

Fall 2016 History & Heritage -- #2

(A Seasonal Catechism for the Study of Western and American Civilization)

Catholic Christianity --- (Shelley; Church History in Plain Language; pp. 27-39)

This early classical form of the faith derives its name from the idea that dominates the period from “the death of the apostles” to “the rise of Christian emperors (70-312)? Apparently, the express word for the idea was coined in the 2nd century (100’s) by Bishop Ignatius of Antioch (Syria), though the concept is writ large in the Bible itself. The universality of its presence (as opposed to provincialism) and the orthodoxy of its message (as opposed to heresy) was what the early Church took pains to proclaim.

The Apostle to Three Worlds --- (Shelley; Church History; pp. 14-27)

This descriptive title surely fits the 1st-century’s Saul of Tarsus (St. Paul), a man whose birth and background encompassed the Jewish, Greek, and Roman civilizations? A pupil of Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem, a learned Greek scholar, and a privileged Roman citizen, the evangelist was qualified to bridge the gap between early Jewish and Gentile Christianity. His three missionary journeys would take the gospel of divine justification (salvation) by faith in Christ alone to Asia Minor, Cyprus, and Europe.

Only Worthless People --- (Shelley; Church History in Plain Language; pp. 27-39)

This phrase was used by 2nd-century philosopher Celsus in his “True Discourse” (178 AD) to describe the “contemptible” folks attracted to the gospel in its catholic infancy? Argued Celsus, “Far from us, say the Christians, be any man possessed of any culture or wisdom or judgment; their aim is to convince only... idiots, slaves, poor women and children.” In part the philosopher had a point (despite his venomous pen); the poor and lowly were numbered rather conspicuously among those professing Christ.

Gospel Harvest in Asia, Africa --- (Shelley; Church History; pp. 27-39)

This geographic heading suggests that Christian evangelism in the first three centuries made great strides in regions we do not typically associate with the Faith? Beginning, of course, in Jerusalem the apostles and their successors witnessed to Syria, Asia Minor (Turkey), North Africa, even to India, as well as to Europe in the West. Moreover, major imperial cities where the Church put down roots, besides more familiar Rome or Lyons, included Antioch, Ephesus, Carthage, and Alexandria.

Classical Apologetics --- (Shelley; Church History in Plain Language; pp. 27-39)

This rigorous rational pursuit indicates “the defense of the faith” begun in earnest by the mid-2nd century (100’s) by various gifted Christian thinkers and writers? Justin the Martyr is perhaps the best known of the practitioners, but great contributions were made by Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian of Carthage, Clement of Alexandria and several others. Their chief end was to use reasoned argument to commend the revealed religion of the Bible, requiring also their refutation of pagan and heretical challenges to the gospel.