

# Early Church Fathers

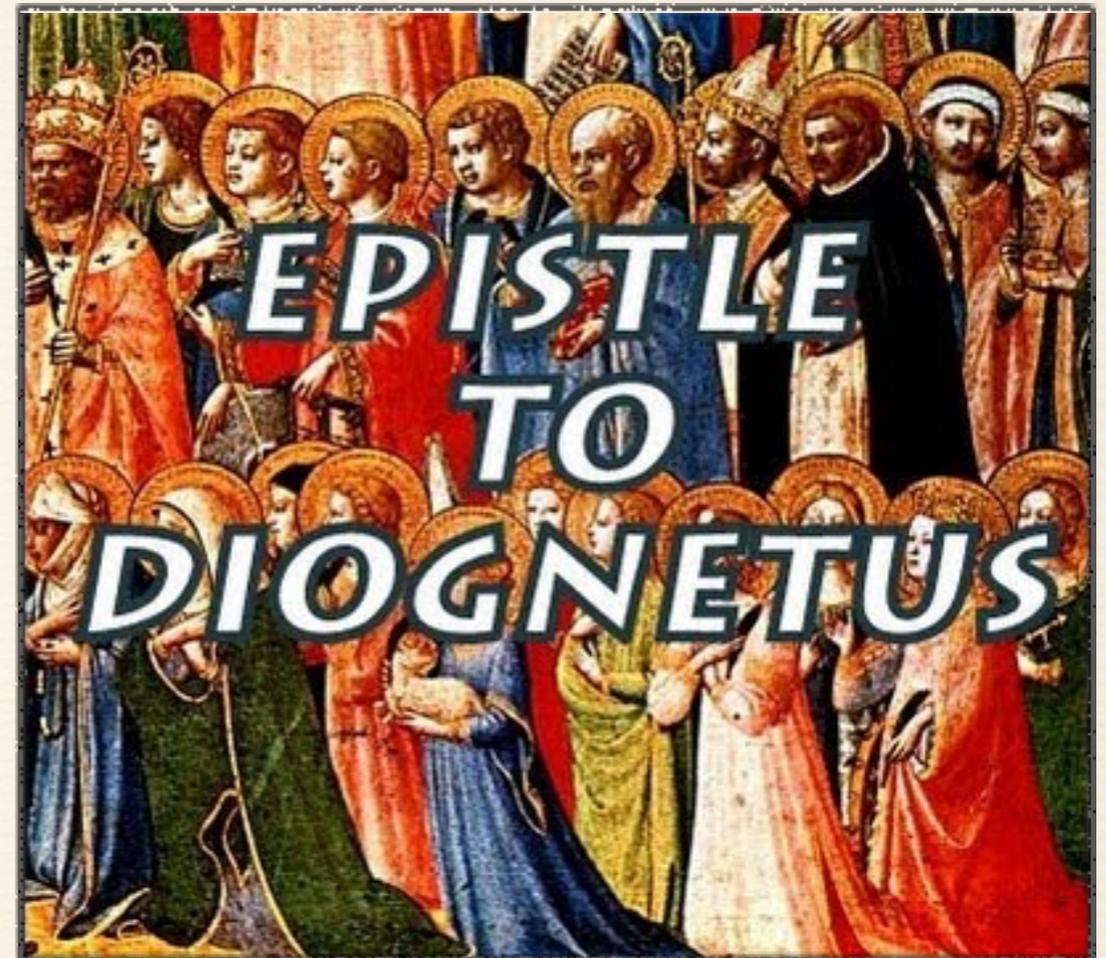


*Chapters 6-9*

# Chapter 6



*Diognetus and the  
Mystery of Christian Newness*



# The Letter

- ❖ **Author** - Unknown, but impeccable Greek writing.
- ❖ **Style** - Apologetic, providing a defense
- ❖ **Purpose** - Present the Gospel to non-Christian
- ❖ **Audience** - Pagans - Emperor Hadrian and ruling class
- ❖ **Written** - around 129 AD, between Ignatius and Polycarp martyrdoms.

# The Societal Background

- ❖ **Cynical** ruling class
  - ❖ Unbelievers in divinity of Emperor
  - ❖ Unbelievers in Greek or Roman gods
    - ❖ Incense a ritual civil duty, not religious
- ❖ Many are **Agnostic**

# Agnostic

ag·nos·tic  
ag'nästik/

**noun**

**noun: agnostic; plural noun:  
agnostics**

**1** a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena; a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God.

*synonyms:*

skeptic, doubter, doubting  
Thomas, cynic;



## AGNOSTIC

A person who says he knows nothing about God and who, when you agree with him, becomes angry.

