

The School of Alexandria



Quiz 1

- Who did St Clement of Rome write to?
- What was the main problem in that church?
- What number Pope of Rome was he, and during what time?
- How many epistles did St Ignatius of Antioch write? Who was the personal letter sent to?
- What was the main message in the epistles to the churches?
- What was the message to the church of Rome?

Alexandria

- 2nd largest city in Egypt
- Extends 32km along the coast of the Mediterranean
- Population - 4-5 million
- Capital of Egypt for 1,000 yrs until the Arab invasion









History of Alexandria

- 332 BC - Founded by Alexander the Great
- Intended to be a hellenistic centre, linking Greece with Egypt
- Architect appointed to design and build the city
- Alexander left, never to return
- Building and expansion carried on by his general, Ptolemy

History of Alexandria

- Grew rapidly to become:
 - Largest city in the world, and following the rise of Rome, second largest for many centuries
 - Centre of commerce/trade between Europe and India/Middle East/Africa
 - Centre of Hellenism
 - Largest Jewish community in the world → Septuagint

History of Alexandria

- Centre of learning and philosophy
- 3 schools:
 - Museum (dedicated to the 'Muses')
 - Serapeum (pagan temple, but also centre of learning)
 - Sebastion
- Each school had its own library, largest attached to the Museum
- Became known as 'Library of Alexandria'

Library of Alexandria

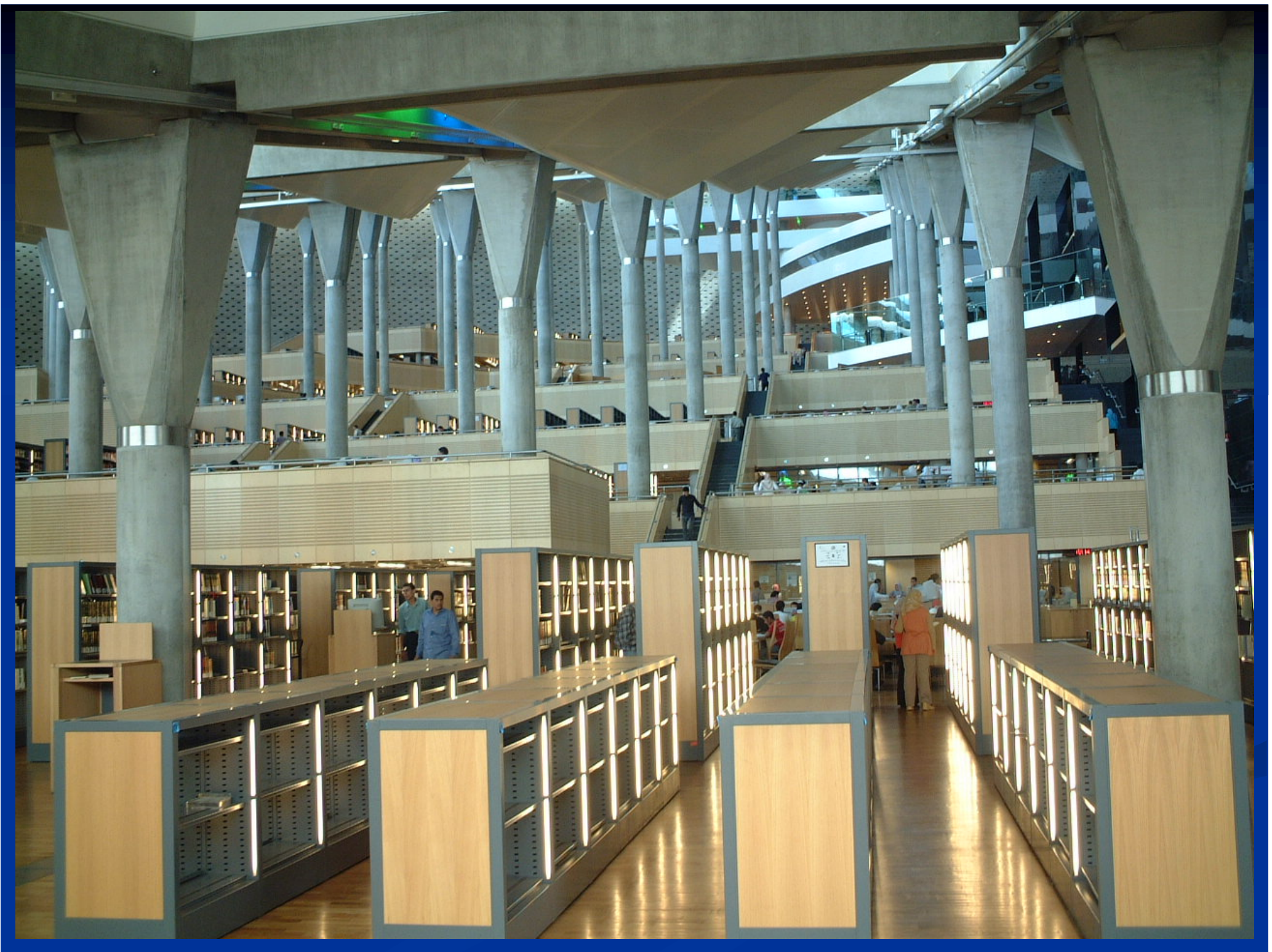
- Built c.200 BC
- Had reading rooms, lecture halls, meeting rooms
- Scrolls catalogued on shelves
- Aim: To collect all the knowledge of the world
- Maths, astronomy, physics, philosophy
- Over 700,000 scrolls/books
- Contraversial how destroyed - Christians? Muslims?











