time made the rapid spread of this Word possible.

#### 5. The Expansion of the Church •

Many factors caused the Church to be extended. Direct revelation to Peter indicated that Gentiles also were to be included in the Church. The stoning of Stephen and the persecutions by Saul and others scattered the early Christians. Jews of the Dispersion, who had witnessed the events of Pentecost, carried the message of salvation when they returned to their homes.

Official missionaries, such as Paul, brought the Gospel to many pagan communities. Unofficial missionaries, the early converts, were themselves enthusiastic witnesses.

#### 6. The Character of the Church •

In the beginning the Church of Jerusa-

Remains of an  
Ancient Synagogue  
at Kfar Nachum  
(Capernaum)

*Courtesy  
Israel Office  
of Information*





A General View  
of Nazareth

Courtesy  
Israel Office  
of Information

lem was known for its spiritual beauty. The members were united by a spirit of love. This was shown in their sharing of material goods and their concern for the welfare of fellow members. They "were of one heart and of one soul."

The young Church was also marred by corruption and dissension. Selfish interest became a stumbling block. Factions, lawsuits, abuses of the Lord's Supper, and other problems faced the Apostolic

Church. The Jewish and Gentile Christians often found it very difficult to extend the hand of Christian brotherhood.

In spite of human shortcomings, the Church is the body of Jesus Christ. For it God prepared the world; for it Christ gave Himself; for it the apostles labored and suffered.

Now, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, the stone cut from the mountain (Daniel 2:35) was about to fill the earth.



1. *What is the Church? What is its work? Who is its head?*
2. *What do the verses from Galatians 3:8-14 indicate about the relation of the Old Testament Hebrew people to the New Testament believers?*
3. *What does the phrase "the fulness of the time" mean with reference to Jesus' coming to earth? (Galatians 4:4)*
4. *What work did Jesus do to found His Church?*
5. *What work did the Holy Spirit do for the early Church?*
6. *Why would Pilate write the placard for the cross of Jesus in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin?*
7. *How did Greek culture affect the spread of the Gospel by the early Church?*
8. *Why was it difficult for the Jews to understand that they must go to the Gentiles? How were they convinced that they should do so?*
9. *Is the Church spiritual or physical? Why?*
10. *What was the function of the miracles which were performed in the early Christian Church?*
11. *What was the culture of Greece?*
12. *Philip went to Samaria and founded a church; he also preached to an Ethiopian. Would he have done this before the new message of Christ had come to the Jews?*

## *The Church*

### *Is Tempered, 33-313*

1. *The Heroic Age of the Church*
2. *The Apostolic Church Is Persecuted*
3. *Nero, the First Emperor to Persecute Christians*
4. *Ignatius, Justin, and Polycarp*
5. *Persecution Is Continued Under Marcus Aurelius*
6. *A Lull in the Storm*
7. *Efforts Are Made to Destroy the Church*
8. *Galerius Calls a Halt*

**1. The Heroic Age of the Church •**  
Christ had forewarned His disciples: "They have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

Throughout the first three hundred years of its existence the Church was tempered in the fires of persecution. This period has been called the *Heroic Age of the Church*.

**2. The Apostolic Church Is Persecuted •** Many leaders and members of the newly formed Church suffered for their Christian faith. This persecution began already in the history recorded for us in the Bible. Peter and John were imprisoned and persecuted on more than one occasion. Both Stephen and James had died a martyr's death.





*Religious News Service Photo*

### St. Stephen Being Stoned

After an Engraving by Gustave Doré

At one time when Paul was in Corinth, he was dragged by a Jewish mob into the court of the Roman governor Gallio. This governor would have nothing to do with the case and brusquely told the Jews to run along. When the Jews continued to press their charges against Paul, the governor had attendants drive them out of the courthouse.

The initial sufferings were inflicted upon the followers of Christ by the Jews, but in course of time, the attitude of the Roman government toward the Christians underwent a change.

**3. Nero, the First Emperor to Persecute Christians** • In the year 64 during the reign of Emperor Nero, fire broke out in Rome. For six days and nights the fire burned. The greater part of the city was laid in ashes. The rumor got around that Nero himself had caused the city to be set on fire. This aroused great hatred in the people of Rome against the emperor. To turn this hatred away from himself Nero accused the Christians of having set fire to Rome. The accusation certainly was not true, but large numbers of Christians were arrested and a terrible persecution followed. Many Christians were even crucified. Some were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts; then big dogs were let loose upon them, and they were torn to pieces. Women were tied to mad bulls and dragged to death. After nightfall Christians were burned at the stake in Nero's garden. The Roman people who hated the Christians were free to come into the garden, and Nero drove around in his chariot wickedly enjoying the horrible scene.

