

ARIANISM

Samuel J. Mikolaski

New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas
Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1974, p. 67

ARIANISM. A heresy that denied the eternality of Jesus Christ the Son of God as the Logos.* It was condemned at the Council of Nicea' in 325. Very little of the written work of Arius, presbyter of Alexandria (d.336), remains, but the Arian controversy (c.318-81) was strategic to the crystallization and development of Christian doctrine. Along with Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius studied under Lucian of Antioch, whose views foreshadowed Arius's Christology. Arius's genius was to push the christological question back to the origin of the pre-incarnate Logos. The controversy seems to have arisen in a dispute between Arius and his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria, though after Nicea it was the young Athanasius, deacon to Alexander, who carried the argument against Arius and whose defense of biblical Christology' eventually triumphed over the Arians in the fourth century.

Affirming a univocal sense of "begetting" with reference to our Lord's being the "only begotten Son," Arius said (to quote Socrates Scholasticus): "If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was (a time) when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his subsistence from nothing."

On the basis of a certain logic of terms, Arius's subordinationist Christology is consistent, but it is also patently heretical judged by the apostolic witness. If God is indivisible and not subject to change, then, on one reading of "begotten," whatever is begotten of God must derive from a creative act, not from the being of God. Hence it has a beginning of existence. Therefore the Son is not coeternal with the Father.

Fastening upon the term "begotten," Arius said that because Christ is begotten He must have had a beginning. Athanasius countered that because Christ is begotten of the Father, He could not have had a beginning. To say that a father begets a child is one thing, but to say that the Father begat the Son is another. The one is temporal, the other eternal; the one is of the will, the other from the being of the Father. Thus the Nicene Creed insisted that Christ is of the substance of the Father, thereby sacrificing neither the impassibility of God nor the deity of the Son. To say that the Son is begotten from the Father from eternity is not to divide the indivisible God but to accept the testimony of the apostles.

Crucial to the question are the doctrines of Creation and the Trinity. At Nicea, Christians adopted the teaching that the one Lord Jesus Christ from eternity is of one substance with the Father (note John's prologue, 1:1-18). This marked the end of the period in which Christ could be thought of as God's intermediary in His work of creation and redemption. Thus was vindicated the OT doctrine of the direct creation of the world by God, rather than the Greek concept of an

intermediary or intermediaries who linked the world to God but not God to the world. The concept of intermediaries (as in Gnosticism) was formulated to overcome the antinomy of how God could be ingenerate and impassible yet act to create the world. Against Arius, Athanasius insisted there is no room in Christian thought for any being of intermediate status between Creator and creature, and because redemption is a divine prerogative, only God in Christ, not some intermediate being, could redeem.

The Arian controversy was protracted and involved many complicated documents circulated in the fourth century. The Arians achieved great popularity after the Council of Nicea, especially following the death of Constantine in 337, because his son and successor Constantius was fond of Arius (see separate articles on ANOMOEANS, and HOMOEANS). Eventually the force of Arian teaching was dissipated, though only through fierce struggle involving Athanasius. The Nicene Symbol was confirmed at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

The most noteworthy Arian-like Christology in modern times is the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny the eternity of the Son of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, and who, like Arius, posit the Logos as an intermediate being between the Creator and creation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians* (1873) and *On the Incarnation of the Word of God* (1944); G.L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (1940), chap. 6; H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (1946) and *Early Christian Fathers* (1956); E.R. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers* (1954); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (1958) and *Early Christian Creeds* (1960); B. Altaner, *Patrology* (1960).

ATHANASIAN CREED

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New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas
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ATHANASIAN CREED. Two creeds need to be distinguished: (1) the Nicene Creed; (2) the Athanasian Creed or the *Quicumque Vult*, known also as the *Fides Catholica*.

How the latter became known as the Athanasian Creed (beyond the fact that it expresses Nicene sentiments) is unknown, but it was apparently written originally in Latin, then translated into Greek, and is later than Athanasius.' It has been widely used in the West among Anglicans (in the Book of Common Prayer), Catholics, and Protestants. The late medieval controversy between the East and the West on the double procession' of the Holy Spirit (that the Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son) intensified its use in the liturgy of Western churches. But its use is now diminishing.

In the preface and conclusion, belief in the truths it declares is said to be necessary to salvation and it anathematizes divergent faith. It is made up of forty rhythmical sentences and is thus more a sermon or instructional hymn than a creed. It expounds the doctrine of the Trinity and the divine relationships, the Incarnation, and the two natures of Christ, and includes statements about our Lord's work as Savior and judge. It is a valuable compendium of orthodox faith and contains one of the best Christian confessions on the Trinity, *we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance*.

As to its origin, Babcock suggests it be dated either in the latter half of the fourth or the fifth century, but not later than the sixth century. It seems to reflect Augustinian views or was known to him. Recently some attribute it to Ambrose, while others attribute it to writers from Gaul such as Hilary. The errors it opposes are primarily Arian, Apollinarian, and Sabellian, rather than Nestorian and Eutychian. Parallels between the *Quicumque Vult* and the letters sent from the Council of Constantinople in 382 seem to confirm the period 381-428 as the time of its writing. It appears in the handbooks of certain Eastern Orthodox churches, including the Greek *Horologium* and Russian service books from the seventeenth century, but as translated from the Greek version omitting the *Filioque* clause.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: F.J. Babcock, *History of the Creeds* (1930); J.F. Bethune-Baker, *Early History of Christian Doctrine* (1954); J.N.D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (1964).

ATHANASIUS

Samuel J. Mikolaski

New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas
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ATHANASIUS (c.296-373). Champion of orthodoxy against Arianism. Born to wealthy parents, he was Egyptian by birth but Greek by education. In the excellent catechetical school of Alexandria he was deeply moved by the martyrdoms of Christians during the last persecutions and was profoundly influenced by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, by whom he was ordained deacon. Of small stature but keen mind, Athanasius took no official part in the proceedings of the Council of Nicea (325), but as secretary to Alexander his notes, circulars, and encyclicals written on behalf of his bishop had an important effect on the outcome. He was a clear-minded and skilled theologian, a prolific writer with a journalist's instinct for the power of the pen, and a devout Christian-which endeared him to the large Christian public of Alexandria and the vast majority of the clergy and monks of Egypt.

Athanasius contested Arius and the Arians during most of the fourth century. Arius taught that Christ the Logos was not the eternal Son of God, but a subordinate being, which view attacked the doctrines of the Trinity, the Creation, and redemption. Athanasius said the Scriptures teach the eternal Sonship of the Logos, the direct creation of the world by God, and the redemption of the world and men by God in Christ. On the Incarnation of the Word of God, written while Athanasius was in his twenties, expounds these truths.

Alexander died in 328, and by public demand Athanasius was enthroned as bishop when he was only thirty-three. The victory at Nicea remained in political jeopardy for two generations, and Athanasius was the focal point of Arian attack. Arianism had a wide following in the empire and also the sympathies of Constantius, Constantine's successor in 337. The history of the Church in the fourth century parallels the events of Athanasius's life and his public ministry. He was hounded through five exiles embracing seventeen years of flight and hiding, not only among the monks of the desert, but often in Alexandria where he was shielded by the people. During one exile, at Rome in 339, he established firm links with the Western Church which supported his cause. His later years were spent peacefully at Alexandria. G.L. Prestige declares that almost single-handedly Athanasius saved the Church from pagan intellectualism, that "by his tenacity and vision in preaching one God and Saviour, he had preserved from dissolution the unity and integrity of the Christian faith."