# Limited to Roman times?

## ❖ Question:

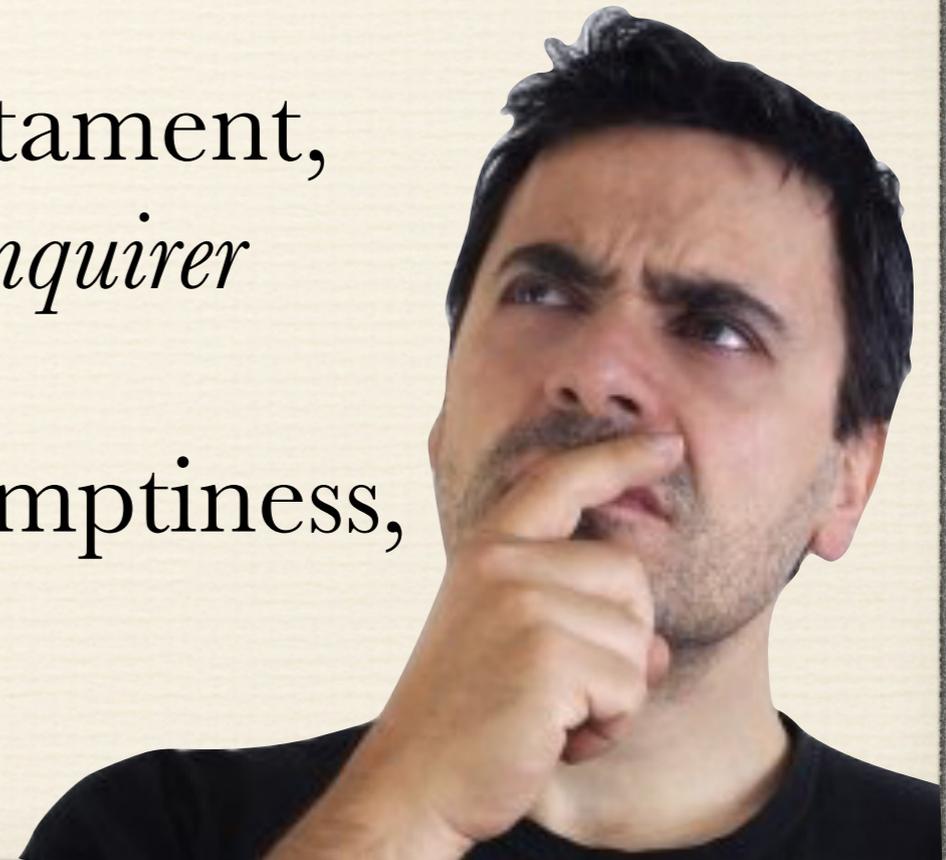
Do we know of a society today, that is **cynical** when it comes to religious beliefs, tends to either disbelieve or are neutral about whether God exists, or can even be relevant in daily life?

# 129 AD

- ❖ In Pagan times, three questions required an answer - as to the validity of a “new” faith:
  1. **Who is this God of yours, that you worship?**
  2. **What is the source of the extraordinary love that you all seem to have for each other?**
  3. **Why is it that it took so long for this new way of living to appear on the earth?**

# Tactics of Letter

- ❖ **Engage** in the questions that are in the market place, using common vocabulary
- ❖ Appeal to **reason**, - the common coinage
  - ❖ *Avoid* quoting Old or New Testament, since it is *not authoritative to the inquirer*
- ❖ **Contrast** listener's lifestyle and emptiness, with richness of faith



# Then, this meant ...

- ❖ Get listener to clear his/her slate of **presuppositions** or prior prejudices. Use same **vocabulary** as the listener
- ❖ Compare **lifestyles** of believer and pagan. There has to be a difference, or there is no point.
- ❖ Explain through **use of familiar concepts** - then, it was Plato and the body-soul distinction

# Then, this meant ...

- ❖ clear **presuppositions**, use same **vocabulary**
- ❖ create an **active listener** who has the *ability* to understand
- ❖ Comparing **lifestyles**
- ❖ Show how Christian lifestyle is **superior**
- ❖ **use familiar concepts**
- ❖ **analogize** our belief to a familiar concept.

Then tie it to Jesus, to show our God is a personal God

# Today's Questions

- ❖ In Modern times,  
what might be the three questions that require an answer - as to the validity of “our” faith:
  1. **Why** do you even believe that **God** exists?
  2. **If God is love**, why are **Christians** so intolerant?
  3. **Your ideas** are outdated, why stick to them?

# Now, this still means ...

- ❖ clear **presuppositions**, use same **vocabulary**
- ❖ Presupposition based on science having proven God doesn't exist
- ❖ Comparing **lifestyles**
- ❖ Our lifestyle is **superior**, inner peace, hope, etc...
- ❖ **use of familiar concepts**
- ❖ **analogize** to the Bill of Rights / Constitution.

Then tie it to Jesus, to show His truth still relevant

# Martyrdom - A witness

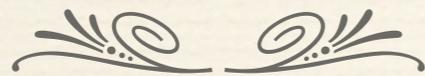
“ Do you not see how they are thrown to wild animals to make them deny the Lord, and how they are not vanquished?

Do you not see that the more of them are punished, the more do others increase?