During the persecution of Nero, according to tradition, the apostles Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome. It is related that Peter was crucified with his head down. This was done at his own request. He said he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Master. Paul, being a Roman citizen, was beheaded.

The slaughter of Christians at this time was confined to the city of Rome. It was not a general persecution throughout the whole of the Empire.

**4. Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin** • For the next one hundred years (from 68 to 161) there were no general persecu-

tions, but in different parts of the Empire many Christians were put to death. Outstanding among the martyrs of this period were Ignatius, bishop of Antioch; Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna; and Justin, the apologist who had written boldly and very ably in defense of the Christians.

Ignatius (67-110) was ordered by the emperor to be arrested and was sentenced to be thrown to the wild beasts in Rome. He longed for the honor of giving his life for his Savior, saying, "May the wild beasts be eager to rush upon me. If they be unwilling, I will compel them. Come, crowds of wild beasts; come, tearings and manglings, wracking of bones and hacking of limbs; come, cruel tor-

tures of the devil; only let me attain unto Christ."

Polycarp was the last one of those who had been personally taught by the apostles. He was arrested and brought into the amphitheater in Smyrna, which was filled with an immense multitude. Since there were no images of gods in the houses of worship of the Christians, the heathen rightly concluded that the Christians did not believe in the existence of the gods, and so they accused them of being *atheists* (people who believe there is no God). The proconsul reminded Polycarp of his great age, and urged him to show his penitence by joining in the cry, "Away with the atheists!" Polycarp

#### Nero Burns the Christians as Torches in His "Golden House"

From a painting by Henry de Siemieradzki

Philip Gendreau



looked straight at the excited crowd, pointed his finger at them, and cried, "Away with the atheists!"

Then the proconsul said, "Revile Christ, and I will release you."

But Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme Him, my King, who has saved me? I am a Christian."

To the crowd the proconsul then proclaimed, "Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian."

The crowds yelled, "Let him be burned!"

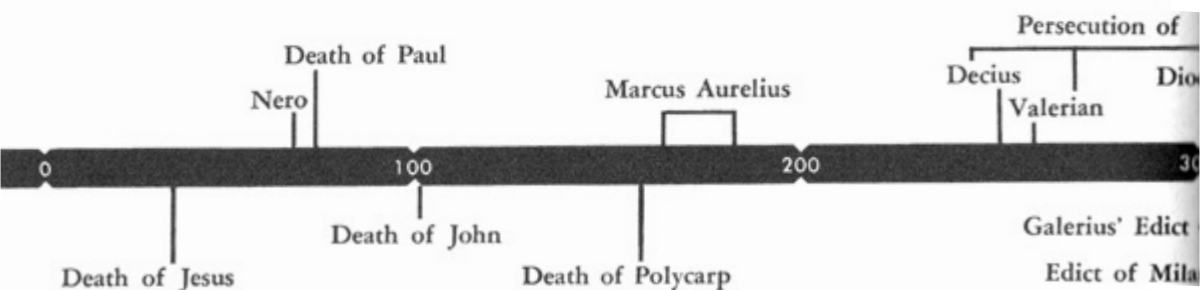
Wood was collected and made into a pile. Polycarp asked not to be fastened to the stake. "Leave me thus," he said. "He who strengthens me to endure the flames will also enable me to stand firm at the stake without being fastened with nails." The woodpile was lighted. While Polycarp prayed with a loud voice, "Lord God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I praise Thee that Thou hast judged me worthy of this day and of this hour, to participate in the number of Thy witnesses, and in the cup of Thy Christ,"

