Chapter 4

CHURCH FATHERS & HERESIES

Part One

Early Heresies

Just So You Know

- Heresy
  - A teaching that is clearly contradictory to the teachings of the Church.

A. Early Heresies

1. Gnosticism - a denial of Jesus’ humanity.
   a) Comes from the Greek word “gnosis” meaning knowledge.
   b) Gnostics taught that all matter was corrupt; only spirit was pure.
   c) Humans are a pure spirit imprisoned in a corrupt body.
   d) Humanity has to find a way to escape from their corrupt bodies and enter heaven.

Early Heresies

- God did this by sending a savior (usually held to be Jesus).
  i. However Jesus couldn’t have a corrupt body so what the apostles saw was a sort of apparition and, not having a body, He really couldn’t die on the Cross.

ii. Instead He was a good divine being whose purpose was to bring the secret knowledge (gnosis) of salvation which He taught the apostles and which was to be passed on only to a select few.
Early Heresies

f) Why Gnosticism is wrong:
   i. Contrary to the witness of the Gospels which stress Jesus’ humanity and that the gift of salvation is open to all who repented and were baptized.

Part Two

THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

A. Ecumenical Councils

1. An ecumenical (world-wide) council
   a) Convened by the Pope in the face of serious issues.
   b) Pope governs councils & accepts or rejects decisions made.
   c) Definitions regarding doctrines of faith and morals are held to be infallible (if that is the intention).

Ecumenical Councils

2. Other councils
   a) Diocesan Councils (synods) ~ meetings of a bishop, clergy, religious and laity in which matters of diocesan Church discipline and procedures are discussed.
   b) Provincial Council ~ assembly of the metropolitan archbishop with his suffragan bishops.
   c) Plenary Council ~ all the bishops of a nation.

A. Church Fathers & Doctors

1. Church Fathers ~ holy leaders who led the Church, explained the Faith, and fought heresies.
Church Fathers & Doctors

2. Church Fathers shared these characteristics –
   a) orthodoxy in doctrine (faithful to the teaching of the Church)
   b) holiness
   c) notoriety (they are well known)
   d) antiquity (the Fathers date from the first five centuries)

3. Doctors of the Church ~ Christians whose development of theology and sanctity are exemplary. This title is given by the pope.

4. St. Ambrose of Milan (c.339-397)
   a) born into a wealthy Roman family, became a lawyer and was appointed governor of Milan.
   b) Ambrose will become bishop even though he wasn’t yet baptized!!
   c) Ambrose spent his life keeping the Church independent from the control of the Empire.
      i. He was not afraid to criticize emperors and when Theodosius massacred 700 people in Thessalonika.
      ii. He refused to let the emperor into the cathedral until he had performed public penance.
      iii. He told the emperor that emperors were IN the Church, not OVER it!
   d) He fought against Arianism, encouraged monasticism, and even composed hymns.
   e) The first reference to the Apostles’ Creed is found in Ambrose’s writings.
Church Fathers & Doctors

5. St. Jerome (c.345-420)
   a) Jerome led a very complex life as a monk & was secretary to Pope Damasus I,
   b) He had a quarrelsome personality and was known for his sharp tongue.
   c) People in the Western Empire all spoke Latin and the Bible was written in Greek (half of the Church could not read the Bible).
   d) Pope Damasus asked Jerome to translate the Scriptures into Latin.
   e) Because Jerome has access to manuscripts of the Bible that no longer exist, it is believed that his translation is the most accurate.
   f) Jerome’s translation is called the VULGATE (from the Latin meaning “common”) since it was written in the common language of the people.

6. St. John Chrysostom, the “golden mouthed” (c.347-407)
   a) His sermons capture the deep spiritual meaning of the Bible as well as a real world application to the Christian life.
   b) Against his wishes he was named Patriarch of Constantinople.
   c) He didn’t hesitate to criticize the sinfulness of the imperial court and earned the lasting enmity of the empress Euodokia who finally engineered his death.
Arianism (4th Century)

1. Arianism - a denial of Jesus’ divinity
   a) Jesus could not be God.
   b) Jesus is not divine
   c) However, Jesus is more than human.