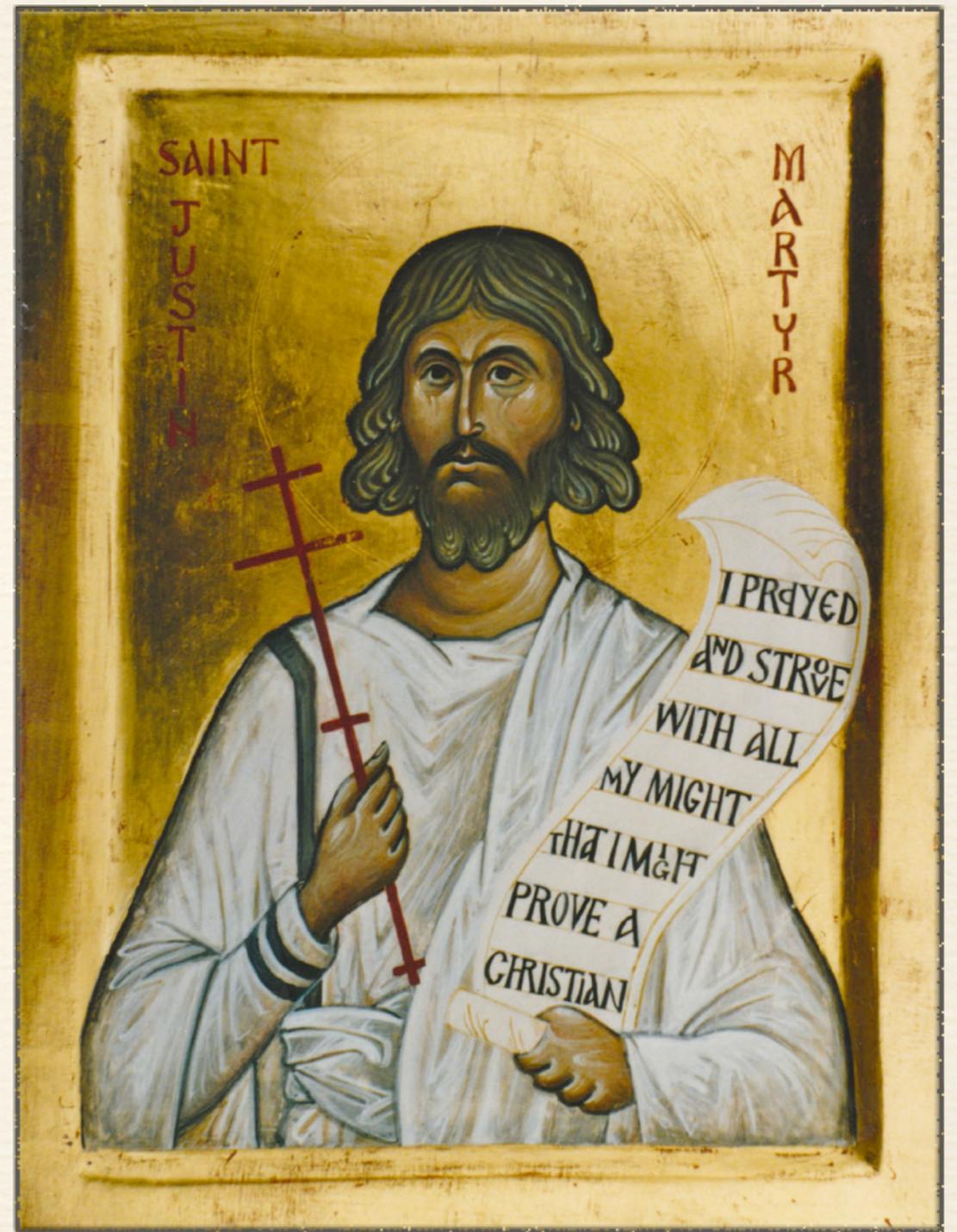
*These things do not seem to come from a human power; they are a might acts of God, they are the proofs of his presence. ”*

Diognetus 7:4

# Chapter 7



*Justin and the Philosopher's Cloak*



# St Justin

- ❖ Born around 100 AD
- ❖ Shechem in Samaria - Romans changed its name, now **modernly Nablus** in West Bank.
- ❖ **Shechem** was Capital of Northern Kingdom; the area in Gen 12 where God confirmed the covenant with Abraham; the location of Jacob's well; and the Tomb of Joseph-the Patriarch
  - ❖ Born into a **Pagan** family
  - ❖ Did not know of Judaism or Christianity

# St Justin

- ❖ Justin would have been 7 years old, when **Ignatius of Antioch** was martyred.
- ❖ **St John the Apostle** would have been dead less than 10 years. Some of the 70 might still have been alive.
- ❖ **Apostolic Father** - because he received his teachings, from hearers of the Apostles.

# St Justin

- ❖ Justin had a thirst for truth, so he donned the philosopher's cloak.
- ❖ **philo sophia** - lover of wisdom
  - ❖ Alexandria and Ephesus - great Libraries
  - ❖ wrestled with Plato's ideas - Venerable old man points to Jesus as the answer

# St Justin

- ❖ Justin was fascinated - witnessing Martyrs, he submitted to **Baptism** at age 30
- ❖ Now felt he was a **true philosopher**.
- ❖ Went to **Ephesus** - church whose membership had included **St Paul and St John the Apostle**.
- ❖ Went to **Rome** - legacy church of **Sts Peter and Paul**.

# St Justin

- ❖ When in Rome gave public seminars on Christianity at a time when it was a capital crime to be Christian.
- ❖ Wrote two defenses of the faith to Pagans: one the **Emperor** (First Apology) and the other to the **Senate** (Second Apology).
- ❖ Also wrote “**Dialogue with Trypho**” an apology written as a dialogue and disputation with a Jew.

# Three Charges

❖ Justin confronts Three Charges against Christians:

1. Atheism
2. Incest
3. Cannibalism

# Atheism

- ❖ We have already discussed **Atheism** from **Roman point of view**.
- ❖ The reluctance to **believe and burn incense** to the **Emperor** as being divine.
- ❖ Divinity of the Emperor flowed from the belief that **Emperors ruled by the consent and design of the gods**, and therefore were also divine.

# Incest

- ❖ This charge flowed from the **Christian meetings:**
  - ❖ They were **secret**
  - ❖ They were called **agape feasts**
  - ❖ The Christians called themselves, **brothers and sisters.**