The volume and scope of his writings is impressive. *Contra Gentes*, a refutation of paganism, and *de Incarnatione*, the exposition of the incarnation and work of Christ, were both written early (c.318) and are really two parts of one work. *De Decretis* and *Expositio Fidei* are also important doctrinal writings. The polemical and historical essays include *Apologia Contra Arianos*, *ad Episcopos Aegypti*, and *de Synodis*. He wrote many commentaries on biblical books. There are numerous

other writings, including letters, many of which are readily accessible (*The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, IV). Key doctrines which he discusses include Creation, the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, the work of Christ, and baptism and the Eucharist. Athanasius greatly influenced the monastic movement, especially in Egypt.

See also ATHANASIAN CREED and CHRISTOLOGY. *Patrology*, III (1966).

BIBLIOGRAPHY: G.L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (1940); E.R. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers* (1954); H.E.W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (1954); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (1958); B. Altaner, *Patrology* (1960); J. Quasten,

**GOD'S IDENTITY AND NATURE IN RELATION TO THE CREATED
ORDER
IN
ATHENAGORAS' PLEA**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

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[Greek readers will excuse my insertion of transliterated Greek. I hope that the omission of accents and breathings will not mitigate against the clarity with which Athenagoras wrote.]

Athenagoras presents (c. 175-77 A.D.) a remarkably insightful, biblically based understanding of the divine nature and attributes. He reflects keen awareness of the Greek philosophical traditions, especially the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius to whom he writes. He contrasts Christian understanding with the classical religious traditions and then cites corroborating perspectives from among the best of the classical metaphysicians.

Athenagoras addresses three charges brought against Christians: (1) Atheism, because Christians denied the gods. (2) Cannibalism, because Christians met to partake of the body and blood of Christ. (3) Debauched sexual intercourse, rumored to take place in their private, eucharistic feasts. My comments will focus on his refutation of the atheism charge because it is here that he expounds his understanding of the divine nature in contrast to idolatry. His perspective underlies refutation of the remaining charges, as well as his essay *The Resurrection of the Dead*, but his reply to the atheism charge conveys the core of his thought.

He mocks idolatry as irrational. The philosophers rejected demeaning hearsay about the antics of the gods (#5). Nevertheless, each of the gods had a beginning. Each is a thing. Each is created and corruptible, hence is not, and cannot be, uncreated and eternal.

Fables about the gods demonstrate their passibility. Anger, wrath, lust, procreation, vanity, grief, joy are attributed to them. They are corruptible beings. They are corporeal, changeable, finite. Those who pretend to love such gods are in fact atheists, he says. Attempts to correlate key gods to the elements of nature simply reinforce his argument. God must by nature transcend the elements, for all elements will be destroyed by fire (#22).

The gods cannot act; others act in the name of each idol (#23). The multitudes uncritically accept myths about the gods. And if philosophers such as Plato employ the myth of Zeus (as Creator) they do so simply as a vehicle to convey to everyone the concept of a Creator.

Powers which pervade nature are not gods, but spirit agents who have been entrusted with administrative responsibilities, some of whom rebelled, led by the (created) Prince of Matter (#24). This Prince rules and governs in opposition to God's goodness. God gave them free will, just as he gave free will to men.

The gods were originally men (#28). They represent the irrational powers of the soul and are mixtures of matter and spirit, but cannot be the transcendent Father and Maker of the universe (#27). If the doctrine about the gods is false, then to reverence them is superfluous(#30).

Philosophical Corroboration

Athenagoras goes to great lengths to justify Christian belief in a single, transcendent Creator by citing the metaphysical insights of the classical Greek philosophers. He makes his case in such a way as to parallel Christian understanding with key elements of Stoic metaphysics, a tactic aimed to win respect for Christians from Marcus Aurelius.

Euripides (#5) employs Zeus to present the invisible divinity who governs the world by Spirit, namely, God. Sophocles agrees; there is one God, one alone. The Pythagorean attempt (#6) to mathematically identify infinity points to God as conceptually transcendent over matter. Plato, especially, argued that the Father and Maker of the universe is the single, good, uncaused cause, himself uncreated and eternal, the fashioner of the sub-deities, of souls, and of life itself. Aristotle extends this to an immanent causal principle, itself unmoved, which moves all else. He cites Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism. Like Euripides who said that Zeus represents the dynamic, fervid aspect of matter, Stoics speak of the causal force, pre-determined by the divine principle according to fate; however, Athenagoras does not say how the divine action occurs.

He concludes (#7): the ancient metaphysicians affirmed the unity of God; the divine as the first, singular principle of the universe, whose divinely established pattern in nature we follow either willingly or unwillingly.

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We too affirm that he who arranged (*diakosmh , santa*) this universe is God (7)..

His key-feature argument is the rational, self-evident distinction drawn by the metaphysicians between the divine as being essentially uncreated and eternal, and matter as being essentially created and perishable (#4). Transcendental divine reality is grasped only by pure mind and intelligence. Christian teaching professes belief in:

- (a) one God (*e , [na qeo , n*).

- (b) who made the universe (*to/u panto.ō poihtn*).
- (c) who is himself uncreated (*avuton men ovugeno,menon*).
- (d) who made all things through his Word (*par' avutou/ lógou pepoihkóta*).
- (e) for that which is does not come into existence, only what is not, (*o[ti tò o;n ovu givvetai avlla. to. mh. o;n*).

The metaphysicians proceeded by rational conjecture, driven by the sympathy of the soul with the divine, which was a sagacious, bright guess based upon experience and insight. This is as far as they could go *deigning not to learn about God from God*. But Christians claim another source of truth, namely, prophetic witness to know truly (*o;ntwj*) by means of that which is generated (*evpefwnh,kasi*) by the divine Spirit (*o[i pne.umati evnge,w*) who spoke through the prophets as through the instrumentality (*o... ,rgana*) of the apprehending senses. Truth about God is based upon revelation engendered by God's Spirit, attested to by prophetic witness (the Scriptures). He appeals to Marcus Aurelius who professes devotion to the true, transcendent deity to see how foolish it would be to demand that Christians abandon belief in the transcendent God of the universe.

What conclusions does Athenagoras draw from his review of the classical traditions and the Christian claim to revealed truth (#8)?

First, God does not, and cannot, consist of parts (*ovuk a;ra sunestw.j evk merw/n*). He is, uncreated (*avge,nhtoj*), impassible (*avpaqh.j*), indivisible (*avdiai,repoj*).

Second, God is transcendent; he is above all created things (i.e., his reality is not contingent upon the material universe).

Third, God retains the world in his forethought and providence (*pronoia*), having in mind a design and purpose. Nature does not function fortuitously. By means of this proposition Athenagoras draws to his side Stoic thought, against the Epicurean thesis of reality as the product of chance collocations of atoms.

Fourth, there can be no second (or third, or fourth...) God. God fills (*peplhrwko,tøj*) all things. God is omnipresent. He occupies all space. Therefore a second God can be nowhere.

Fifth, creation, forethought and providence belong together. If God does not create nor exercise providence then, Athenagoras says, he is nowhere.

There can therefore logically be but one God, one God alone, Creator of the world. These truths have already been grasped by rational insight and are confirmed by the inspired biblical voices. Christians acknowledge (#10):

one God (*e ; na*)
the uncreated (*to . n avge . neton*)
eternal (*kai . a ; idion*)
invisible (*kai . a [oraton*)
impassible (*kai . avpaqh /*)
incomprehensible (*kai . avkata , lhpton*)
illimitable (*kai . avcw , rhton*)

The truth about God is grasped only by mind (*vw /* and reason (*lovgw*). God is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power. These insights are confirmed by the Scriptural revelation (he cites *Ex. 20:2-3; Is. 43:10-11, 44:6, 66:1*).