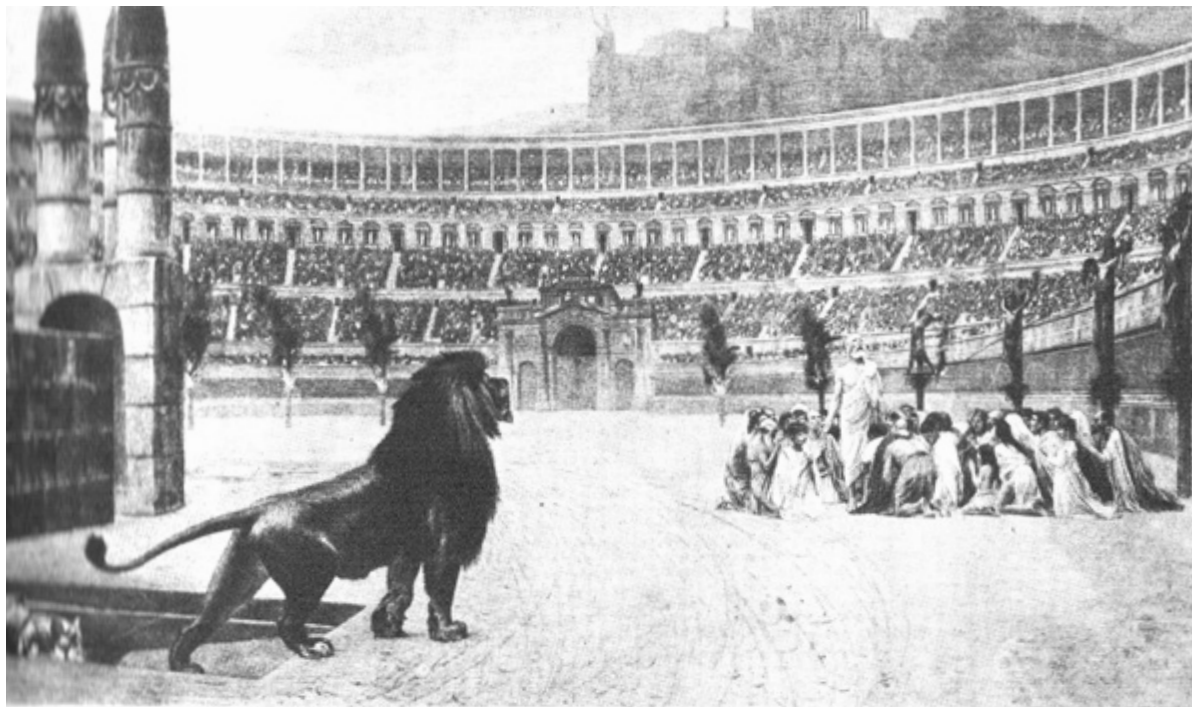
the flames consumed him. Polycarp's martyr death took place in the year 156.

Justin Martyr (100–166), who was a philosopher, was scourged and beheaded in Rome with six other Christians. In the face of death he bore with joy the witness to the truth. His last words were: "We desire nothing more than to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ; for this gives us salvation and joyfulness before His dreadful judgment seat. . . ."

**5. Persecution Is Continued Under Marcus Aurelius** • The emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180) decreed that the property of Christians should be given to their accusers. It is not difficult to see what would be the effect of this decree. Everywhere there were people who were eager to have the property of the Christians. These came forward with accusations. Persecution became well-nigh universal. Christians everywhere were sought out, brought to trial, and often executed with the greatest cruelty, while their property was taken from them and given to their accusers.

What happened to the Church in Lyons and Vienne in southern Gaul, now





*Religious News Service Photo*

### Christian Martyrs in the Amphitheater

France, can give us some idea of the severity of the persecution under Marcus Aurelius. By the most horrible tortures, they sought to make the Christians deny their faith. When at last the persecutors became convinced that no amount of torture would make the Christians deny their faith, they beheaded those Christians who were Roman citizens, and the others they threw to the wild beasts in the arena of the amphitheater.

From far and near the heathen flocked to the amphitheater to see this spectacle. All the condemned met their death with great joy. The last to die was Blandina. She had been a spectator of the death of many others, and she had constantly encouraged and exhorted them to remain steadfast to the end. With joy and thanksgiving she entered the arena. A net was thrown over her. Then she was exposed

to the fury of a wild bull. Several times the bull took her upon his horns and tossed her into the air. At last she was dead.

The bodies of the martyrs were burned, and the ashes were thrown into the river Rhone. The heathen said mockingly, "Now we shall see whether there will be a resurrection of their bodies."