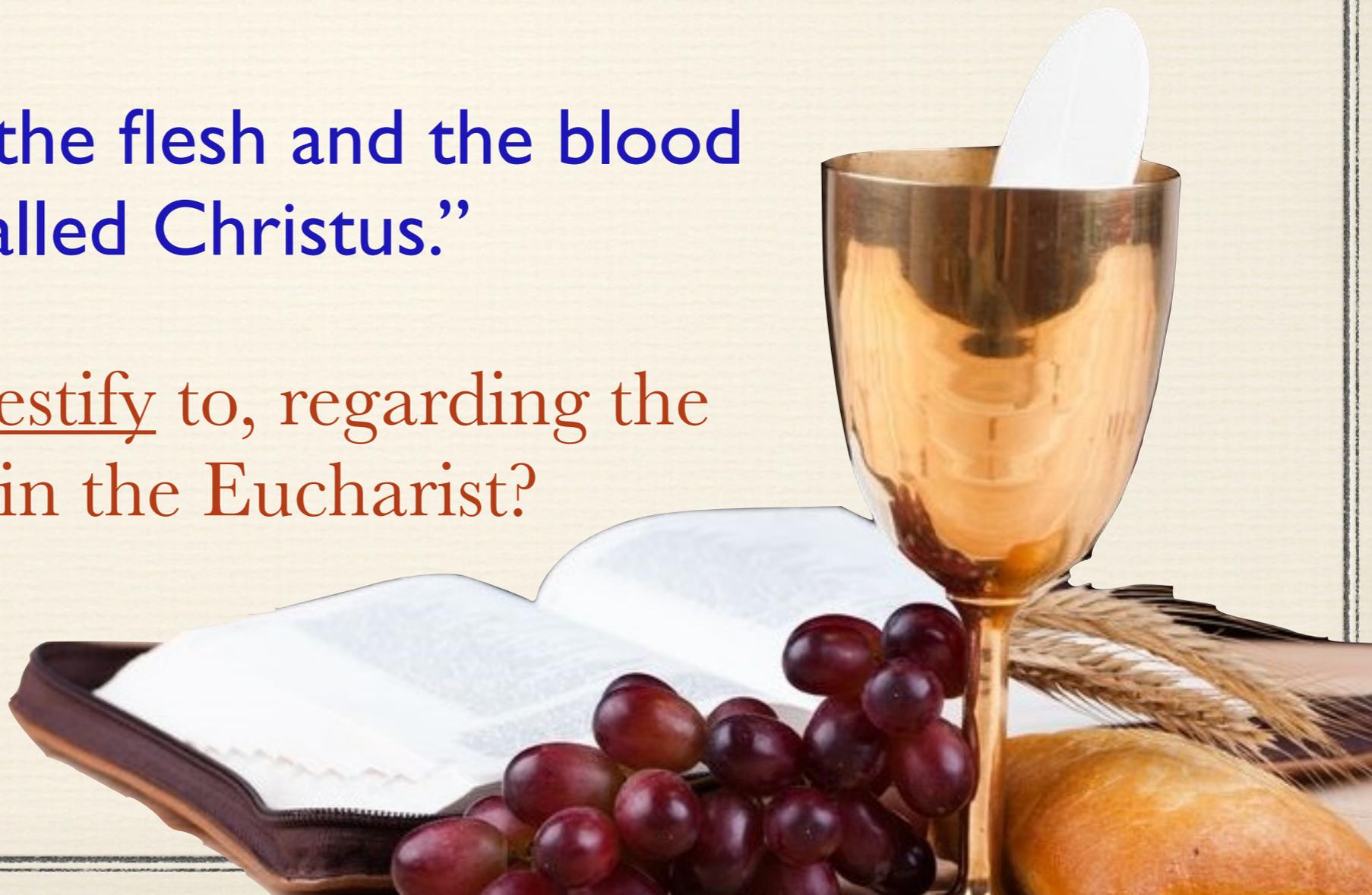
# What is the answer

- ❖ Why were the meetings held in secret?
- ❖ What were the “agape feasts?”
- ❖ Why did Christians call themselves ‘Brothers and Sisters’?



# Cannibalism

- ❖ This charge flowed from the fact that Christians claimed to:
  - ❖ “consume the flesh and the blood of a man called Christus.”
- ❖ What does this testify to, regarding the Christian belief in the Eucharist?



# Good Offense - Incest

- ❖ Justin Martyr - **Good Offense is often Best Defense.**
- ❖ **Attacked** the immorality of the Pagan society, adultery, promiscuity, homosexuality and pedophilia - and male and female prostitution
- ❖ Sex sold was taxed - **financial stake** by Empire is seeing it go well.

# Good Offense - Incest

- ❖ Unwanted babies were routinely abandoned.
- ❖ Many died from exposure
- ❖ Many raised by pimps for prostitution.
- ❖ *Consequence?* Some Patrons of prostitutes were invariably having **incestuous sex**, with prostitutes who might be their own kin, or illegitimate offspring!

# Good Offense - Incest

❖ *“You charge against us the actions that you commit openly and treat with honor.”*

1 Apology 27

❖ Then Justin defends:

1. **monogamous marriages;**
2. **begetting children as the natural order of the marital union; and,**
3. **asserts the prohibition against divorce and remarriage.**

❖ Justin also defends **lifelong chastity** as valued.

# Good Offense - Problem

- ❖ When using a Good Offense option:
  - ❖ Don't only attack the other view.
  - ❖ Must also defend our view
    - ❖ Otherwise, if we only accuse others of doing the same, we are **not** distinguishing our way of life, from the way of the world.

# Christian Worship

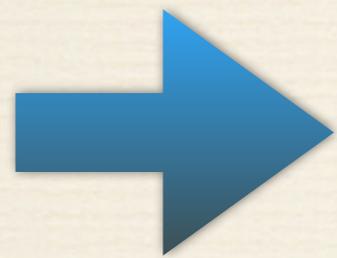
- ❖ St Justin gives us **confirmation that what we do today is Apostolic**
- ❖ Describes Holy Mysteries, which he calls a **sacramentum** - analogizing to the oath of fidelity of a soldier to caesar.
- ❖ Describes **Baptisms** - as life changing events.

# Christian Worship

- ❖ Describes the continuing vitality of the **Didache**:
  - ❖ **Fasting** days and **40 days** before Easter celebration of Baptism (precursor to **Lent**)
- ❖ Describes a **first century Mass**
  - ❖ *Lets look at pages 54-55*

# Cannibalism

- ❖ *Consistent* with St Ignatius of Antioch, St Justin Martyr says:



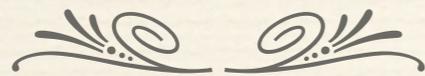
“we have been taught ...”