There follows a trinitarian statement as to God's relationship to the created order (the trinity is eternal, he says; the trinity is not a derivative of God's relationship to the created order):

By him (God) all things were created
through his Word (*par' avuto / u lo , gou*)
and set in order (*kai . diakeko , smhtai*)
and are held together (*kai . sugkratei / tai*).

We think that God has a Son (which is not stupid to say because we don't think of Father and Son like the pagan fictions which represent the gods as no better than men).

The Son of God is
the Word of the Father (*lo , goj tou / patro . j*)
in idea (*evn ivde , a*)
and actualization (*kai . evnergei , a*).

I have rendered as *actualization* in the foregoing rather than the traditional *power*. Athenagoras means *full reality*. So in Aristotle (*Meta. 1048a26; 1042b10; 1050a22*), and Paul (*Galatians 2:8*).

For by him (*pro . j avutou /*)
and through him (*kai . di' avutou /*)
were all things made (*pa , nta evge , neto*).

He came forth to give form (*ivde , a*)
and to be the actualization of (*kai . evne , rgeia e ; inai*)
all material things.

All things, he adds, were made through the Son and by the Son.

He then gives a splendid statement of trinitarian co-inherence: *And as the Son is in the Father* (the being of the Son is in the Father) *and the Father is in the Son* (the being of the Son is in the Father) *in the unity and power of (the) Spirit, the Son of God is the mind and word* (*no/uj kai. lo,goj tou/patro,j ~o u`ioj to/u qeo/u*) *of the Father.*

Athenagoras' explanation of the Son's nature which follows in #10 is not pertinent to my main consideration in these notes, only to add that the *function* of the Son as Creator is stated as: giving form and actuality to all material things, which, as pure matter, are formless and inert. This prophetically revealed truth points to the Holy Spirit's reality as the divine effluence who actualizes the creative task, aided by angels and other ministers created by God.

Summary: God made the world and he made us. He rules humanity. He is the great Judge to whom we shall all answer (#12). As Creator he holds the world together (*sume,conta*) and watches (*evpopte,uonta*) over the world with understanding (*evpisth,mh*) and skill (*te,cnh*) as an overseer. On this foundation of the truth Christians must logically reject the nations' gods, but they are not therefore atheists and should not be persecuted. It follows therefore that it is not the world in all its beauty that should be worshipped, but its Maker (#16)

God's Relationship to the World

Athenagoras strongly affirms the divine aseity. God did not create the world because he needed it, for God is in himself complete (is himself everything to himself: *pa,nta ga.r o` qeo,j evstin avuto.j ~autw/*) unapproachable light (cf. *1 Timothy* 6:16), a perfect (complete) world, spirit, power, reason (#16).

What, then, of the world? It is an instrument in tune, moving in harmony (organic rhythm). God is the cause of the body's motion, impassible Spirit moving the passible elements in all their artistry. And if the gods represent powers of nature, this means that originally they did not exist. We must therefore distinguish between God who is uncreated and eternal and things which are created and corruptible (#19).

He hypothesizes: suppose we grant the Stoics their two principles: (a) providence (*h` pro,noia*) which is active and governing; and, (b) matter (*h` u`lh*), which is passive and changeable. It follows that the gods are not essential being (i.e., self-existent) but are created, and reflect all the passions of mortals.

How are we to understand providence as *active* (*o`rasthri,ou*) and governing (*katarcome,nou*) by way of contrast with the four material elements which key gods represent (#22-23: Zeus, fire; Hera, matter; Adoneus, air; Nestor, water)? The one true God is transcendent, self-existent, eternal and immanent. To what purpose or purposes are God's actions in creation and

providence directed? To what end? Athenagoras' answer appears to be freedom, the freedom which is a key feature element of personhood. God did not intend that this freedom should be subverted, as the Prince of Matter (the Devil) and his cohorts have done (#25). God gave humanity freedom to choose between good and evil, the same freedom which the Prince of Matter had subverted (*auvqai,reto i o`h. gego,nasin u`po. tou/ qeou/*).

God's providence functions in two ways: general and particular.

First, all things are subject to God's eternal providence. These are what we call "laws of nature" – the normal functioning of the natural order, whether we will to submit to it or not. He cites Euripides: *The earth, let willingness move her or not, must herbs produce, and thus sustain my flocks*. Athenagoras calls this *God's providential law of reason* (*no ,mou lo ,gou prooume ,nwn*).

Second, particular providence, which relates to particular spirits, the individually deserving. This focuses upon the reality of freedom and its use by individual spirits. In the case of men this is due to internal and external influences brought on by the fallen, opposing forces: the principle of matter (a materialistic, purely behavioral view of human nature) in contrast to the principle of harmony with the divine (true freedom). The reality of the world is that it reflects a divine order, not blind fate. God by his providence knows what he is doing, although Athenagoras does not say how God works in nature by his Spirit (any more than we are able to say).

DEAR MR. EMPEROR

An essay on Athenagoras, c. 175 A.D.
Samuel J. Mikolaski
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[This is the second of three articles by Samuel J. Mikolaski, Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Studies, Carey Hall, University of British Columbia. They were co-jointly published with *The Atlantic Baptist*. The three articles during 1984 on the faith of early Christians are: Diognetus (July-August), Athenagoras (September), and Clement of Rome (October/November.)

Every Christian high school and college student in Canada should know about Athenagoras. Paul observed, "You don't see many philosophical or ruling class types, nor many aristocrats" among Christians, as the Christian faith began to spread in the Roman empire (1 Cor. 1: 21-29). However, Athenagoras is surely an exception Paul would have welcomed.

Today, Athenagoras would be teaching philosophy in a good university. He was an Athenian, and Athens was famous for its schools. He became a Christian. He wrote a "Plea" on behalf of Christians to the emperor, Marcus Aurelius, which was probably submitted to him on the occasion of a royal visit to Athens around A.D. 175 or 177, only about 80 years after the death of the last living apostle. Athenagoras' submission is the best and clearest of early Christian statements about the nature and reasonableness of Christian faith. If Western society is becoming increasingly pagan, then this "Plea" bears careful study to ascertain distinctive features of Christian faith which might appeal to modern secular minds.

Marcus Aurelius was an exceptionally enlightened emperor. He remains to this day one of the greatest of the Stoic philosophers (see end note). Stoic philosophy was a prominent metaphysical and ethical system of ancient times, teaching that the universe is pervaded by the divine world reason, and that everything has its place in a fixed, rational order of things. The chief end of man is to know his place in the universe and to accept it with equilibrium. At the time that Athenagoras wrote, Stoic philosophy had an unbroken history of five centuries.

Plea for Justice

Athenagoras pleads first for justice. He appeals to the urbane, cosmopolitan emperor to recognize, in light of the different laws and customs within the Roman empire, that Christians deserve toleration. He says of justice within the empire, "No one is hindered by law or fear of punishment from devotion to his ancestral ways, even if they are ridiculous." He adds that men ought not to be punished because they bear a name (such as Christian); rather, "It is wrongdoing which merits penalty and punishment." Indeed, Christians have learned not only not to return blow for blow, he says, but to be kind to those who oppress them and who pour out unfounded accusations against them.