Alexandria - Centre of Learning

- Alexandria - intellectual capital of the world
- Large communities of Greeks and Jews, as well as Egyptians
- Distinguished scientists, mathematicians, writers, philosophers conducted research, taught and wrote in Alexandria
- Numerous Jewish schools established as well, and Septuagint a product of Alexandria:
 - Acts 18:24 - “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures...”

Alexandria - Centre of Learning

- Phillip Schaff states:
 - “Alexandria was the metropolis of Egypt, the flourishing seat of commerce, of Grecian and Jewish learning, and of the greatest library of the ancient world, and was destined to become one of the great centres of Christianity....There the religious life of Palestine and the intellectual culture of Greece commingled and prepared the way for the first school of theology which aimed at a philosophic comprehension and vindication of the truths of revelation.”

School of Alexandria

- In this environment, the church had to establish a Christian institution to develop scholars and teachers to compete and battle against the pagan and Jewish schools
- Christian scholars were needed to convert pagan and Jewish scholars
- New converts were educated people - scholars, philosophers, scientists - hence it was necessary to present Christianity in the form of knowledge, research and wisdom

School of Alexandria

- Result: Catechetical School of Alexandria
- The oldest and most famous Christian intellectual institution

Development of SoA

- Started as a catechetical school - St Jerome states was started by St Mark himself
- Both men and women admitted to the school for Christian studies, to be qualified for baptism
- Combined spiritual life (fasting/service/alms) with intellectual studies
- No buildings, lecture halls....etc – Instruction in the private house of the teachers

Development of SoA

- “It seems to have been conducted privately, and was never under the patronage of church authority. The pupils were mostly young Alexandrian Greeks, and young women were probably included in the classes. There was a library attached to the school and there can have been no shortage of books.....The task of the head of the school was to train young Christians in the understanding of texts. Probably there were no formal classes; it is more likely that the school resembled a study circle of intense young Christians...with [the head of the school] acting as moderator and occasionally delivering sermons”
 - R. Payne “The Holy Fire”.

Development of SoA

- By 2nd century, became influential:
 - Encouraged higher studies, research and knowledge
 - Gave birth to numerous church leaders including Popes
 - Attracted students from other nations - eg. Basil
 - Offered the first ever systematic theological studies
 - Established importance of education as a basic element in religious structure
 - Used philosophy as a weapon in dealing with pagan philosophers

Program

- Started as catechetical school - candidates admitted to learn the Christian faith and some Biblical studies
- However, the school's activities were not restricted to theology. Origen wrote:
 - “No inquiry was closed to them, no knowledge was withheld from them. They had the chance to study every branch of learning: Greek or foreign, spiritual or sociological, human or divine. We were permitted with entire freedom to encompass the whole round world of knowledge and investigate it, to satisfy ourselves with every variety of teaching and to enjoy the sweets of intellect.”
- Taught the sciences, then moral and religious philosophy, and then Christian theology

Characteristics of SoA Theology

1. Faith and knowledge:
 - The word “gnosis” was associated with the “gnostic” heresy that knowledge is what leads to salvation, not faith
 - Many Christians therefore attacked knowledge and philosophy as enemies of faith
 - The SoA rather considered knowledge as a way that leads to faith and as a divine gift

Characteristics of SoA Theology

2. The role of philosophy:

- The SoA did not despise philosophy
- Rather, saw all schools of philosophy as having the same aim of Christianity - the study and love of true wisdom
- However, other schools could not realise their aim
- St Clement said:
 - “Philosophy is not a work of darkness, but it has a ray of the Logos who shines on it”
 - “Philosophers are children, until they have been made men by Christ”

Characteristics of SoA Theology

3. The oneness of life:

- The study of religion is not isolated from the church life, or daily spiritual life
- There is one life in Christ
- Deans and students devoted their lives to Christ - not purely scholars, but true worshippers, ascetics, preachers
- Many pagans converted to Christianity through them, and became martyrs - this was through the complete knowledge AND spiritual life as one

Characteristics of SoA Theology

4. Allegorical interpretation of the Bible:
 - The SoA systematically studied the Bible.
 - Believed in three levels of interpretation:
 1. Literal - Looks to the obvious or superficial meaning of the Bible
 2. Moral - Looks to scripture to guide morals and behaviour
 3. Allegorical – Inner or spiritual interpretation
 - Eg - Crossing the Red Sea

Early Deans

1. Yostius:

- Appointed by St Mark.
- Ordained the Pope in 121 AD.