**6. A Lull in the Storm** • With the death of Marcus Aurelius this period of persecution came to a close. For some seventy years the Church on the whole enjoyed rest, with the exception of the persecution under Septimius Severus from 200–211.

For a time this persecution raged with great violence in Alexandria in Egypt. Along with many others, the father of Origen was put to death. Origen, who



Christians  
Hunted Down  
in the  
Catacombs

*Religious News Service Photo*

later became the greatest scholar the Church had produced, was at the time of his father's death a young boy. It was only with the greatest difficulty that his mother restrained him from offering himself for martyrdom.

Another to suffer a martyr's death during this period was Irenaeus, the Church Father who had written the brilliant defense, *Against Heresies*.

**7. Efforts Are Made to Destroy the Church** • The first emperor who ordered a general persecution with the definite purpose of destroying the Church was Decius. Happily his reign lasted only two years, from 249 to 251. After a brief respite of seven years the Church suffered persecution under Valerian. Thereafter the Church was granted another period of tranquility, which lasted forty years. In the year 303 the emperor

Diocletian started a persecution which was continued by his successor Galerius until the year 311.

The tortures which were inflicted upon the Christians during these persecutions were so gruesome that it is not fit to describe them. Church buildings were demolished and Bibles were burned. These persecutions far surpassed, in the number of Christians who were martyred and in cruelty, anything the Christians had been made to suffer up to this time. These persecutions were a determined and systematic attempt to uproot Christianity completely, and wipe the Church off the face of the earth. An outstanding Christian who suffered martyrdom in these persecutions was Cyprian. Origen also died as the result of the tortures inflicted upon him at this time.

Many Christians in the city of Rome found a place of refuge in the catacombs,

which were underground passageways. The ground upon which Rome is built consists of comparatively soft stone. Burying people within the city limits was not permitted. So in many places just outside the city, long, narrow passages or tunnels were dug out of the soft stone for this purpose. There are so many of them that if they were all end to end they would be some five hundred miles long. They wind and cross each other in every direction so as to form a veritable maze. Many of these subterranean passages are thirty or more feet below the surface. In the sides of these galleries or passageways excavations were made row upon row. In these excavations the dead were laid to rest. It was in these catacombs that many Christians hid themselves in times of persecution. There they also laid to rest the mangled remains of their fellow believers who had died as martyrs.

The persecution under Diocletian and Galerius was the most severe of all. But it was also the last. Heathendom had finally exhausted its strength and spent its fury.

**8. Galerius Calls a Halt** • Emperor Galerius became ill and suffered unspeakable torments. His disease was dreadful and incurable. From his sickbed, which became his deathbed, he issued in the year 311 an edict which granted to the Christians permission to hold their assemblies again. He asked for their prayers in behalf of himself and the Empire.

The edict of Galerius was not a complete victory. What Galerius had granted was only a halfhearted toleration. Nevertheless the complete victory for the Church was near at hand.



1. How did persecution affect the Church?
2. Identify: Galerius catacombs.
3. Why did some of the Christians seek to be martyrs?
4. Why did the Romans persecute Christians? Notice from the account given that the persecutions were sporadic. In addition, many persecutions were local—in Rome only, or for a time in certain provinces. Relate the answer to the exclusive character of Christianity.
5. Why is there so little known of the Christian Church from A.D. 70 to A.D. 300?
6. Read about the lives of martyrs in Foxe's *Christian Martyrs*.
7. How are the catacombs described by Hawthorne in Chapter 3 of *The Marble Faun*?

*The Church**Grows Inwardly, 33-325*

1. *What Is Meant by the Church's Inward Growth*
2. *Is Doctrine Important?*
3. *The Apostolic Fathers*
4. *The Apologists*
5. *False Ideas Arise*
6. *The Church Fathers*
7. *A Creed and a Canon Emerge*
8. *The Development of the Episcopate*

**1. What Is Meant by the Church's Inward Growth** • From the above dates you will see that the things to be discussed in this chapter happened in the same period of time as the things treated in the second chapter.

The *inward growth* of the Church has to do with its *doctrine*, or beliefs, and its *organization*. This is vitally important,

for it concerns the truth of God and the system of government within the Church.

Gifted men spent their lives searching out the truths in the Scriptures and defending these truths against the false teachings of the day. In doing this they performed a great service for God and His Church. Certainly we want to know something about these men and about the

doctrines, or beliefs, which they championed. We also want to see how the Church developed a system of organization and government.

