

## **Church History**

### **Lesson 6 - Early Heresies**

#### **1. Marcion**

- 1.1.** Marcion was the son of the bishop of Sinope in Pontus (modern day Turkey).
- 1.2.** Marcion was a ship builder and acquired great wealth.
- 1.3.** About AD140 he travelled to Rome, where he came into contact with the teaching of a man named Cerdo, who had real Gnostic leanings. Cerdo taught that the God of the Old Testament was different than the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 1.4.** Marcion gave a large sum of money to the Church in Rome. (this money was returned to him when his teachings were deemed heretical and he was excommunicated.)
- 1.5.** The basic beliefs of Marcion (from Ferguson, location 1723-1742)
  - 1.5.1.** There are two gods—the creator god and the redeemer god. Marcion’s dualism seems not to have been a metaphysical matter, but an inference from the human experience of contradictions in life.
  - 1.5.2.** Law and judgment belong to the creator (the Demiurge), and redemption is the work of the Father (the “Unknown” or “Strange” God).
  - 1.5.3.** The Old Testament is the revelation of the creator. It predicts the Jewish Messiah (the Jews have read their Scriptures correctly). Jesus is not the fulfiller of the Old Testament (he came “not to fulfill but to destroy” the Law). The Old Testament God worked evils, contradicted himself, and delighted in wars.
  - 1.5.4.** Jesus was viewed in a Docetic manner; he only seemed to suffer. Yet, his death was described as a purchase. Jesus’ resurrection was of his soul and spirit, and he raised himself. This view again seems not to have originated from a metaphysical standpoint (e.g., the inability of the divine to suffer), but from ordinary experience that recoiled from the flesh as unclean.
  - 1.5.5.** Paul was the only true apostle. The Twelve “Judaized,” so the Father had to call Paul to restore the true gospel, but even his epistles were interpolated by the Judaizers.
  - 1.5.6.** Marcion took his stand on a written revelation.
  - 1.5.7.** Asceticism was emphasized. Sex was abhorrent. Water replaced wine in the Lord’s supper. Foods associated with sexual reproduction were forbidden—meat and milk products.
  - 1.5.8.** The followers of Jesus are not under law. Salvation is by grace alone, and grace needs no law.
- 1.6.** The effect of Marcion’s beliefs
  - 1.6.1.** These beliefs led Marcion to reject the idea of God as Creator, and thus to reject Yahweh of the Old Testament. He declared that the God of the Old Testament is not the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - 1.6.2.** This means that the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament) had to be rejected.

- 1.6.3. Marcion believed that Yahweh was a god of arbitrary justice, and not one of love. On the other hand, he taught that the God of the New Testament was not vindictive, but loving. The God of the Old Testament makes stringent demands upon humans, while the God of the New Testament requires nothing of us, but gives everything freely.
- 1.6.4. Marcion therefore rejected the doctrine of final judgement - God will simply forgive everyone.
- 1.7. Because of his dislike of matter and Judaism, Marcion also rejected many parts of the New Testament Scriptures as being "Jewish."
  - 1.7.1. He rejected the Virgin birth, stating that Jesus simply appeared as a man during the reign of Tiberius.
    - 1.7.1.1. The physical birth of Jesus was a stumbling block to Marcion, so he began his Gospel in Luke 3 with the statement that in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Jesus "came down" from heaven "to the Galilaeen city of Capernaum. Ferguson, location 1733.
  - 1.7.2. He rejected any books being used in the Church (which later became our New Testament) that he thought were too Jewish. By the end, all he had left were an edited form of Luke's Gospel (removing the entire nativity narrative), and Paul's ten letters (excluding 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, which he viewed as having been made too Jewish).
  - 1.7.3. This was the first attempt to define a New Testament Canon. (We will discuss the development of the New Testament canon below.)
- 1.8. Marcion's views were firmly rejected by the church at Rome, and he was excommunicated in AD 144.
- 1.9. Marcion then formed his own churches, complete with his version of the Scriptures and a rival set of bishops. This church was widespread and lasted until the 5th century.
- 1.10. The importance of Marcion
  - 1.10.1. Marcion showed certain questions that needed to be answered clearly and in a more formal manner than the church had done to that point. Marcion did "create" the Catholic Church, but he did help certain tendencies already in process to develop more definitely.
  - 1.10.2. The influence of Marcion was considerable, but was overestimated by his twentieth-century interpreters. The Catholic Church with its creed, canon, and episcopate were not the product of a reaction to Marcion; but reaction to him did strengthen certain tendencies already at work and so speeded up the process of development of these practices. Ferguson, location 1744.
  - 1.10.3. The response of the church to Marcion and the other heretics will be discussed below.