- ❖ “food consecrated by **the word of prayer** which comes from him (Jesus) ...”
- ❖ from which our flesh and blood are nourished **by the transformation, is the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus”**

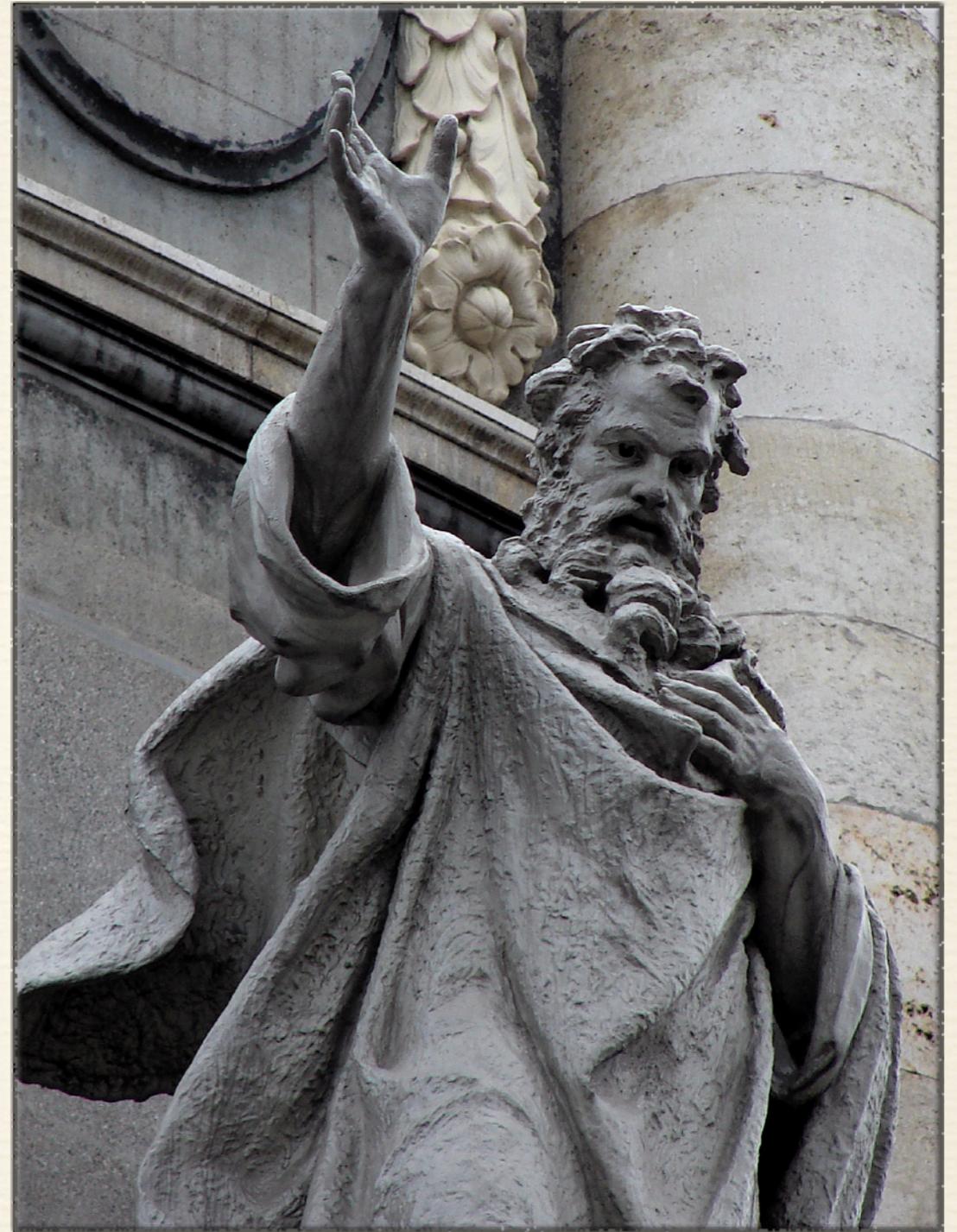
# Martyrdom - A witness

- ❖ *Mystery* that **Baptism** is a celebrated love, more powerful than a legionary's **sacramentum** - which is only motivated by fidelity for a future benefit.
- ❖ “Nobody in his senses gives up truth for falsehood.”  
Justin Martyr in 165AD
- ❖ Especially when Truth is a person. Jn 14:6

# Chapter 8



*Irenaeus and the Gnostic Threat*



# Gnosticism

- ❖ Creeping Eastern thought into the West
- ❖ Great **threat** to true Christianity in the 2nd Century - attractive as 'superior'
  - ❖ *St Dominic would still fight it in the 13th Century in the form of Albigensians*
- ❖ **Diverse**, but with common characteristics

# Gnosticism

- ❖ Bad God and good God, generally in opposition.
- ❖ In the case of Christian/Jewish based Gnosticism, the OT was controlled by the bad and lesser God - **Demiurge** - but the good God, the **Supreme Being**, was revealed in the NT.
- ❖ **Flesh = bad; Spirit = good**

# Gnosticism

- ❖ **Soul**, our spiritual component, is trapped in our flesh. Freedom requires escape of Spirit from the flesh. Death provides this.
- ❖ Sometimes Anti procreation - if flesh is bad, should not create more flesh in the form of children. Essenes shared this view.
- ❖ **Some believed we had a pre-existence** as Plato taught. Angels trapped in bodies.  
*(Mormons also believe in pre-existence of soul)*

# Gnosticism

- ❖ Anti-flesh then express itself in two extremes:
  - ❖ **Ascetism** - deprive the flesh of pleasure since flesh only seeks evil. Focus on Spiritual only.
  - ❖ **Indulgence** - yield to the flesh in all things, immorality, gluttony, orgies, for the flesh avails nothing anyway.  
(as Jesus himself said).