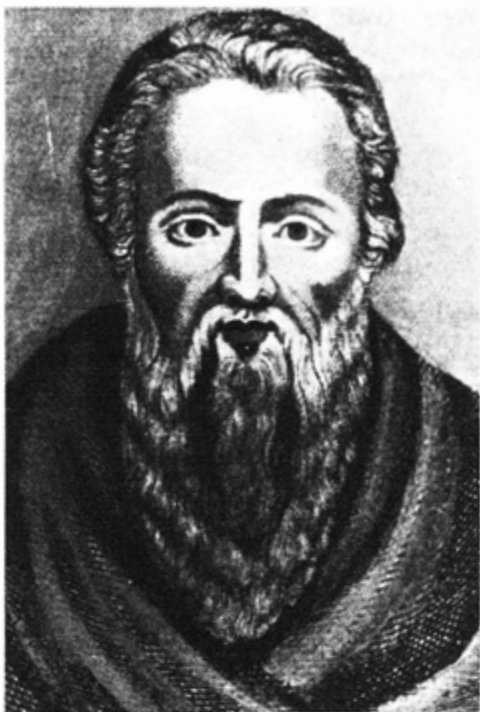
**2. Is Doctrine Important?** Many people today do not like doctrine. They say differences of opinion about doctrine have caused much debate and controversy. They say that the many divisions in the Church have been caused by debates about doctrine. Doctrine is not so important after all. What is important is a good Christian life. So runs their argument.

The effect of this kind of talk has been very bad. In many churches ministers teach the people and the children very little doctrine. The result is a great ignorance of Christian truth. The theory that doctrine is not important is not only shallow and foolish, it is also crafty. It is one of the devil's best tricks.

The history of the controversies about doctrine is a very important part of the history of the Church.

**3. The Apostolic Fathers** • After the time of the apostles the foremost leaders in the Church were the *Apostolic Fathers*. They were called the Apostolic Fathers because they are said to have been taught personally by the apostles. They lived in the first half of the second century. We know the names of five of them. They were Clement and Hermas of Rome; Ignatius of Antioch; Polycarp of Smyrna; and Barnabas, probably of Alexandria. There were two others whose names we do not know.

You will remember that there was much in the teaching of Christ which for a long time the disciples did not understand. From the writings of the Apostolic



*Schoenfeld Collection  
from Three Lions*

**Ignatius of Antioch**

Fathers we can tell that, more than a hundred years after Christ, they had not as yet penetrated very deeply into the truth revealed in the Bible. Their conception of Christianity was very simple. They thought of Christ chiefly as the revealer of the knowledge of the one true God, and the proclaimer of a law of high and strict morality. The Apostolic Fathers wanted to know the truth about Christ. They thought and wrote about Him.

**4. The Apologists** • The heathen attacked and persecuted the Christians. They told many false stories about the Christians, accused them of many terrible crimes, and misrepresented the teachings





THE WORLD IN WHICH THE CHURCH  
DEVELOPED ITS DOCTRINE

of Christianity. In response some Christians wrote books. Because in these books these writers defended Christianity, they are called *Apologists*. An apologist is one who defends what he believes to be the truth. In order to explain Christianity to the educated and cultured heathen and in order to defend it against attacks, they were compelled to make a deeper study of the Bible. In that way the Church made progress in the understanding of Christian truth.

The foremost of these Apologists was Justin. He was born in the ancient town of Shechem in the province of Samaria. There at Shechem was the well of the patriarch Jacob, where Jesus had talked to the Samaritan woman. Justin's father and mother were both heathen. Justin studied philosophy and even after he had become a Christian he continued to wear the man-

tle of a philosopher. While living in Ephesus he was converted by the study of the Old Testament prophets. "Straightway," he wrote in one of his books, "a flame was kindled in my soul, and a love of the prophets and of those men who are friends of Christ. Theirs is the oldest and truest explanation of the beginning and end of things and of those matters which the philosophers ought to know, because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They glorified the Creator, the God and Father of all things, and proclaimed His Son, the Christ. I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable."

About the year 153, while in Rome, Justin wrote his famous *Apology*. In that same city, perhaps in the year 165, he was beheaded for his faith. For that reason he is called Justin *Martyr*.