"From what we have to say you will gather that we suffer unjustly and contrary to all law and reason," he says. Thus Athenagoras pleads for the justice of which the Romans, and especially the Stoics, were justly proud. He argues that keeping the ideal of justice untarnished is even more important than the personal issues of whether Christians' property rights or their civil rights are respected. "Hence," he adds, "we ask you to devise some measures to prevent our being the victims of false accusers." One recalls the daily masthead of the Toronto Globe and Mail, which sets forward the Roman ideal in the words of Junius, "The subject who is truly loyal to the chief magistrate will neither advise nor submit to arbitrary measures."

An early Christian states his case

Where Christians have been true to their heritage, they have always acclaimed the principles of justice and rejected arbitrary measures. It is important to remember this because after the 4th century A.D. the mediaeval church became dominant and, at times, repressive. Early Christians advocated the ideal of a cosmopolitan, composite society. Canadian Christians ought to remember that Canadian and American democracy was shaped significantly by the British free church ideal of a composite as against a monolithic, optionless society. This is what Athenagoras means by toleration for Christians and others even if their ideas are ridiculous.

Are we forgetting the link between the Baptist tradition and a composite society under the rule of law? The British free churchman P.T. Forsyth saw the issue clearly: transfer of free church principles of independency to politics became "the mother of public liberty in the modern world," (*Faith, Freedom, and the Future*, 1912, p. 101).

World societies are closing in on their citizens again religiously, ideologically, politically. Many of the gains, hard won before and after the French Revolution in the Western world, are being lost on a world scale. In many countries where there is Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Communist or other hegemony, dissenting groups are persecuted or intimidated. The plea for justice must be renewed because enemies of the open society are gaining the upper hand in the modern world.

Three False Charges

Athenagoras replies to three charges levelled against Christians.

First, that Christians are atheists because they do not honour the gods. To us this sounds strange but at that time it was a serious charge. "We are of course not atheists," says Athenagoras; "we distinguish God from matter." He adds lengthy argument from Greek and Roman sources which satirize irrationalities and immoralities attributed to pagan gods - for example, the shameless and

indiscriminate sexual intercourse attributed to Zeus. If Plato and others limit god to being one, uncreated and eternal, he asks, why should Christians be regarded as atheists when they do the same? The gods are human creations. They are the projections of human heroes to divine status.

Second, that Christians indulge in orgies (because they were persecuted, Christians sometimes met in secret). The accusers, he says, attribute to Christians what they themselves practise in orgies which they justify as ecstatic, divine mysteries. Included were practices which "outrage those with the more graceful and handsome bodies," by adultery and homosexuality. "The strong chase the weaker," he says. This is a reference to molestation and exploitation of children. At that time, too, laws and customs were hard pressed to hold back sexual abuses: "they outrage human flesh, even while the laws are in force which you and your forefathers carefully enacted in view of all that is right."

By contrast, says Athenagoras, for Christians even "a lustful glance is adultery." Christians reckon with more than human laws, which can hope only to restrain evil. Christians "have a law which requires us to have right relations with ourselves and with our neighbours." Thus, depending upon age, Christians regard each other as sons and daughters, as brothers and sisters, as fathers and mothers.

This is surely one of the most beautiful passages in early Christian literature. Athenagoras adds, "We feel it a matter of great importance that those, whom we thus think of as brothers and sisters and so on, should keep their bodies undefiled and uncorrupted." Christians know that to indulge in wrong thoughts and passions drives them from God; thus, all the more reason to seek purity and integrity in single life and in married life. Christians centre attention not on windy speeches, but "on the proof and lessons of actions."

Third, Christians are not cannibals. Why the charge of cannibalism? Because of the Lord's Supper and wild rumours as to what Christians did when they met to commemorate the broken body and shed blood of Christ by partaking of bread and wine! Athenagoras counters: how can we eat flesh without killing? But we reject killing! Our houses and practices are open to inspection. We hate killing so much that we will neither witness an execution, nor will we attend the murderous spectacles in the arenas (where prisoners fought each other to death, or were eaten by animals to entertain the crowd).

We prize life and "say that women who induce abortions are murderers ... for the same person would not regard the fetus in the womb as a living thing and therefore the object of God's care, and at the same time slay it, once it had come to life." Nor do Christians leave unwanted infants on the hillside to die and be eaten by animals. "We obey reason and do not override it," he says. We believe in the resurrection. We live in light of God's final look at all our actions. And if we believe in the resurrection, how can we be cannibals and in that way make of our bellies tombs for bodies that will rise again?

Superiority of Christian Faith

Christianity advances not merely an abstract ideal for the intellectually curious who remain morally unchanged. It furnishes emotional depth to human religious experience and power to live on a high moral and spiritual plane. Christian faith goes beyond talk, beyond rules, beyond ecstasy, beyond abstract ideals, to a personal redeeming relationship with God, a right relationship with self and a right relationship with neighbours.

Stoic philosophy set a high intellectual standard but was profoundly impersonal. It set a remarkable ethical standard in the teaching that virtue is knowledge to avoid entanglement and error, but this was equally impersonal. The impersonal, universal world reason functioned deterministically, Stoics said, so one tended to be fatalistic (similar to the fatalism of today's astrological myths). There is no love in the universe. Man's life is hitched to the universe like a dog tethered to a chariot: when the chariot moves so will the dog, either willingly or unwillingly! So we must learn to accept the inevitable and to avoid emotional entanglement.

Love

Into such a milieu Christianity brought the message of God's love. The universe is not unfriendly. It is God's creation and we are the object of his care. Philosophically conceived, Christianity was no less intellectually challenging than the views of the classical philosophers: "God is uncreated, impassible and indivisible. He does not consist of parts," says Athenagoras. We "acknowledge one God, who is uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable. He is grasped only by mind and intelligence, and surrounded by light, beauty, spirit and indescribable power."

Uniquely, Christians attest to the revelation God has given of himself through the eternal, creative word who, as well, is his Son. Athenagoras adds, "Let no one think it stupid of me to say that God has a Son." There follows a splendid statement of trinitarian faith: "But the Son of God is his word in idea and in actuality; for by him and through him all things were made, the Father and the Son being one. And since the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son by the unity and power of the Spirit, the Son of God is the mind and word of the Father ... Who, then, would not be astonished to hear those called atheists who admit God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and who teach their unity in power and their distinction in rank?"

Christians know God not as a philosophical abstraction, but as personally revealed in the eternal word. Such knowledge leads to the heart of the Godhead, namely, the fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, into which we are brought. Christianity offers person-affirming and person conserving faith, not a purely abstract religious ideal.

Goodness

“We are convinced,” he says, “that when we depart this present life we shall live another.” Here Athenagoras swings the argument concerning the good life away from sensuality at one extreme, and Stoic detachment at the other. The Christian lives in hope, which hope daily purifies motives and actions. Christians aspire to be “free from passion,” not in the sense of being emotionally apathetic but of handling emotions morally. In the pagan systems, “wickedness has a habit of warring against virtue.” In contrast, each Christian seeks to regulate his life by reference to God.

Christians aspire to higher morality than battles over hairline grammatical distinctions, which philosophers allege will bring happiness. Who of these loves his enemies instead of hating them? Who of them prays for those who plot against them? Mostly they pursue skill in oratory, rather than to show proof of life by deeds. Here Athenagoras adds a touching sentence, “With us, on the contrary, you will find unlettered people, tradesmen and old women, who, though unable to express in words the advantages of our teaching, demonstrate by acts the value of their principles. For they do not rehearse speeches, but evidence good deeds.”