Why Arianism is Wrong!!

f) Attacks the very foundation of Christianity because if Jesus is not God then His death has no meaning, and we have not been redeemed.

g) When Constantine realized that this heresy was threatening the unity of the Empire he convened the Council of Nicaea to settle the matter.

B. Council of Nicaea

1. The Council of Nicaea (325)
   a) St. Athanasius (great defender of the divinity of Christ.)
   b) The bishops saw that this teaching is contrary to the Tradition of the Church, which has believed from the very beginning that Jesus is the Son of God.
Council of Nicaea

d) Arius was given a chance to recant, refused, and was exiled.
e) After the Council some eastern bishops had trouble with the wording of the Nicene Creed and the controversy started up again.

Council of Nicaea

f) Finally settled at the Council of Constantinople (381) when the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (the one we say at Mass) was written and is the official creed of the Church.

New Nicene Creed 3rd Roman Missal

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

C. The Three Cappadocians

1. Three Greek Fathers were central figures in the defeat of Arianism in the East: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Gregory of Nyssa.

The Three Cappadocians

2. St. Basil (Father of Eastern Monasticism)

a) As Bishop of Caesarea he defended the Church against Arianism, made sure his priests were trained and set up a system of hospitals and social service institutions to serve the laity.

b) Authored the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil which became the chief liturgy of the Eastern Churches.

D. Dogmatic & Sacramental Heresies

1. Donatism - a heresy that claimed the validity of a sacrament depended on the holiness of the priest administering it.

2. Claimed that the Church of the saints must remain holy and not only free from some but also not associate with sinners.
Dogmatic & Sacramental Heresies

a) St. Augustine developed the Catholic position that Christ is the true minister of every sacrament even if the priest administering it is sinful.

Dogmatic & Sacramental Heresies

i. Manichaeans believed that there were two gods in the universe.
ii. One was a god of good and the other a god of evil
iii. Therefore humans were not responsible for their good or evil deeds.

e) He returned to Africa, founded a monastery and against his wishes was elected bishop of Hippo.
f) He wrote more than 250 books - the most famous of which is his autobiography *The Confessions* and *The City of God*.

Dogmatic & Sacramental Heresies

3. St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) perhaps the greatest Father of the Church

a) Augustine was born in Roman Africa of a Christian mother (St. Monica) and a pagan father.
b) As a young man his life was totally out of control, as a teenager he ran with a gang of boys, took a mistress and became a Manichaean.

c) He opened a school of rhetoric in Rome and moved on to Milan where he became acquainted with St. Ambrose and Plato’s philosophy.
d) It was in Milan that he had a conversion experience and was finally baptized Holy Saturday, 387.

g) His influence on Christian theology is immense - writing works that deal with the Trinity, grace, the Fall and original sin, repentance, the sacraments, predestination and atonement.
Part Five

CHRISTIANITY: OFFICIAL RELIGION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

A. Christianity

1. Constantine - the first Christian emperor.
   a) Issued Edict of Milan in 313
      i. legalized Christianity after nearly 300 years of persecution.

2. However, because the Roman emperor was always head of the Roman state religion, Constantine saw himself as the head of Christianity as well.
   a) This “marriage” of government and Church will have serious consequences in the history of the Church.

3. The Eastern Empire became known as the Byzantine Empire.

4. Emperor Theodosius I the Great (379-395)
   a) Christianity was made the official religion of the Empire 391 AD, and paganism was outlawed as well as heresy.

b) Constantine's founding of the “new Rome” Constantinople led to a shift in the economics of the Western Empire as well as culture and language.

b) Making Christianity the official religion in inaugurated a new era filled with the promise of evangelization, as well as with the dangers of political meddling in the affairs of the Church.