## 2. Gnosticism

### 2.1. The great danger of Gnosticism

**2.1.1.** In many ways, Marcion is a good introduction to Gnosticism - both were judged heretical, both preferred the spiritual over the material, both therefore had problems with the Old Testament, both were widespread, and both required similar responses from the church.

**2.1.2.** However there are great differences between Marcion and Gnosticism which require them to be considered separately:

**2.1.2.1.** Marcion led a single unified movement. Gnosticism was not a well-defined system, but rather a conglomeration of similar groups and beliefs.

**2.1.2.2.** Marcion, arising in the West, was far less speculative than Gnosticism, which was particularly strong in the East.

**2.1.2.3.** Marcion created a rival church, complete with its own truncated version of the Scriptures and its own bishops. Gnosticism existed both outside and inside the Church, added many additional writings to the New Testament and greatly reinterpreted the existing NT writings, and did not really set up its own structured church.

### 2.2. Understanding Gnosticism

**2.2.1.** The name gnosticism derives from the Greek word “gnosis” - knowledge. According to the Gnostics, salvation depended on access to secret, mystical knowledge - which they possessed. This was not open, public, propositional knowledge, but rather secret, speculative, mystical knowledge.

**2.2.2.** Gnosticism was very syncretistic, drawing from a great variety of sources. They combined many of the ideas floating around the world at that time.

**2.2.3.** Gnosticism did not arise at a single moment and place, but over a great length of time and in a wide variety of locations.

**2.2.3.1.** The basic beliefs were already in place during the time of the New Testament and are refuted in a number of passages such as John 1:1-18; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 1 John 4:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; Colossians 2:8-20.

**2.2.3.2.** However, the full blown system discussed below did not really develop until the 2nd century.

**2.2.4.** Some of the main Gnostic leaders and teachers were Valentinus, Cerinthus, Theodotus, and Heracleon.

**2.2.5.** The basic beliefs of Gnosticism:

**2.2.5.1.** Matter was evil, or at best only a mere appearance. In contrast, the spirit was pure. This is what is known as dualism - and extreme separation between the material and the spiritual.

- 2.2.5.2.** The Supreme Being had no intention of creating a material world, but only a spiritual one. He created many spiritual beings, often referred to as demiurges or eons, which were emanations from the Supreme Being. Furthermore, each of these beings also sent forth emanations from themselves. However, each succeeding generations, while still divine, became weaker than the generation before.
- 2.2.5.3.** Eventually one of these beings, far removed from the Supreme Being, fell into error and created the material world. Many Gnostics associated this being with the God of the Old Testament.
- 2.2.5.4.** However, this world still contains sparks of the spiritual world. Thus, human beings are eternal spirits that came to be imprisoned in a material body.
  - 2.2.5.4.1.** Some Gnostics taught that not all humans had spirits - some were purely flesh and could not be saved and would simply be destroyed at death or the end of the physical world.
- 2.2.5.5.** Since the body is material, and matter is inherently, irrevocably evil, salvation consists in gaining the knowledge necessary to eventually escape the prison of the body and this material world in which we are presently exiled.
- 2.2.5.6.** A spiritual messenger had to come to waken us from our sleep and grant us the secret knowledge we need to escape - which is salvation. In “christian” forms of Gnosticism, this was Jesus.
- 2.2.5.7.** However, since matter is evil, most Gnostics reject any idea that the savior would take human flesh.
  - 2.2.5.7.1.** Some said the body of Jesus was not real; it only “appeared” to be a body. This group was known as Docetists, from the Greek word dokeo - to seem or appear (or think).
  - 2.2.5.7.2.** Some made a strong distinction between the heavenly “Christ” and the earthly “Jesus.” The “Christ” descended upon Jesus as His water baptism, and then departed from Him prior to His arrest, beating, and crucifixion. The Heavenly Christ could not and did not suffer pain and death; only the human Jesus did.
  - 2.2.5.7.3.** Thus, Gnostics did not deny the Deity of Christ (as claimed in books like *The Da Vinci Code*); they denied the humanity of Christ! He was fully Divine, but not really and fully human!