# Gnosticism

- ❖ Therefore, the Supreme Being could never become flesh!
- ❖ *Incarnation* of Supreme Being did not occur.
  - ❖ **Infancy Narratives** of Jesus discarded
  - ❖ **Death** of Jesus, discarded as well.
  - ❖ No cross - **Salvation thru gnosis**

# Gnosticism

- ❖ **Gnosis - knowledge.** Therefore, only gnostics, were in the know.
- ❖ **Only gnostics would be saved**
- ❖ This knowledge is **secret** - reserved for the elite.
- ❖ Only the elect, will be saved. (*shades of Calvinism in this pre-election idea*)

# Gnosticism

- ❖ You will also hear, especially from **Calvanists**:
  - ❖ **Disproportionate** emphasis on the contrast between a Carnal man and Spiritual man. (flesh and spirit). A sense that the body is evil, fallen and therefore by nature the source of our woes. The body is not good. (miss it on St Paul)
  - ❖ The **Resurrection of the Body is secondary**, their primary vision is of being a soul in heaven. No special yearning for the resurrection as a completion of salvation.

# Gnosticism

- ❖ To Gnostics - Jesus only appeared to be human.  
An emanation - Even in Apostolic times
- ❖ **John the Evangelist** fought two things in writing his Gospel:
  - ❖ **Cerintus** the gnostic - **Irenaeus** in one of his writings reports that the Apostle John refused to remain under the same roof with Cerintus.
  - ❖ *and, lingering belief that John Baptist was messiah.*

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# Enter Irenaeus

- ❖ A bishop in Lyon, France
- ❖ As a boy, a **disciple of Polycarp** - who was a disciple of St John.
- ❖ Spiritual Grandchild of John the Apostle.
- ❖ **Student of Justin Martyr!**



Credentials?

# Irenaeus Tactic

- ❖ **Credentials - credentials, credentials!**
- ❖ *Against Heresies*
  - ❖ 5 volume work, on teachings of the Apostles as written in the **Scriptures**
  - ❖ **Tradition** of the Apostles as memorialized by the **successors to the Apostles**.
  - ❖ Similar approach as St Clement.

# Irenaeus Tactic

- ❖ **St Clement** taught us that our unity came from the Apostolic succession - a conferring of authority from one generation to the next.
- ❖ **St Irenaeus** adds that this Apostolic succession, not only ensures unity so that we are one church, but also is the assurance of transmission of truth.
- ❖ With Irenaeus, the understanding of the **magisterium** teaching office, takes flesh.

# Irenaeus Tactic

- ❖ **Every bishop** traces his office to the unbroken line that leads to one of the Apostles. At that time, each could trace their own pedigree.
- ❖ If Jesus was gnostic, he would have transmitted his **secret knowledge** to those closest to him - His Apostles.
- ❖ Only those teachings are authentic, that were transmitted by the Apostles, their writings and the traditions they shared.

# Irenaeus Tactic

Therefore, Mr Gnostic ...  
show me your credentials.

... show me how you  
trace your teachings to  
the Apostles,

... who laid hands on you?



# Sacraments

- ❖ **St Justin Martyr** learned of Sacraments from followers of *St John & St Paul* in Ephesus, and followers of *St Peter* in Rome. As such, demanded Baptism.
- ❖ **St Irenaeus** learned of Sacraments *specifically* from St Polycarp who learned them from *St John the Apostle*.
- ❖ **St Ignatius** also testified to sacramental teachings of the Eucharist as learned from *St John the Apostle*.



# Sacraments

- ❖ **St Irenaeus** emphasized the invisible reality transmitted through matter and the visible.
- ❖ A very anti-gnostic theology.
- ❖ **Salvation** through water? **Spiritual** nourishment through bread & wine?
- ❖ Salvation and Resurrection linked

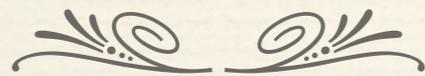


# The New Eve

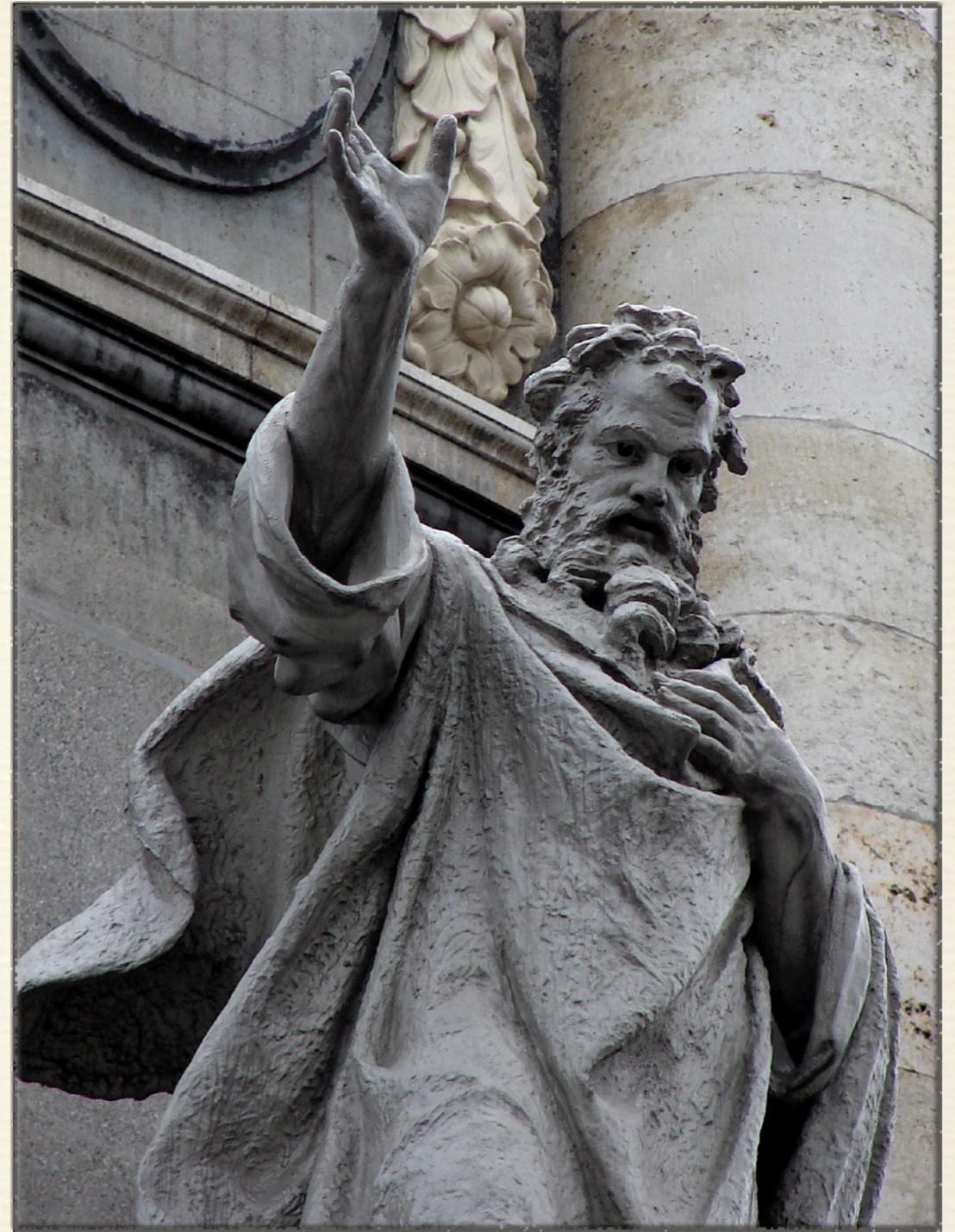
- ❖ **St Irenaeus** is the first to contemplate in writing that the **Virgin Mary is the New Eve**
- ❖ Drawing from the image of Jesus as the New Adam, from St Paul in Romans 5.
- ❖ Mary's sinless nature is advanced as part of **her obedience, untying the knot that Eve tied.**