Beauty

Finally, early Christians valued the created order as God’s handiwork. We would, Athenagoras says, truly be impious if the “order, harmony, greatness, colour, form and arrangement of the world” did not give us good reason to adore God.

There follows a splendid statement about creation: “Beautiful, indeed, is the world, in its all-embracing grandeur, in the arrangement of the stars, both those in the circle of the ecliptic and those at the Septentrion (i.e., Northern Constellation), and in its form as a sphere. Yet it is not the world, but its maker, who should be worshipped.”

The world is an instrument in tune, a rhyme which responds to God the melody-maker.

The world is beautiful. The human body is beautiful. Human relationships are beautiful. Beauty is not something fashioned by man but is God’s creation and gift. Men by their avarice and immorality destroy beauty by unreasoning passion, just like a fish gulps down anything it sees.

Because Christians believe each person must “give an account of all our life here to God who made us and the world,” they adopt a temperate, generous and despised way of life.

Athenagoras sets before us a personal and social pattern of Christians living in a hostile world which is eminently worth emulating: Christian beliefs and Christian

values go together, undergirded by deep love for the God who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who helps us.

Note: A significant portion of Marcus Aurelius' writings has survived. Note the "Meditations" in *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers* (ed. W.J. Oates, 1940), pp. 491-586. A recent translation of the *Plea of Athenagoras* is found in *Early Christian Fathers* (ed. C.C. Richardson, 1950). The selections cited are from this translation.

THE PRIMACY OF ROME: CLEMENT OF ROME

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The Canadian Baptist, October 1984

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[This is the last of three articles by Samuel J. Mikolaski, Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Studies, Carey Hall, University of British Columbia. They were co-jointly published with *The Atlantic Baptist*. The three articles during 1984 on the faith of early Christians are: Diognetus (July-August), Athenagoras (September), and Clement of Rome (October/November).]

Cardinal Wojtyla of Krakow. Poland, was consecrated supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church in October 1978, taking the name John Paul II. Observers noted the spiritual and confessional emphases of the celebration, omitting the traditional coronation and enthronement.

There have been radical changes in the Roman Catholic church and the papacy in our time. The reforms adopted by the council, Vatican II, 1962-65, gave significant impetus to changing attitudes of Catholic leadership to other Christian communions and to the role and task of the Roman Catholic church in the modern world.

John Paul II is justly much admired. He has a keen theological mind. He is a tough negotiator with the communist powers. He defends traditional Christian spiritual and moral values. In Eastern Europe and in the third world he represents the forces of the church against injustice. He was gravely wounded in St. Peter's Square by an assassin, who was almost certainly funded by communist authorities in Eastern Europe, perhaps directly by the Soviet Union. Thus the pope has become an heroic figure. When thronged by poor and downtrodden masses on some of his many world trips, against the dark background of repression he is an imposing symbol dressed in white.

Nevertheless, many Christians from other communions, including Baptists, have reservations. The public relations skills of the pope are hard to match. His international visits, including his Canadian visit, entail diversion of large amounts of public money to ensure the success of the tour, which practice many regard with dismay. His visits become media events which are seen to give undue status and advantage to the Roman Catholic church, especially as his tours are intended to be as much evangelistic as pastoral for the church.

We have come a long way since the middle ages when popes claimed political power as well as religious authority. The Protestant Reformation is now accepted by many Catholics as needed correction. The views of our Baptist and other free church forefathers in the advocacy of composite as against optionless societies prevailed in many countries, including the doctrine of the separation of church and state in the American and Canadian political models. The modern missions movement of the past two centuries has produced vast numbers of free church evangelical bodies, like our own, all over the world.

Thus many Canadian Christians experience conflicting moods: thanksgiving for a man who can publicize Christian faith and its spiritual and moral values, while being fearful deep down that the present surge of Catholic fervour threatens hard-won religious and political freedoms.

The religious and political pluralism which we treasure is only one end of a broad spectrum of key theological concerns. Equally important to free-churchmen is the issue of the essential nature and mission of the church. Fundamentally, Baptists have been restorationists which was, and is, quite a different emphasis from being (Protestant) reformationist. We have advocated restoration in the church of New Testament principles, as best we understand them, not merely reformation which stops short of returning to key biblical practices (for example. retention by the Protestant reformers of unbiblical infant baptism and the concept of a sacral society in which church and state are linked).

However, along with the Protestant reformers, free churchmen reject the succession claims of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican churches. The claims to authorized episcopal ministry from apostolic times. which characterizes the theology and polity of the episcopal-type churches, is still a very large bone of contention. For example, last summer at the Vancouver World Council of Churches assembly eucharistic celebration, Eastern Orthodox participants did not partake of the eucharist even though the service was led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. For them, the celebration was not truly apostolic (i.e., was not celebrated in a successionist context with which they could agree). Baptists and other free churchmen continue to say, Ridiculous! The gifts and callings of God to ministry, we argue, are not restricted to the lineages of the competing episcopal communions. Baptists and other free church Christians have always maintained that the true church of Christ is wider than any one communion. This principle is now widely accepted (though there are still large blocs who maintain otherwise); therefore we have rejected claims to religious hegemony, including the traditional pontifical claim.

How does our understanding of the church stand up under the scrutiny of scripture and history? Very well, I believe. A central question is this: was the church intended to function as an hierarchical, centralized organization (as the Roman Catholic church is) or as a unity of faithful Christians under the Lordship of Christ comprising, organizationally, what P. T. Forsyth called the "United States of the Church?"

It is instructive to go back to Christian roots including the early days of the church at Rome, to find a sense of direction on these matters. I am convinced that, despite historical and textual ambiguities, the weight of evidence is against the hierarchy of the papacy. Rather, the evidence suggests a collegial, pluralist congregational model of church leadership and relationships.

Let us examine in light of New Testament practice the crucial letter of Clement of

Rome, which was written about A.D. 96 to the church at Corinth. This is the earliest extant piece of Christian writing outside the New Testament.

Caesar's Household

If Paul's Roman epistle is any indication, the Christians at Rome were an active, theologically minded congregation. Whether they all could meet together, or were scattered as groups around Rome, we do not know. Paul had not yet visited Rome. but in anticipation of such a visit he wrote his "epistle to the Romans" as a theological treatise to build them up in Christian faith.

How the church at Rome started and when it started we do not know. Later, in prison in Rome, Paul could send greetings to Philippi, including greetings especially from "those of Caesar's household," (Phil. 4:22). 80 or 90 years later, Iraenaues could still write about "those believing ones who are in the royal palace" (*Against Heresies*, 4.30.1).

Clement was one of the leaders of the church. In New Testament terms he was a pastor, bishop or elder (which were synonymous terms) but he was certainly not "the" bishop of Rome. He may well have been the one pastor among others given responsibility as a "foreign secretary" (*Hermas*, II.4) to correspond with other churches. Remember that at this time the exchange of visitors and encouraging letters and copies of apostolic writings was frequent among the early churches (the books of the New Testament were only beginning to be widely circulated).

It is unlikely that our Clement was the Clement of Phil. 4:3. The name was common in the empire. There is another intriguing possibility, namely that Clement was connected with the household of Titus Flavius Clemens, the cousin of the Emperor Domitian, who slew Clemens on a charge of atheism (*Dio Cassius*, 67.14). "Atheism" was a capital charge brought against Christians because they refused to worship the gods. However, this fact does not prove that Clemens was a Christian. His wife Domitilla almost certainly was. It is known that she established a Christian cemetery on her land. Because leading servants sometimes took the name of their master, it may be that Clement the author of the letter was a freeman of Clemens' household.

