

APOSTOLIC INTERPRETATION: THE KEY FOR THE CHRISTIAN UNITY

1. Apostolic Interpretation as Part of Apostolic Tradition

a) The same Holy Spirit inspired the Church to interpret the Holy Scripture

- * The Holy Spirit descended upon "the Body"
- * The Holy Spirit inspired "the Body" with "the godly way of life" or Holy Tradition both:
 - + orally at first
 - + in writing later
- * the same Holy Spirit inspired "the Body" to interpret through the individuals
 - + individuals gave the Church interpretation
 - + the apostolic dimension of the interpretation of individuals was dependent on its concordance with the uninterrupted interpretation of the Church

b) The "godly way of interpretation" begins with Jesus Christ

- * Jesus interpreted during His life on earth and He continues to interpret within the Church, His Body, through the Holy Spirit
- * Jesus Christ, the Son of God upheld the godly interpretation against the individual, out of context interpretation of the Devil
 - + see Matthew 4, 6-11
- * Jesus interpreted for the Apostles and Disciples, giving them a pattern of interpretation
 - + see Luke 24,45

c) The Church of the Book of Acts is shown as interpreting through individual members

- * Philip interprets on behalf of the Church for the eunuch:
 - + see Acts 8,26-38
 - + verse 31 points out the need to receive proper interpretation
- * Paul points out that preaching, which includes and is often made up of interpretation must be done by those who "are sent"
 - + see Romans 10,15
- * the Apostles delegated their successors to clarify the teaching by interpreting according to apostolic doctrine, as we can see in:
 - + 1 Timothy 1,3
 - + Titus 1,5
 - + Titus 1,9

d) The authors of the New Testament books warn of the temptation to improperly interpret the Scripture and insist that the ultimate truth is in "the Body", the Church, and not the individual

* Peter warns of improper interpretation

+ see 2 Peter 2,1-2

+ see 2 Peter 1,20-21

+ see 2 Peter 3,15-17

* Paul reminds us that the Apostolic truth lies with the Church, the only "pillar and ground of truth"

+ see 1 Timothy 3,15

2. Apostolic interpretation continued by Post-Apostolic successors

a) The Church and her "godly way of life" continued through the Successors of the Apostles.

* Even though the New Testament writings were done, questions and issues similar to those dealt with by the Gospels and Epistles arose

* Because some of the writings had "things hard to understand", and the Apostles were no longer around to be asked for clarification

* Because "false teachings", some not even based on the New Testament writings, were taught

* The rightfully appointed successors of the Apostles were asked to:

+ answer to questions and issues from the oral tradition, which continued along with the New Testament writings

+ to correctly interpret the passages which had "things hard to understand"

+ to speak out against false writings and "false teachings" which were not faced by the Apostles themselves

b) The APOSTOLIC FATHERS and their writings

* The immediate successors of the Apostles are known as Apostolic Fathers.

+ they knew the Apostles (one or more) personally

+ they were appointed episkopoi of the Church by the Apostles and their immediate successors

+ they were seen and heard preaching and working in the Church with the Apostles and their immediate successors

* When there was a need for clarification the Church turned to one of the well respected Apostolic Father

for clarification, and they responded:

- + often orally, when that was possible and it produced the immediate result
- + in writing, when he could not be with those requesting, or there weren't immediate results
- + they did not teach anything new; their responses became part of the Apostolic writings only when:
 - accepted by the unorganized consensus of the Church
 - accepted by the organized consensus of the Church in Councils, Ecumenical or local

3. Examples of Apostolic Fathers and Apostolic writings

a) Clement the episkopos of Rome

- * episkopos of Rome after Lynnus & Anacletus between 92-102
- * "saw the Apostles and talked with them"(as said by Irenaeus in his work "Against the Heresies")
- * mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4,3
- * died as a Martyr for Christ
- * wrote The Epistle to the Corinthians, around A.D. 96-98 in which we find remarks about such debated issues as:
 - + Apostolic Succession (42,1-5 & 44,1-6)
 - + The importance of the example of the saints (46,1-3)
 - + The importance of the authority of the presbyters in the local community (57,1-2)

b) Ignatius of Antioch

- * episkopos of Antioch
- * knew personally the Apostles Peter, Paul and John
- * died as a Martyr for Christ
- * wrote Seven Epistles (Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans, Policarp), in which we find remarks about such debated issues as:
 - + the need for visible Christian unity
 - Magnesians 7,1
 - Trallians 2,1-3 & 3,1-2
 - Ephesians 4,1-2
 - + the oneness of the Trinity
 - Magnesians 13,1-2
 - + the early existence of the three orders
 - Trallians 3,1
 - Smyrnaeans 9,1

+ the meaning of the Body and Blood in the Eucharist

- Romans 7,3
- Philadelphians 4,1
- Smyrnaeans 7,1 & 8,1-2

c) *The Didache or The Teaching of the twelve*

* author is unknown but was extensively used in the second century and quoted by Apostolic Fathers such as Justin the Martyr

* it provides us with clarifications on debated issues such as:

+ the importance of Baptism

- 7,1-4

+ the Eucharist

- 9,5

+ Confession

- 14,1

+ Fasting

- 8,1

+ Sunday, the Lord's Day

- 14,1

+ the importance of using the Lord's Prayer

-8,2-3