Celsus was not one of the Apologists. He was a heathen who was well acquainted with the teachings of Christianity, but he never became a Christian. On the contrary, in the year 177 he wrote a book, *A True Discourse*, against Christianity. Celsus was a man with a very keen mind. He brought all his learning and wit to bear, and used many of the arguments still used by unbelievers today. His was the ablest criticism of Christianity produced by heathenism. It was not until seventy years later that Celsus was answered. But when at last the answer did come, it was overwhelming and crushing. This brilliant apology of Christianity was written by Origen in his book, *Against Celsus*. You will presently hear more about Origen.

**5. False Ideas Arise** • In the last half of the second century two *heresies* (departures from the truth) became a serious menace. They were *Gnosticism* and *Montanism*. Gnosticism went so far as to maintain that Christ never dwelt on this earth in human form. Montanism taught that Christ's promise of the Comforter had not been fulfilled in the upper room on Pentecost, but that the coming of the Holy Spirit was now at hand and that the end of the world was near. Both of these doctrines were gaining a foothold in the Church. These ideas were entirely contrary to Christian truth. Right doctrine is important. Wrong doctrine will hurt the Church. The Church cannot live with false doctrine. So the last half of the second century was a time of tremendous crisis for the Church.

How keenly the Church felt the deadly nature of these heresies you can tell from the following incident. One of the leading Gnostics was a certain Marcion. After

he made his fortune in Constantinople, he moved to Rome. He gave large amounts of money to charity, but he also made strong propaganda for his Gnostic ideas, and gained many followers among the members of the church in Rome. Polycarp, bishop of the church in Smyrna, at one time made a visit to Rome. Marcion and Polycarp had known each other very well back East. When Polycarp happened to come across Marcion on the street, he was going to pass on without speaking. Marcion stopped him and said, "Don't you know me any more, Polycarp?" "Yes," answered Polycarp, "I know who you are. You are the first-born of Satan."

**6. The Church Fathers** • The first great doctrinal controversy in the Church was about the person of Christ. We know that Christ is the eternal Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, Himself God. But at first this was not so clear to the Church. It took the leaders in the Church a great deal of hard study, thought, and discussion to come to a right understanding of the person of Christ. That we have the right view today we owe to the long and intense labors of the great Church Fathers. Outstanding among these Church Fathers were Irenaeus and Tertullian in the western, and Clement and Origen in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

Irenaeus was born sometime between 115 and 142. He was reared in Smyrna. There he saw Polycarp and heard him preach. From Smyrna he moved to Lyons in Gaul, now France, in the church of which city he became bishop. In the year 200 he suffered a martyr's death. Irenaeus gave much thought to the Scriptural teaching about Christ. The beginnings of a

sound doctrine about Christ are to be found in his book *Against Heresies*.

Tertullian was born sometime between the years 150 and 155 in North Africa in the city of Carthage. Tertullian studied law and practiced in Rome. After his conversion he returned to Carthage, and became a presbyter in the church of his native city. He was a great student of philosophy and history and had an excellent legal mind. In his understanding of Christ he did not advance much beyond Justin and Irenaeus, but he was very gifted in the use of language and so was able to state the true doctrine about Christ more clearly and precisely than anyone before him had done.

Clement of Alexandria (not to be confused with the Apostolic Father, Clement of Rome, who lived a hundred years earlier) was a very able teacher in the theological school in Alexandria.

Origen, a pupil of Clement, became far more famous than his teacher. He was by far the greatest scholar the Church had produced. A deep and original thinker, he wrote many large and learned books. Origen's book, *Against Celsus*, was the brilliant answer to this critic of Christianity. Both Clement and Origen did much through their writings to lead the Church to a better understanding of the person of Christ.

#### 7. A Creed and a Canon Emerge •

Out of the Church's struggle with the heresies of Gnosticism and Montanism came three things: a *creed*, a *canon*, and an *organization*. All three of these have been of very great and lasting significance for the Church.

The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning "I believe." A creed

is a statement of belief. The creed that came out of the Church's struggle with Gnosticism and Montanism is known as the Apostles' Creed. It is so called not because it was composed by the apostles, but because it is a summary of the apostles' teachings. No doubt you know that creed by heart. It is the oldest creed of the Church. The Church adopted the Apostles' Creed in order that everybody might know what the Church believed to be true Christian doctrine, in distinction from the false and heretical doctrines of the Gnostics and Montanists.