- 2.2.5.8. As for the Christian life, Gnostics had two answers for dealing with the temptations of the body:
  - 2.2.5.8.1. Some said the body was evil and must be restrained and punished. These were ascetics.
  - 2.2.5.8.2. Some said the body did not matter and should be left to its own devices and propensities. What the body did was of no concern; pursue the life of the spirit. These were libertines.
  - 2.2.5.8.3. Some Gnostics also taught that those Christians who rejected Gnosticism were “soulish” or “carnal” while the Gnostics were “spiritual” - thus misappropriating Paul’s terms in 1 Corinthians 3.
- 2.2.6. Excursus: The Nag Hammadi Texts
  - 2.2.6.1. Until very recent times, the majority of information we had regarding the beliefs of Gnostics came from Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius.
  - 2.2.6.2. This situation changed dramatically with the discovery, in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, of a collection of twelve codices (plus other sheets) written in the fourth century and containing mostly original Gnostic works in a Coptic translation.
  - 2.2.6.3. These documents, which are spoken of a lot in *The Da Vinci Code* and by many modern scholars confirm the main lines of thought refuted by the Church Fathers.
  - 2.2.6.4. Many modern scholars want to use the documents to speak of other “Scriptures” and beliefs in the early Church. However, they were quickly, universally and thoroughly rejected by the Church.
- 2.2.7. The danger of Gnosticism as a movement
  - 2.2.7.1. Because Gnosticism was not a single structured movement it was very hard for the church to stamp out its influence.
  - 2.2.7.2. Furthermore, the simplistic nature of dualism (spirit is good and matter is bad) has continued to appeal to people all the way down to the modern day.
  - 2.2.7.3. The idea of a special elite group of Christians who possess deeper knowledge that sets them apart has also found broad appeal all the way down to the modern day.
  - 2.2.7.4. Finally, Gnostics took Christian terms and filled them with their own unbiblical meaning - another practice which has continued to the present day.

### 3. Montanism

- 3.1. Montanism is more properly understood as a schism than a heresy. It did not deny essential Christian doctrines, but rather over-emphasized certain points of doctrine and certain practices, and eventually split off and formed a separate church.
- 3.2. During the 2nd century, in the wake of the influence of leaders such as Ignatius and in the face of heresies such as Gnosticism and Marcion, the church became more rigid in its structure and beliefs.
- 3.3. Furthermore, as more people became Christians, the standards of holiness were deemed to be diluting.
- 3.4. Somewhere between AD 156 and 172 a man named Montanus appeared in Asia Minor. He demanded a higher standard, more rigorous Christian living, and a return to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.
  - 3.4.1. For example, Montanists taught and observed stricter fasts, prohibited second marriages even after death of the spouse, and forbade flight to escape martyrdom.
- 3.5. Montanus was joined by two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, and they went about prophesying in the name of the Spirit, and foretelling the speedy second coming of Christ.
  - 3.5.1. Given the prominence of the two prophetesses, it is not surprising to find that the Montanists were more open to the gifts of women in the Church, and they even allowed women to hold leadership offices which were not open to women in the broader Church.
- 3.6. The great Church Father Tertullian eventually became part of this movement.
- 3.7. The Montanists came to view prophecy and spiritual gifts as the hallmark of apostolic Christianity.
- 3.8. As some churches resisted this new 'revelation' Montanists began to declare that to resist the new prophecy was blasphemy against the Spirit.
- 3.9. Montanism actually ended up speeding up some of the very trends it was fighting against - the formalization of Church structure, the sidelining or elimination of spiritual gifts, etc.
- 3.10. In the end, gatherings of bishops deemed the Montanists as schismatics, which put the movements future in jeopardy. Furthermore, some of Montanism's own excesses also contributed to its decline, and it faded as a movement.