# Chapter 9

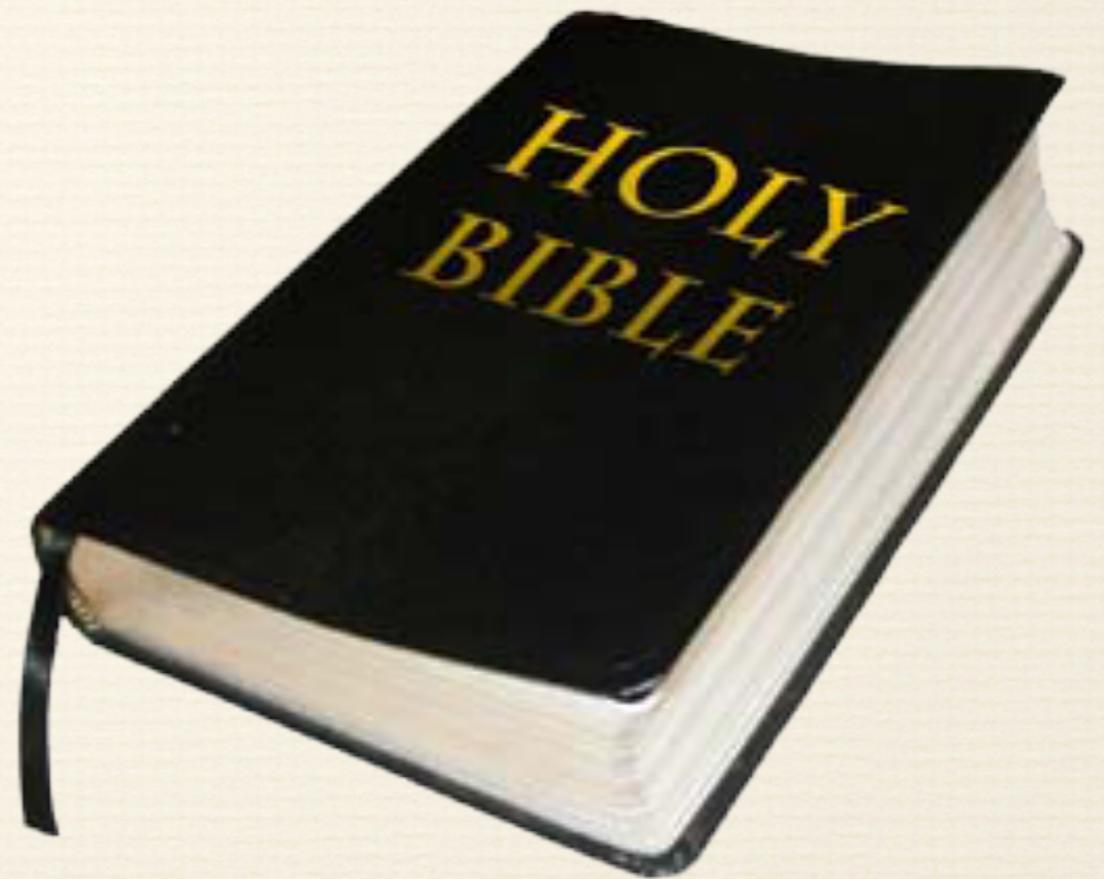


*Irenaeus and the  
Battle for the Bible*



# Holy Scripture

- ❖ The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Gnostics and Christians alike believed in an inspired Word of God.
- ❖ What books, however, belong in the Bible?



# Holy Scripture

- ❖ In the final analysis, **everyone but Catholics** define the content and/or inerrancy of the Bible according to their theology.
- ❖ **Muslims**, say they accept the bible including OT and NT except to the extent corrupted.
- ❖ **Most Protestants**, reject seven books of the OT - even though they were used in Apostolic times when drafting the New Testament.