The word *canon* has many meanings. As we are using it here it means "a list." The canon that came out of the above-mentioned struggle is the canon of the New Testament, that is, a list of the books that belong in the New Testament. In its controversies with the Gnostics and Montanists the Church always appealed to Scripture. But already at that time there were many Christian writings. So it was necessary to know which of those writings possessed absolute authority as inspired writings. Out of all the Christian writings then in existence the Church recognized as inspired those which now make up the New Testament.

#### 8. The Development of the Episcopate •

The organization that came out of the struggle with the Gnostics and Montanists is the *episcopal form of church government*. The leaders of these heretical groups also claimed support from the Bible. The Church had to establish its position as the authority who decided the meaning of the Bible. It exercised this authority through its rulers who came to be called bishops. The Church from this point down to the time of the Reforma-

A Meeting of Some  
Early Christians in  
the City of Rome

Historical Pictures  
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tion had the episcopal form of government. There are several churches today which have this form, such as the Roman Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, the Episcopal, and the Methodist churches.

At first the organization of the Church was very simple. The officers were the elders and deacons. The elders were known as presbyters, since *presbyter* is the Greek word for "elder."

In the early Church the presbyters were all of the same rank. But it was natural that in each congregation one of the presbyters should take the lead. He would be president of the board of presbyters, and he would lead in worship and do the preaching. The presbyters were also called overseers. The Greek word for "overseer" is *episcopos*, from which we get our word "bishop." The title of *bishop* was given to the presbyter who in course of time

became the leader of the board of presbyters. So the other presbyters gradually became subordinate to the presbyter who was their overseer, or bishop, and the bishop came to rule the church alone. The Greek word for a man who rules alone is "monarch." For that reason these bishops, who came to have all the authority in a church, were called *monarchical bishops*.

Churches were first established in the cities. The people in the country continued to be heathen when the people in the cities had already become Christians. The Latin word for country people was *pagani*. So the name *pagani* or pagans became equivalent to heathen. From the cities Christianity spread among the heathen, or pagans, in the country. The converts from the country would attend church in the city. The city with its surrounding country district was called a

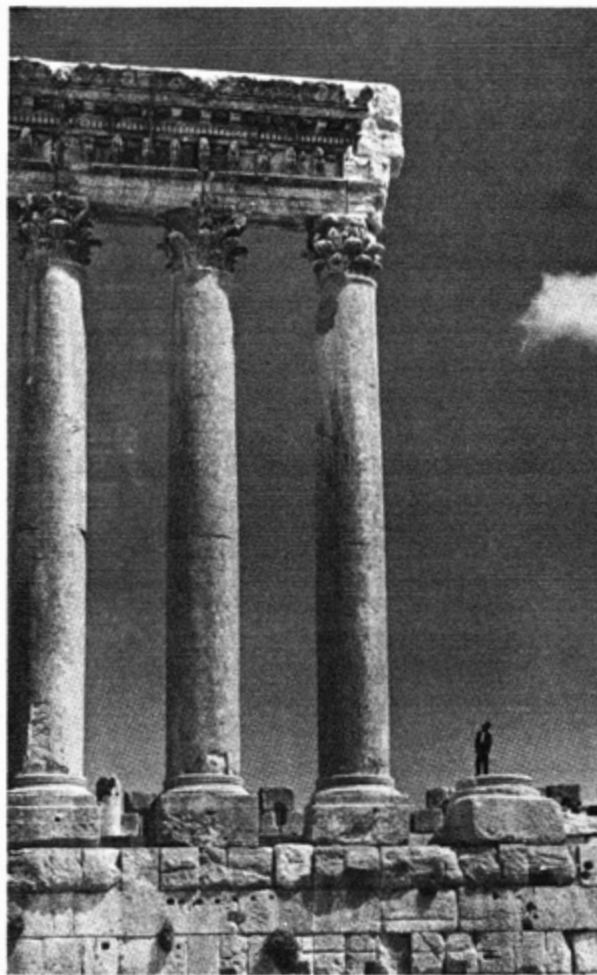
*diocese*. Then the man who at first was bishop only of the city church became bishop of the diocese, and was called a *diocesan bishop*.