### 4. The rule of faith - the Creed

- 4.1. In order to defend what the church had always believed and to combat heresies and novel beliefs, the Church relied on "the rule of faith."
- 4.2. We see evidence of such rules of faith already developing in the Scripture
  - 4.2.1. Galatians 1:8–9 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

- 4.2.2. 1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.
- 4.2.3. 1 John 4:1–3 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.
- 4.2.4. Colossians 1:15–18 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
- 4.2.5. 2 John 1:9–10 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.
- 4.3. The rule of faith was not a detailed confession of faith, but rather a set of core beliefs that defined the essence of Christianity. It attempted to lay out the central story of Scripture, especially regarding the person and work of Jesus. Especially in its earliest forms, the rule of faith was very simple, and eventually was adopted in fuller statements as creeds.
- 4.4. This rule of faith was also known as the “symbol of faith.” The word symbol meant a sign, a badge of identity, or token of a pact, and so stood for one’s faith.
- 4.5. The earliest formalized form of the rule of faith was the baptismal confession of the church at Rome, which became known as the Apostle’s Creed or the Apostles Symbol.
  - 4.5.1. Originally the statements of the Creed/Symbol were posed as three questions asked before each submersion in water baptism. (Baptism was done by immersing the person three times at this stage of history in the church at Rome.)
  - 4.5.2. Later, the Creed/Symbol became a series of statements that people coming to the faith had to memorize, be taught on, and then confess at their baptism.
  - 4.5.3. The name “Apostles’ Creed” or “Apostles’ Symbol” was given because the content was thought to be an accurate summary of the apostolic faith.

- 4.5.4.** The Apostles Creed used in many churches today is an outgrowth of this earliest creed. Although there were a number of revisions, the core of the original creed is also the core of the modern creed recited today.
- 4.5.4.1.** One of the main uses of this “symbol” was in baptism, where it was presented to the candidate in the form of a series of three questions: Do you believe in God the Father almighty? Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Ghost and of Mary the virgin, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose again at the third day, living from among the dead, and ascended unto heaven and sat at the right of the Father, and will come to judge the quick and the dead? Do you believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh? Gonzales, location 1540
- 4.5.4.2.** Two things stand out in reading these questions. The first is that we have here the core of what later came to be called the “Apostles’ Creed.” The second is that this creed has been built around the Trinitarian formula that was used in baptism. Since one was baptized “in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” these questions were posed as a test of true belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Gonzales, location 1546
- 4.5.5.** This Creed became widely used in the West, but not as much in the East, where a variety of creeds continued to flourish.
- 4.5.6.** By the time of Rufinus, around 400, the Apostles’ Creed was believed to be not simply “apostolic” in content but to have been actually drawn up by the apostles to assure that—as they dispersed to preach the gospel—they would deliver a common message. Eventually the creed was distributed into twelve clauses, each contributed by one of the apostles. The present form of the Apostles’ Creed still used by many Western churches received its wording in the eighth century, but the differences are minimal from the form known already in the fourth century. Ferguson, location 2165
- 4.6.** The rule of faith, and later the Creed, were also formed in to respond to heresies. Thus, many of them took on specific content and forms to note the true faith in opposition to heresies. For example, many of them are Trinitarian in structure, and many of them contain statements that refute the teaching of the Gnostics.
- 4.6.1.** This does not mean the rule of faith or Creed were developed after the fact to refute heresies. Rather, they reflect what was always believed, taught, and confessed, but which had come under attack from heretical groups.