# Holy Scripture

- ❖ **Mormons**, add a whole other set of Testaments to the bible - The Book of Mormon, Doctrines and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price.
- ❖ **Jehovah Witnesses**, like Martin Luther add words and revise the text according to their 'interpretation' of the Greek.
- ❖ **Gnostics**, in the 2nd Century - did the same

# Judaizers - Ebionites

- ❖ **Judaizers**, believed heretically that the 613 commandments of the Mosaic law were binding. These were called **Ebionites**
  - ❖ **Ebionites** rejected Jesus' divinity.
  - ❖ Only the Gospel of Matthew without the infancy narratives.
- ❖ Jesus was human, the new Moses of Dt 18:15-18

# Marcionites

- ❖ **Marcion**, believed heretically that the god of the Old Testament was evil, and therefore could not be the loving father of Jesus Christ
  - ❖ **Marcionites** rejected the OT as evil.
  - ❖ Only the Gospel of Luke, and like the Ebionites without the infancy narrative.
  - ❖ Only 10 Epistles of Paul, purified of references to a created evil world by God the Father.

# Montanism

- ❖ **Montanus**, believed heretically that he and the two women in his company were prophets.
- ❖ **Montanites** rejected the Scriptures in any form as binding, because the Holy Spirit -having been sent at Pentecost, superseded Jesus and Moses.
- ❖ Revelation was not complete and would continue as it always had in the past. God would speak through prophets, and Montanus was a prophet.

# By the Way ...

- ❖ **The Mormon Church**, today, still believes in continuing revelation.
  - ❖ How else could **Joseph Smith** have received an additional Gospel.
- ❖ **Dark Skinned people could not become LDS priests**, a perpetual ordinance according to **Brigham Young**.
  - The LDS church got a *new* revelation that it was OK after all for black people to become priests, when the **Civil Rights Act of 1965** became law.

# Irenaeus

- ❖ **History of Salvation** - fits together with a unity that Gnosticism and Montanism had to ignore.
- ❖ **Premise** - God reared humanity with the same care and caution as we raise children.
  - ❖ God nurtured, knowing that the revelation of all the truth at once could not be embraced.
  - ❖ St Paul speaks of those who first need milk

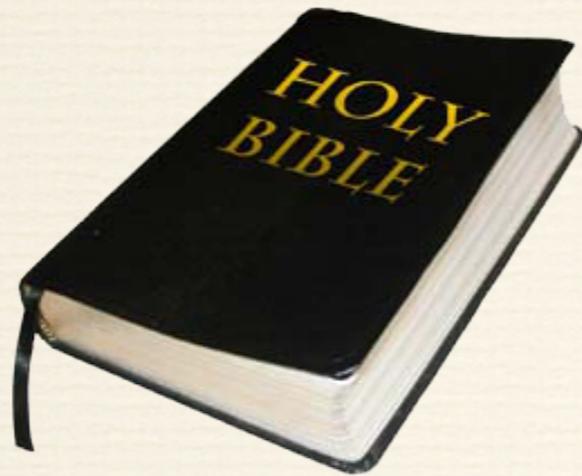
# Irenaeus

- ❖ **Irenaeus** explained how all of the Old Testament prefigured Christ.
- ❖ Now that Jesus has been revealed there is nothing more to be revealed. The New Testament records that final revelation.
- ❖ As such, Irenaeus referred to the **New Testament books as well as the Old Testament books as scripture.**

# Irenaeus

- ❖ **Irenaeus** explained further that we know the content of the Scriptures based on the **Sacred Tradition**, which guards:
  - ❖ the **writings** of the Apostles
  - ❖ their use by the **magisterium** of the Church
  - ❖ and the unity of the three.

# Example . . . . .



❖ **Lost Pauline Letters**

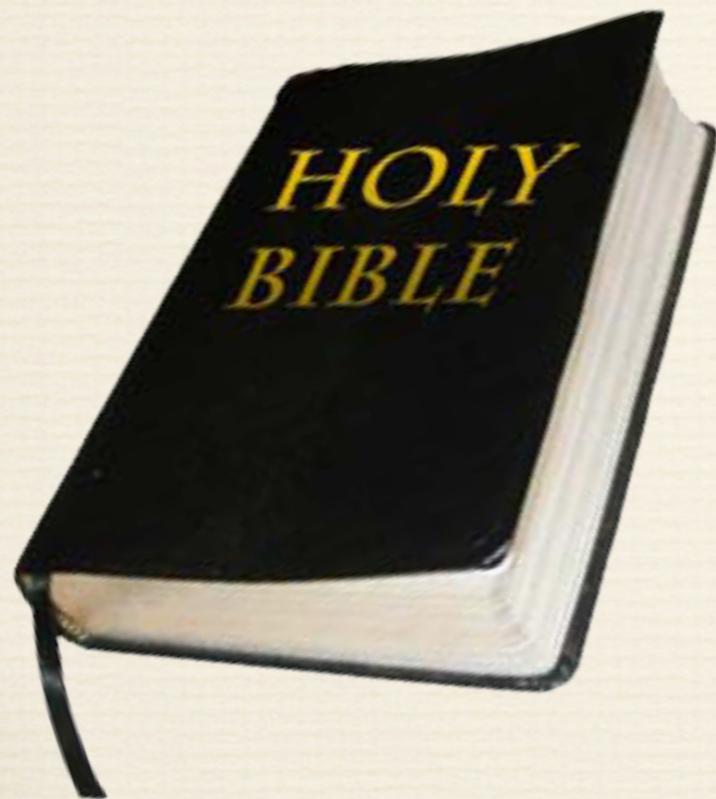
❖ **See 1 Cor 5: 9, 11**

**See also Col 4:16**

- ❖ **1 Cor 5: 9, 11** - I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. ... But now I write to you not ... (cf 1 Cor 7:1)
- ❖ **Col 4:16** - And when this letter is read before you, have it read also in the church of Laodecia, and you yourselves read the one from Laodecia.

# Question .....

- ❖ If the letter to the **Laodecians**, was found with the apparent certainty that has validated the Dead Sea Scrolls:



How would the **Catholic Church** evaluate the validity of this letter?

How would a **Protestant Church** evaluate the validity of this letter?

# Early Church Fathers



*Chapters 6-9*