

Church History 100 – 500 AD Class – Doctrinal Issues

1. We discussed Clement and Tertullian's attitude about the use of Greek philosophy in evangelizing to those familiar with it. In general Clement was very much in favor (saw philosophy as pointing the way to the gospel) and Tertullian was against it ("What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?").
 - a. Do we face similar issues of engaging with the culture to evangelize today?
 - b. Should we follow Clement's guidance or Tertullian? What are the advantages of each? What are the disadvantages?
2. Marcion did not believe the Old Testament scriptures were applicable to Christianity. Although not taken to the same extreme as Marcion we hear of New Testament only or New Testament focused churches today. What problems are encountered by ignoring the Old Testament?
3. Novatian and Donatus saw the church as a house for holy people only which would be polluted by sinners. What is wrong with this outlook? Is there any behavior that should cause someone to be evicted from the church?
4. We discussed the relationship between Jesus (the son) and the Father. Modalists believe that the Son and Father (and Holy Ghost) are the same person playing a different role at various times. Arius believed that the Father is separate from, and hierarchically above, the Son and that there was a time prior to the Son existing.
 - a. What adverse doctrinal ramifications are there to modalist or Arian beliefs?
 - b. Jesus is referred to as the "only begotten Son of God" on multiple occasions in scripture. If Jesus has always existed what does "begotten" mean?
5. We talked about the divine and human nature of Jesus. Apollinaris envisioned the Logos (Word of God) replacing the reason / soul of a human body. Eutyches spoke of a blending together of the divine and human natures into a single, new, distinct nature. Nestorius described two natures that conjoined but did not really overlap or mix. Orthodox doctrine at Chalcedon was basically stated as a negation of the three opinions expressed.
 - a. Is this just an "angels dancing on a pin head" intellectual exercise or are there serious ramifications regarding ones belief on this issue?
6. In refuting Arianism Augustine laid out a logical case for predestination and grace which reasoned that fallen man was not capable of making the right choice to accept the gospel and receive salvation. Broadly speaking there is very little discussion of predestination prior to Augustine by the writers we discussed during our course, and although Augustine's refutation of Arius was accepted there was reticence to fully adopt predestination / grace salvation even after Augustine. Why do you suppose this was the case?