- 4.6.2.** Thus, what had always been believed, taught and confessed, was cast into a more formal statement that was put into specific terms to refute heretical teachings which denied or changed what has always been believed, taught, and confessed by the Church.
- 4.6.3.** Some of the terminology in the Apostles' Creed probably reflects points at issue with Gnostics and Marcionites. But the beliefs stated were already present in Christian teaching prior to these controversies. Ferguson, location 2170
- 4.7.** How the rule of faith as expanded in the Creed refuted the heresies discussed above
- 4.7.1.** First, the Creed affirms belief in "God Almighty." A later version adds, "Maker of heaven and earth." Thus, it repudiates the gnostic idea that the created world is evil or the work of an evil god. Shelley, location 1137
- 4.7.2.** The creed's most extensive paragraph is the one dealing with the Son. This is because it was precisely in their Christology that Marcion and the Gnostics differed most widely from the church. Gonzales, location 1554
- 4.7.3.** The birth "of Mary the virgin" is not there primarily in order to stress the virgin birth—although, quite clearly, that is affirmed—but rather to affirm the very fact that Jesus was born, and did not simply appear on earth, as Marcion and others claimed. Gonzales, location 1557
- 4.7.3.1.** But ironically, to the early gnostics, the problem was not Virgin: it was born. Modern man sees a red flag because he hears "born of the Virgin Mary"; the gnostic saw a red flag because he heard "born of the Virgin Mary. Shelley, location 1145
- 4.7.4.** The reference to Pontius Pilate is not there to put the blame on the Roman governor, but rather to date the event to insist on the fact that it was a historical, datable event. Gonzales, location 1559
- 4.7.5.** In orthodox Christianity redemption came not by some secret knowledge of spiritual realms but by God's action in history. The Son of God entered time, was born of a virgin, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was buried. That is not gnosis; that is Event. Shelley, location 1148
- 4.7.6.** The "holy church" is affirmed because, over against the Gnostics with their many schools, and Marcion with his own church, Christians were beginning to underscore the authority of the church. Gonzales, location 1563
- 4.7.7.** And the "resurrection of the flesh" is a final rejection of any notion that the flesh is evil or of no consequence. Gonzales, location 1564

5. The development of bishops and apostolic succession
  - 5.1. In order to defend what the church had always believed and to combat heresies and novel beliefs, the Church relied on church leaders who taught, defined, and defended to apostolic faith once for all delivered to the saints.
  - 5.2. We see evidence of the importance of church leaders in defending the faith developing in the Scripture
    - 5.2.1. Titus 1:5, 9 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you....<sup>9</sup> He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.
    - 5.2.2. 2 Timothy 4:2–3 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.
    - 5.2.3. Acts 20:28–31 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.<sup>29</sup> I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.<sup>30</sup> Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.<sup>31</sup> So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.
    - 5.2.4. Hebrews 13:7, 17 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith...<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
  - 5.3. As we have seen in previous sessions, in the NT the church had a very simple structure - elders and deacons. Elders were the authority in the local church, and all elders were equal with one another.
  - 5.4. However, as we also have seen in previous sessions, this system began to change. Ignatius argued forcefully and repeatedly for a single bishop who was distinct from the rest of the elders.
  - 5.5. The development of the single bishop system was not universally accepted, but rather grew gradually over time, in a variety of locations. For example, we know that Alexandria did not have a single bishop system prior to 180AD. (see Shelly, location 1406).

- 5.5.1.** The emergence of one bishop at the head of the presbytery (moniscopacy) is attested first at Antioch of Syria and in Asia Minor by the letters of Ignatius. The bishop, as portrayed in the letters of Ignatius, was still a local bishop in a city (not a territorial bishop), and nothing is said of apostolic succession or a priestly function. Ferguson, location 2081
- 5.5.2.** The three-fold ministry of the local church (bishop, presbyters, deacons) became the general pattern by the mid-second century. Ferguson, location 2086
- 5.6.** The question of which church and which bishops accurately carried on the apostolic tradition, faith, and practice was extremely important. Eventually, the question “Which Church is the true Church?” became inseparable from “Which bishops are the true bishops?”
- 5.7.** Eventually, in addition to the single bishop, the concept of “apostolic succession” was added. Simply put, this taught that the apostles had ordained certain men to lead the church, and these in turn had ordained others to lead the church, and so on until the middle of the 2nd century when the heresies of Marcion and the Gnostics were at their height. At that time the true Church pointed out that those who could claim direct apostolic succession unanimously deny the existence of any such secret teaching as found in Gnosticism, and they universally rejected the teachings of Marcion as well.
- 5.7.1.** The churches could actually show a link between the bishops all the way back to the apostles since many churches had kept lists of leaders tracing all the way back to the time of the apostles.
- 5.7.2.** Of course, many of the initial leaders were not actually bishops, but rather elders (such as Clement for example), but nonetheless, a link all the way back to the apostles could be shown.
- 5.7.3.** This did not mean that only those churches that could show such a link back to the apostles were valid churches. It did mean that all of those who could do so taught and confessed the same faith and rejected the Gnostics and Marcion. And any church which agreed with these churches was part of the one apostolic Church.
- 5.7.4.** Later in the century Irenaeus in Gaul and Tertullian in North Africa followed in this antignostic path mapped out by Hegesippus. They pointed to the succession of bishops in the catholic churches stemming from the apostles and argued that this guaranteed the unbroken tradition of the apostles’ doctrine within the catholic churches. Gnostics were wrong; Catholics were right. Shelley, location 1419
- 5.7.5.** The strengthened position of the bishop by the end of the second century is shown in Irenaeus’s argument from apostolic succession. Ferguson, location 2095
- 5.7.6.** “Apostolic succession” becomes something more than this in Irenaeus’s controversy with the Gnostics; it becomes a powerful argument for the faith taught in the churches. The claim to an apostolic succession of teachers, on Irenaeus’s own testimony, was first made by Gnostic teachers. Ferguson, location 2099

