

HEROES AND HERETICS:
An 8-Week Course on Early Church History

WEEK 3 **January 31, 2016**

Teacher: **Pastor Pickens**

Origen – Greek Philosophy and Early Apologetics

Setting the Stage:

Justin Martyr (died 165 AD) – The first great apologist (negative and positive)

Clement of Alexandria (died 210 AD) – The Alexandrian school (Greek Philosophy)

Life:

- Born 185 AD to a Christian family
- Even at a young age he was recognized as intelligent and devoted
- His father was arrested and martyred when he was 17
 - ‘Mind you don’t change your mind on our account.’
- Adopted by a wealthy woman who was a Christian yet housed another young heretic, Antiochene
- Because of the need at the Alexandrian school he began teaching at 18
- Aided and encouraged martyrs
 - “The same divine and heavenly grace protected him again and again on other occasions too many to count; for because of his fearlessness and extreme enthusiasm for the word of Christ he was at that time the target of plotters.”¹
- Ascetic life: wouldn’t wear two coats, went without shoes, youthful mistake (Matt. 6:34; 10:10; 19:12)
- School experienced significant growth (especially gifted at reaching intellectuals), recruited fellow teacher (Heraclas) in order to devote more time to study
- Well-respected by others, traveled to teach as well as received students from abroad
- Due to conflict with the Bishop of Alexandria he left for Caesarea. He started a school there and was ordained as a presbyter.
- Writings:
 - Commentaries, apologetics, systematic theology, Hexapla
- Many students faced martyrdom
 - “Thanks to him, men like this with all their heart honestly embraced faith in the word of God, and came into prominence in the persecution that broke out at that time, some of them being arrested and finding fulfilment in martyrdom.”²
- Invited back to Alexandria to teach.
- Tortured during the reign of Decius and died in 254 AD

Thought:

- Platonic and gnostic influence
- God: Creator, incomprehensible, spiritual being
- Christ:
 - Same essence of the Father and proceeds from the Father.
 - Subordinationism, copy, lesser, created yet eternal
- Fall: spiritual beings (except one), punishment of physical bodies
- Redemption: no true incarnation, yet flesh, atoning sacrifice without which men are doomed
- Consummation: universalism
- Biblical interpretation: allegorical – deeper spiritual meaning
 - “Having spoken thus briefly on the subject of the divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures, it is necessary to proceed to the (consideration of the) manner in which they are to be read and

¹ Eusebius, 182

² Ibid, 183

understood, seeing numerous errors have been committed in consequence of the method in which the holy documents ought to be examined, not having been discovered by the multitude.”³

- Apologetics: intellect and faith (1 Peter 3:15-16). Philosophy is given precedence.

Take Away:

- The importance of holiness; sin matters
 - “An ounce of sin can cause us more harm than a ton of suffering” (Tim Keller)
- Gentleness, respect, and humility especially toward those with whom we disagree
- Christianity takes every aspect of life seriously

Further Reading:

- William C. Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Vol. 1: From Its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation*
- Eusebius, *The History of the Church*
- Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*
- Tim Dowley, *The History of Christianity*

³ Origen in Placher, 37