Clement's Letter To Corinth

The most obvious and striking feature of Clement's letter is that it is not an episcopal letter but an inter-church fraternal letter. It is not a letter from the bishop of Rome (there was no such office that we can discern) but from one congregation of Christians to another; from the Christians at Rome to the Christians at Corinth.

Troubles in the church at Corinth were evidently no less severe than when Paul wrote his Corinthian epistles 40 years earlier. This time young men had evicted

older pastors (elders) from office. On behalf of the church at Rome, Clement pleads for humility, order and reconciliation.

The letter (about 30 pages) is filled with Old Testament and secular allusions and appeals based on obedience to Christ. Pride, envy and sedition are wrong. The Lord commands repentance. Let us follow the example of obedient biblical heroes of faith such as Abraham. The Holy Spirit honours the gentle and longsuffering. Consider the example of Christ's own humility and submission. There is order and harmony in nature and subordination and gradations of rank in the army as well as in other human relationships. The evicted elders should be restored to their places.

Ministry

What concept of the ministry and church leadership emerges from this early Roman church letter? First, we must disengage modern notions of "bishop" from early Christian uses of the term. While some Catholic writers call Clement the "Bishop of Rome," there is no warrant for this title. It is certain that there was plurality of bishops or presbyters (pastors). The epistle stressed order and servanthood, not hierarchy. References to orderly worship in the Old Testament (40-41) are intended to foster this principle, "let each be subject to his neighbour, according to his particular gifts" (38). Distinctions between laity and church leaders (40-41) concern effective use of divine gifts. Clement's argument parallels that of Paul: let the young respect the old (21:6).

This is a congregational letter written by Clement on behalf of the church. He is an instrument of the church. The letter proceeds not from bishop to bishop but from community to community. Intervention is on the basis of love. The final authority cited is neither that of Clement nor of the church but the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Nevertheless, there is in the letter a marvellously ambiguous passage which cannot be used however, to justify episcopal hierarchy, although attempts have been made to do so.

What is the status of church leaders? Clement says: God sent Christ. Christ sent the apostles. The apostles have given us the gospel from Christ (42.12). The apostles preached, won converts and appointed Spirit-led "bishops and deacons (pastors and deacons) of the future believers" (42.4). The apostles anticipated strife over the title of bishop (44.1). "For this cause ... they appointed those who have been already mentioned and afterwards added the codicil that if they fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. We consider therefore that it is not just to remove from their ministry those who were appointed by them, or later on by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole church, and have ministered to the flock of Christ without blame, humbly, peaceably and disinterestedly and for many years have received a universally favourable testimony" (44.23).

What follows from this? It is no small thing for the Corinthians to eject blameless

men from pastoral ministry. Second, pastors are in place by consent of the congregation. Third, pastors are called and appointed by the Lord. How? At the first by the apostles. Later by others. Herein lies the ambiguity.

"Other approved men" probably means notable, learned, eminent, eloquent, i.e., with gifts, abilities, spirituality. What does "added a codicil" regarding succession mean? Does it mean that other approved men secured apostolic prerogatives with the sole right to approve successors? Or, is this simply a statement that succession of ministry, originally in the hands of the apostles, passed to others of proper standing such as Timothy and Titus who then appointed successors? Or, is this a statement about self-perpetuating presbyteries?

In my judgment the words "later on" and "with the church's consent" and "by other eminent men" suggest a strong congregational model which functions to recognize gifts the Lord gives to the church and which church leadership finds, develops and presents for commissioning. This is a far cry from episcopal hierarchy. In happier days, the first concern of the Corinthian Christians had been, "day and night you strove on behalf of the whole brotherhood that the number of his elect should be saved with mercy and compassion" (2.4).

Brotherhood

My conclusion about ministry is reinforced by the concept and mood of brotherhood which pervades Clement's letter. Only in one place does Clement show himself personally when he writes "my" brethren (14.1). The Corinthians are addressed 14 times as "brethren." The exhortative "let us" occurs over 60 times. The word "beloved" occurs six times.

Renewal of brotherly love is the golden text of the letter. The Corinthians are not bound to rethink their actions because they are required to do so by Rome. The plain fact is that they could persist in their behaviour and Rome could do nothing about it. The letter is not directive but persuasive; not episcopal but fraternal.

Mission

Further, the frame of reference from which the appeal to the Corinthians is made is not in the first instance administrative purity. It is not an appeal that they should be ideologically correct and respond to higher authority ecclesiastically but that the ministry of the gospel not be hindered. The thrust is missionary rather than structural. Continuity of ministry from the apostles concerned "preaching the good news that the kingdom of God is coming" (42.3). To implement this mission and task, the apostles appointed bishops and deacons (42.4), which is precisely the task free churchmen have set for themselves. It is for no small reason that our Baptist forefathers, in an effort to restore church life to its original missionary pattern, developed church planting leadership as that of pastors and deacons.

The fundamental task of the church is to be missionary not the repository of religious authority. This is partly why our ancestors suffered so much persecution. They were missionary-minded. Mission, rather than authority, should be the prime function of leadership.

Thus, in Clement there is not a hint of Peter's authority being invoked. There is no suggestion of subordination to Rome. Peter and Paul are mentioned together (5) as righteous, martyred pillars of the whole church. One may readily concede the presence of both Peter and Paul in Rome. One might even concede that the bones recently discovered under the Vatican might be bones of Peter. Do these facts give the church at Rome authority over other congregations? No doubt the presence in Rome and the death there of these two key apostles gave to the church at Rome great leverage. But in its early life, the Roman congregation made no attempt to capitalize on this fact. This much is clear from Clement's epistle.

Influence

Much later there is a story which illustrates for me the best function of a great church. The setting is around A.D. 350 in Rome. Augustine tells about the event (*Confessions* 8.2), which profoundly influenced him as to his own Christian conversion.

The story concerns Victorinus, who was a famous professor in Rome at the time. He was drawn to Christian faith. But one of the pastors of the church at Rome refused to believe his conversion until Victorinus publicly declared it. So the day came. The church was packed. There was an air of joyful expectancy. As Victorinus walked forward a murmur swept the congregation. At the front was a pedestal on which converts stood to declare their new-found faith.

“And there ran a soft whisper through all the mouths of the rejoicing multitude,” says Augustine. Victorinus gave his testimony. Then Augustine writes what I regard as among the most beautiful statements in any language, “And every man would gladly have plucked him to them into their very heart: yea, greedily did they snatch him in, by loving of him and rejoicing for him. These were the hands by which they snatched him.”

This is the true mark of a great Christian congregation: the fingers of love which reach out in the name of Christ to welcome yet many more new believers in the Lord Jesus.

Every true church must be a great apostolic centre where the gospel is preached and sinners are converted to Christ. It is a place where the unity of Christians in Christ is declared, yet the indigenous character of each church is respected. It is congregation centred, the mission of the gospel is pursued, Christ is exalted.

Such a church, always and in every place, is canonical. It reflects the magisterial

word of God and the delicate nuances of humility and obedience to Christ. Every true church of Christ is a repository of the truth and of good works for Christ. May God give us more of these in our world. And may every Baptist church be just this in every place of Canadian Baptist ministry.

Note: A modern translation of Clement's letter, commonly known as *I Clement*, is in *Early Church Fathers* (ed. C.C. Richardson. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953).