- 5.8.** Linked to this idea of “apostolic succession” is also the public nature of the teaching. Gnostics taught that their knowledge had been secretly imparted by the apostles to the Gnostic bishops. Against this, Irenaeus and others noted that the true church had teachings that were public. Thus, the true church could show an unbroken chain of public teaching of Christian truth, along with an unbroken chain of publicly appointed leaders back to the apostles themselves. Against this the Gnostics could only appeal to secret knowledge through bishops who were secretly appointed by the apostles.
- 5.8.1.** At this point, the notion of apostolic succession became very important. What was argued was simply that, had Jesus had some secret knowledge to communicate to his disciples—which in fact he did not—he would have entrusted that teaching to the same apostles to whom he entrusted the church. If those apostles had received any such teaching, they in turn would have passed it on to those who were to follow them in the leadership of the church. Gonzales, location 1575
- 5.8.2.** Catholic Christians countered this argument by stressing the public teaching of the churches, the Rule of Faith, and the bishops in the churches established by the apostles. This argument was outlined first by Hegesippus, a historian who traveled from Palestine to Rome in the mid-second century. Shelley, location 1414
- 5.8.3.** Irenaeus’s argument—each bishop in each church taught the same doctrine—took the following form. [First] the stability or uniformity of the teaching was guaranteed by its publicity. The same teaching was heard from Sunday to Sunday in the church. Ferguson, location 2107
- 5.8.4.** The correctness of the doctrine was confirmed by the agreement among the teachings given from the different teaching chairs. Ferguson, location 2111
- 5.8.5.** Moreover, Irenaeus argued that if the apostles had any secrets to impart, they would have delivered them to the men in whom they had enough confidence to entrust the care of the churches as bishops and presbyters. Ferguson, location 2113
- 5.9.** Around this time the church also began to use the title “catholic” to distinguish the true Church from the various heretical sects.
- 5.9.1.** This was the original meaning of the phrase “catholic church.” The word “catholic” means “universal,” but it also means “according to the whole.” To separate itself from the various heretical groups and sects, the ancient church began calling itself “catholic.” This title underscored both its universality and the inclusiveness of the witness on which it stood. It was the church “according to the whole,” that is, according to the total witness of all the apostles. Gonzales, location 1596
- 5.9.2.** Thus, originally, the term “catholic” referred to the whole church which received taught and passed on the whole faith that was agreed upon by all, as opposed to the heretical groups which were little individual groups, each having its own form of doctrine, which not only disagreed with core Christian teaching, but also with one another.

- 5.10.** The church also began to use the title “orthodox” (meaning right thinking) to distinguish itself from heretical or heterodox (meaning other thinking) groups.
- 6.** The development of the canon
- 6.1.** The final way the church combatted the heretical groups discussed above was the development of the canon.
- 6.2.** The canon (from the Greek word *κανών* meaning rule or standard) is the list of books recognized and received by the church as Scripture, the Word of God.
- 6.3.** The church obviously had books it considered authoritative prior to the challenge posed by Marcion, but his creation of a canon spurred the church to begin the process of formally discussing and determining exactly which books were part of the Christian Scriptures.
- 6.4.** Since this is such a broad and important topic, we will cover it in depth next session.