You may wonder why all these terms (*presbyter*, *bishop*, *monarchical bishop*, *diocese*, *diocesan bishop*, and *episcopal*) are taken from the Greek language. You will recall from the first chapter that the world language of that day was Greek, and Christianity first spread in the eastern part of the Roman Empire where Greek was generally used.

Just exactly when the Church came to have bishops we do not know. The de-

velopment of the episcopal form of church organization or government came about gradually. It came about in some cities sooner than in others. Churches in certain cities had monarchical bishops before the church in Rome had such a bishop. Around the year 110 the church in Antioch, from which city Barnabas and Paul had set out on their first missionary journey, had a bishop by the name of Ignatius, and Smyrna had Polycarp as its bishop. Both of these men are said to have been personal disciples of the apostles, and both of them are reckoned among the Apostolic Fathers. The first bishop of Rome seems to have been a man by the name of Anicetus. He was bishop of Rome from 154 to 165. By the middle of the second century practically all churches had monarchical bishops.

The bishops were supposed to be the successors of the apostles. That idea



The Ruins of the Corinthian Columns of the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbek, Lebanon

*Philip Gendreau*

helped immensely to clothe the bishops with great authority. Ignatius considered the bishop to be the great bond of church unity and the great defense against heresy. To the church in Philadelphia he wrote, "Do ye all follow your bishop as Jesus Christ followed the Father. Do nothing without the bishop."

For a long time the churches in the various cities were only very loosely connected with each other. By the year 200 they had become welded into one compact whole. The struggle of the churches with the Gnostic and Montanist heretics had done much to bring this about. All the churches now had in common the Apostles' Creed, the canon of the New Testament as authoritative Scripture, and the episcopal form of church government. The heretics were, of course, outside the Church. They had formed little churches of their own. But the big church was henceforth known as the *Catholic* (or Universal) Church, and also as the *Old Catholic* Church. Later we shall hear of the Roman Catholic Church.

The man who better than anyone else expressed the ideas about the Church which had come to prevail around this

time was Cyprian. He was born in Carthage in North Africa around the year 200 and lived in that city all his life. A rich and well-educated man, he became famous as a teacher of rhetoric, or speech. In 246 he was converted. Two years later he became bishop, and in 258 he was beheaded as a Christian martyr. He wrote, "There is one God, and Christ is one; and there is one Church and one Chair." (By *one chair* he meant "one center of authority.") He continued: "He who is not in the Church of Christ is not a Christian. He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother. There is no salvation outside the Church. The Church is based on the unity of the bishops. The bishop is in the Church, and the Church is in the bishop. If anyone is not with the bishop, he is not in the Church."

It was in the midst of persecution that the Church grew in numbers, spread throughout the Roman Empire, and even preached among the barbarian tribes. And it was in the midst of persecution that the Church developed its organization and doctrine. Now it was about to enter a new era.



1. What do we mean when we speak of Apostolic Fathers? When did these men live?
2. Compare the writings about the person of Jesus Christ as they are found

*in the three ecumenical creeds: Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed.*

3. *Identify: Polycarp, Origen, Gnosticism, Montanism.*
4. *Who were the Apologists? What did they accomplish for the Church by their writings? Look up Volume I of the Christian Classics series and read some of Justin Martyr's Apology. Notice that it is addressed to Roman officials, philosophers, and men of culture. Why would Justin write to these people particularly? What other Apologists can you name?*
5. *To whom were the books of Luke and The Acts addressed?*
6. *Why would the Apostles' Creed contain only one statement about the Father, one about the Holy Spirit, but many about the Son? What does this prove about heresy in the early Church?*
7. *Give the meanings of the new words that describe the government of the early Church. Notice the strong movement in the direction of unified government under the bishop. In what way does this development indicate a tendency moving toward the papal control of all the churches?*
8. *Your author mentions Irenaeus and his work Against Heresy. Read the selections from that work in Volume I, Christian Classics.*
9. *You may read more about Clement of Alexandria in Christian Classics, Volume II. The general introduction tells about his life and work, and excerpts of some of his writings follow. Volume V gives biographical material on Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome. All of the writings mentioned in questions 4, 8, and 9 are also found in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Roberts and Donaldson, editors, Eerdmans, 1950.*

A standard survey of the history of the Christian church from A.D. 33 to modern times, *The Church in History* by B. K.

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**WM. B. EERDMANS  
PUBLISHING CO.**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
[www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com)

ISBN 978-0-8028-1777-8



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