MODERN PAGANS AND LIVING FAITH

To His Excellency, Diognetus -- lessons from an early Christian letter

Samuel J. Mikolaski

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[This is the first of three articles by Samuel J. Mikolaski, Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Studies, Carey Hall, University of British Columbia. They were co-jointly published with *The Atlantic Baptist*. The three articles during 1984 on the faith of early Christians are: Diognetus (July-August), Athenagoras (September), and Clement of Rome (October/November).]

To His Excellency, Diognetus:

For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do.

Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry like everyone else and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed.

It is true that they are "in the flesh" but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men and by all men are persecuted.

They are unknown and still they are condemned; they are put to death and yet they are brought to life. They are poor and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute and yet they enjoy complete abundance. They are dishonoured and in their very dishonour are glorified; they are defamed and are vindicated. They are reviled and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect.

When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life, they are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity.

To put it simply: What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body but does not belong to the body and Christians dwell in the world but do not belong to the world. The soul, which is invisible, is kept under guard in the visible body; in the same way, Christians are recognized when they are in the world, but their religion remains unseen.

The flesh hates the soul and treats it as an enemy, even though it has suffered no wrong, because it is prevented from enjoying its pleasures; so the world hates Christians, even though it suffers no wrong at their hands, because they range themselves against its pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it and its members; in the same way, Christians love those who hate them.

The soul is shut up in the body and yet itself holds the body together; while Christians are restrained in the world as in a prison and yet themselves hold the world together. The soul, which is immortal, is housed in a mortal dwelling; while Christians are settled among corruptible things, to wait for the incorruptibility that will be theirs in heaven. The soul, when faring badly as to food and drink, grows better; so too Christians, when punished, day by day increase more and more. It is to no less a post than this that God has ordered them and they must not try to evade it.

[*Letter to Diognetus*, 5-6 (circa A.D. 129) transl., E. R. Fairweather; C. C. Richardson ed., *Early Christian Fathers*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953.]

Nobody is quite sure exactly when written, only that this delightful letter, addressed to Diognetus, goes a long, long way back, almost to the years of the last living apostles. It may even have been part of a defence of Christians written to the Roman Emperor Hadrian from Asia Minor around A. D. 129.

Who was Diognetus? We don't know. It was a common name in the Roman empire. The address calls him "excellency." More important, the epistle is composed in the question-answer style. Here is an ancient attempt to interpret the Christian faith to a seeker after truth. It is a statement of Christian beliefs, outlook and approach to life. As well, it superbly illumines the place of Christians in our world.

The first of three major questions is: *What God Do Christians Believe In?*

What sort of God do Christians believe in and worship, especially since Christians don't seem to fear death; they refuse to be absorbed by purely earthly existence; and they despise the gods others worship?

Consider this, Diognetus : Christians regard veneration of pagan gods as silly. The stone of the stonemason we also walk on. The iron of the blacksmith rusts. The wood of the artisan rots. Precious metals used to fashion gods must be guarded against thieves! "Were not all those things made out of perishable material?" he asks. Are they not without life or feeling or movement? Are they not blind and dumb (note Isaiah 44:9-20)? Moreover, if they did feel things, people who worship them by wheedling them and by propitiatory sacrifices actually insult them, for no rational human being would feel honoured by such sacrifices.

"It seems to me," says the writer, "that the one (Romans and Greeks) offer to those who cannot partake of the honour and others (Jews) to him who is in need of nothing" (note Acts 14:15; 17:22, 31). He adds, Christians find ridiculous the astrological myths of those who "constantly gaze at the stars ... in order to cater to their whims ..."

Here is a solid attack upon religious superstition. "Well and good," you say, "but we are scientific, skeptical, modern types. We don't worship idols." Really! Anyone who supposes that Canadians do not worship gods of their own creation lives in an intellectual cocoon. Some time ago I priced a house in the West for

purchase. The owner proudly showed me through the master bedroom. In the centre was a dais, two steps up, on which stood the bed. "Our sanctum," he murmured. "Not unlike the ancient Greeks and Romans," I added, "who believed they met the divine in the sex act with temple prostitutes."

Today's absorption with sex amounts to deification of sex. Any substitution for God in life is idolatry, whether it is total absorption with the arts, hobbies, or cultivation of one's own body. The leading divinity of today's pantheon is Behaviour. Man is understood purely behaviourally -- in the terms of his bodily function, interests, gratification. The same tiresome litany of the deification of man and his powers is endlessly repeated from age to age, sometimes as the central element of worship, as by Matthew Arnold a century ago:

*The Will is free;
Strong is the soul and wise and beautiful;
The seeds of godlike power are in us still;
Gods we are, bards, saints, heroes, if we will!*

What place does Christian belief and Christian worship have in the face of cultural diversity and the many gods worshipped among world religions today? Read on ...

The second major question is: *Whence Christian Loving Affection?*

There follows one of the most marvellous statements about Christian identity ever written. It is reproduced above: Christians are not "odd-balls," they are like their fellow citizens of any society. Nevertheless, they are unique, not merely as to mores but in the spiritual qualities which their faith produces in them. Like the soul dispersed throughout the body, they are uniquely the new life of the world.

First, Christians have accepted the truth that there is only one God, the "Almighty, the Creator of all, the invisible God himself" who, though above and beyond the world, has come to us with his truth. He did not send a subordinate however high but his own Son: "He sent him as God; he sent him as Man to men." He sent "the Designer and Maker of the universe himself;" under whom all things are placed in subjection. The gods therefore are irrelevant and amount to human inventions.

Further, when God sent his Son "he was calling, not pursuing ... he was loving, not judging," though ultimately God will indeed judge men. God willed to save men by persuasion, not by compulsion. Hence those who have responded to and experienced such love are ready to die in the arena rather than to renounce their faith.

God is invisible, but he has manifested himself through faith. All idols are nonsense, as is the nonsense of philosophers who identify god with fire or water or other elements. Christians live by the supernatural power of the only God who is invisible, but is self-revealed in his Son. God, the Master and Maker of the universe, is not whimsical, neither does he act arbitrarily. He made all things and

providentially determines the proper place of each created thing according to wise purposes. More than this, he is kind and good and he is slow to anger. He has "showed himself to be longsuffering, as well as a true friend of man."

How different this knowledge of God is from the pagan rituals which were intended to wheedle the gods! God is one, infinite and eternal and also personal. He comes to us because he loves us each one and cares about our life and destiny. God's love has won the absolute love and affection of his redeemed children.

The third major question: *Is Christianity Really Unique?*

If Christianity is so unique, why did it arrive on the world scene so late in history? Because, says the writer, God was patiently dealing with mankind, despite human sinfulness. He was preparing us and teaching us so that "when we had shown ourselves incapable of entering the kingdom of God by our own efforts, we might be capable of doing so by the power of God."

In his mercy, "God took up the burden of our sins. He gave his own Son as a ransom for us, the Holy for the wicked." In showing his power through Christ to save us, God calls for our faith in him to be to us what we need in so many different ways Nurse, Father, Teacher, Counsellor, Physician, Mind, Light, Honour, Glory, Strength, Life. To those who yearn for faith, their response is moved by love: love for him who wrought the sweet exchange in sending the Son to die for us, so that his righteousness might justify all of us sinners.

Thus, as the objects of infinite love we are debtors to this limitless grace. We find our identity and destiny not in dominating others but in imitating God in humility and loving help: "whoever takes his neighbour's burden on himself and is willing to help his inferior in some respect in which he himself is better off and, by providing the needy with what he himself possesses because he has received it from God becomes a god to those who receive it -- then this man is an imitator of God."

The true Christian understands that while his lot is cast on earth, God rules in heaven. Therefore, he is concerned as much with heavenly as with earthly things. Therefore, he admires those who suffer for faith. Therefore, he is unafraid to rebuke evil and wrong. Realization that true life is in heaven removes fear of what proves to be only the apparent death here below.

The Christian's life thus is intended by God to be a garden of delights rich in the fruitfulness of many virtues, the loveliest of which is love. God's love for us create within us hearts of love which overflow with his goodness.

Says this early Christian, "Think how you will love him, who first loved you so! And when you love him, you will be an imitator of his goodness. And do not be surprised that a man can become an imitator of God. He can because God wills it."

MONARCHIANISM

Samuel J. Mikolaski

New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas
Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1974, p. 670

MONARCHIANISM. The name is applied to a second- and third-century theological movement centered chiefly in Asia Minor and Rome, but also common elsewhere. The term “Monarchians” was coined by Tertullian in the third century. While the word can sustain an orthodox view of the Trinity, it usually described those who opted for a unipersonal rather than trinitarian view of the divine nature in order to preserve the unity of God.

Two forms of the doctrine are discernible. First, Adoptianist or Dynamic Monarchianism, which centers on the problems raised by Christology in early Christian times. In this view Jesus is regarded as a unique man who was divinely energized by the Holy Spirit (usually thought of as occurring at his baptism) and called to be the Son of God. Theodotus of Byzantium expounded such a view at Rome, about A.D. 210. Similar views were held by Paul of Samosata. Much earlier the Ebionites and Cerinthus (a contemporary of the Apostle John at Ephesus) maintained that Jesus was a divinely energized Galilean. 1 John condemns this viewpoint (cf. 5:6).

Second, Modalistic Monarchianism, Patripassianism, or Sabellianism. The incarnation of God the Father was put forward in an effort to maintain both the divinity of the Son and the unity of God. This view was influential at Rome about A.D. 200 through Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius. It was vigorously opposed by Tertullian in North Africa and Hippolytus at Rome. The Patripassian nickname relates to Tertullian’s gibe that by his teaching Praxeas “put the Paraclete to flight and crucified the Father.” The Modalist appellation concerns their representation of God as revealed at one time under the mode of Father, at another under the mode of Son, and at another under the mode of the Holy Spirit. According to Hippolytus, Noetus taught that if Christ is God, he is surely the Father, or else not God; therefore, if Christ suffered, then God suffered.

Dynamic and Modalistic Monarchianism represented erroneous early attempts to assimilate the empirical facts of the Christian faith associated with the person of Jesus Christ and the Pentecostal descent of the Spirit to an unrevised notion of unity. The facts of the biblical revelation demanded recognition to the full personhood of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Only gradually did Christians acquire categories and a language adequate to the new revelation.

See INCARNATION; TRINITY; SUBORDINATIONISM.

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NEOPLATONISM

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New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas
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NEOPLATONISM. This comprised probably the most important intellectual vehicle of the ancient world after the third century, though unlike Gnosticism it never acquired a comprehensive religious guise. Its roots lie in the prolific Platonic culture of Alexandria, which had displaced Athens as the intellectual center of the world. Its founder, Plotinus, was influenced by the unknown philosopher Ammonius Saccas. There followed an outstanding philosophical progeny, including Porphyry and Boethius.

Neoplatonic influences on Christian thought were more as a catalyst and vehicle of thought than as a religion. Christian writers who employ Neoplatonic methods include Basil the Great, Nemesius of Emesa, Synesius of Cyrene, Nestorius (see NESTORIANISM), Augustine, and the treatises of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. In Neoplatonism the ultimate divine principle is above being. The divine light streams from the superabundance of the divine perfections and fades into the inexhaustible void. Existence is like a ladder with the top near to the light, but the bottom mired in the realm of the irrational and lifeless. By abstracting the particulars of existence or by sheer mystical illumination (a form of transcendental meditation) the mind can overcome the hindrances of the psyche to experience the sublime.

Neoplatonism aimed to overcome the duality between thought and ultimate reality by direct union of the soul with God. It maintained an infinite qualitative distinction and distance between the material world (including the flesh) and divine goodness; hence the ascription to Christ of a phantasmal body by some Neoplatonists because a real incarnation was unthinkable. Religious questions were of the utmost importance, based on a dualistic view of reality. Man should turn his face upward; science turns man's face to what is below him. They refused totally to see in the world the manifestation of a spiritual or divine principle. By contrast, Christianity brought the divine goodness down into the world in discrete personal, bodily form by the Incarnation. Salvation is by redemption through the Cross, based upon the creation of the world by God and His personal coming into it in human life, not by aspiration.

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SABELLIANISM

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SABELLIANISM. Another name for Modalistic Monarchianism or Patripassianism. This was an influential theological movement at the beginning of the third century A.D. It seems to have originated in Asia Minor. Noetus of Smyrna taught Patripassian views; his disciple Epigonus brought the teaching to Rome, where through Praxeas and Sabellius it gained a strong foothold. Sabellius, whose name is given to the movement, was active in Rome during the early third century. Tertullian in North Africa vigorously opposed Praxeas, as did Hippolytus at Rome. Motives for the struggle may not be unmixed. However, while Bishop Zephyrinus at Rome fought Montanism (which Tertullian favored) and Zephyrinus and his successor Callistus' engaged in a bitter power struggle with Hippolytus, the theological implications of Sabellianism on the orthodox side were serious. A modern form of Sabellianism is Unitarianism.

Little is known about Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius except through the writings of Tertullian (*Adversus Praezan*) and Hippolytus (*Refutation, Contra Noetum*) and other secondary sources. Sabellianism was an attempt to solve the problem of how to accept the deity of Christ and also maintain the unity of God. The Sabellians achieved this at the expense of a trinity of persons in the Godhead. They reduced the status of the persons to modes or manifestations of the one God. The term is frequently coupled with the word "monarchy" to denote the primacy of God as the Father. The Son and Holy Spirit are thus revelatory and apparently temporal modes of God the Father's self-revelation. Tertullian sneered that Praxeas had put the Holy Spirit to flight and crucified the Father. If God the Father became incarnate, then He also suffered (Patripassianism).

See also:

MONARCHIANISM (for bibliography); SUBORDINATIONISM;
INCARNATION; TRINITY.

SUBORDINATIONISM

Samuel J. Mikolaski

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SUBORDINATIONISM. An early, anti-Trinitarian, widely diffused sub-Christian Christology. One form of the doctrine concerned the origin of the preexistent Logos. Most Christians rejected the Gnostic idea of intermediate beings, but that Christ is a divine being somewhat below the highest divine principle and that He derives His existence from it appealed to some, especially Origen. Some see Subordinationist tendencies in Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. The fourth-century Arians (see **ARIANISM**) moved the christological issue back to the pre-incarnate origin of the Logos. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses assign to Jesus Christ a pre-incarnate, derived existence.

Another form centered upon the man Jesus. He was a unique Galilean, perhaps sinless but still only a man, who was divinely endowed (with the Christ) at his baptism for a special mission. The Ebionites, Cerinthians, (see **CERINTHUS**) and Paul of Samosata held similar views. The teachings condemned in 1 John are probably those of Cerinthus. The Trinitarian form of Subordinationism is "Dynamic Monarchianism." More recent Subordinationist Christologies are those of John Knox of New York and Norman Pittenger. The church has resolutely rejected christological reductionism in favor of the apostolic doctrine that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God made flesh.

See also **INCARNATION**; **MONARCHIANISM**; **TRINITY**.