2. Eumenius:

- Little known about him. Became Pope in 132 AD.

3. Marcianus:

- Dean and Pope in 144 AD

Early Deans

4. Athenagoras:

- Athenagoras was a philosopher, and held an academic position in the Museum as a pagan
- Searched Christianity for mistakes to attack it:
 - “He...was bent on writing against the Christians; and studying the divine scriptures in order to carry on the contest with greater accuracy, was thus himself caught by the Holy Spirit, so that, like the great Paul, from a persecutor he became a teacher of the faith which he persecuted.” (Greek historian)
- One of the first known Christians who had a strong foundation in philosophy, and showed that the two were not inconsistent.
- “...the whole of philosophy is embraced in Christianity...”
- His pupils were Pantaneus and Clement

Early Deans

5. Pantaneus
 - Succeeded Athenagoras
 - Became missionary to India
6. Clement of Alexandria
7. Origen

St Clement of Alexandria

- Born c.150 AD
- Travelled widely as a youth to seek Christian instruction (Italy, Palestine, Syria), and came to Alexandria where he met Pantaneus and stayed
- Became disciple of Pantaneus, and then succeeded him as Dean in approx 190 AD
- Took refuge out of Egypt during persecutions in 202 AD, and died abroad in 215 AD

St Clement of Alexandria

- Did not see philosophy and Christian doctrine as enemies
- Rather, the philosophers only glimpsed the glory of God, which was fully revealed in Christianity
- Very talented and enthusiastic teacher, with a sharp intellect and fiery enthusiasm
- He believed teaching to be a divine mission and he gave his life to the task
- Crowds flocked to hear him speak

Writings of St Clement

- Main work was the “Trilogy”:
 1. “The Exhortation” - Directed to pagans to accept the Christian faith
 2. “The Tutor” - Aimed to teach those who are converted to Christianity to be in the likeness of Christ
 3. “The Miscellanies” - a mixture of science, philosophy, poetry and theology which aimed to show that Christianity can satisfy man’s intellectual needs

Origen

- Student and successor of St Clement:
 - “The School of Alexandria reached its greatest importance under...Origen, the outstanding teacher and scholar of the early church...a man of encyclopaedic learning, and one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen” (Quasten, *Patrology*)
- Origen was an exceptional and unparalleled intellect, but was also controversial

Origen

- Born in Alexandria approx 185 AD
- Father Leonides was a Christian, and raised Origen on the Holy scriptures
- Origen memorised a passage from the Bible daily
- Even as a child, Origen asked for the deeper spiritual meaning of the scriptures, and often embarrassed his father who could not answer
- Became a student under Clement in the SoA at 14yrs old

Origen

- When 17, a persecution arose against the church and his father was imprisoned
- Origen wanted to join his father in martyrdom, but his mother hid all his clothes to stop him
- His father ultimately was martyred
- Origen worked as a teacher of grammar and literature to support his family
- He preached and converted pagans where possible

Origen - School of Alexandria

- Pope Demetrius appointed Origen as dean of the SoA when he was 18, while Clement was still in refuge out of Egypt
- Origen sold all his possessions and devoted his life to the school
- Taught his students not just by his lectures and writings, but also by his way of living:
 - “He stimulated us by the deeds he did, more than by the doctrines he taught” (St Gregory the Miracles Performer)

Origen - School of Alexandria

- Numerous pagans flocked to learn the teachings of Christianity from him
- Origen went to learn philosophy so that he could converse with the philosophers (cf. Pantaneus and Clement who were philosophers first)
- He taught the need for ascetism. As there were females in his lectures, he mutilated himself, acting on the words:
 - “there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (Matt 19:12)

■ R. Payne, “The Holy Fire”

- “He lived precariously. He drank no wine, walked barefoot and slept on the floor. Almost his chief expenditure was for midnight oil: he had a habit which lasted throughout his life, of writing and studying at night.”
- “About this time, when he was living a life of strictest asceticism, he performed the act of self-mutilation.....He may have performed the act in a sudden irrational moment, when the calm demanded by intensive scholarship was thwarted by the invasion of sexual energy. It may have been that he regarded emasculation as simply one more of the mortifications he imposed on the body....to be compared with fasting”.
- “He tried to hide what he had done, but the secret was soon known and brought to the attention of his bishop, who forgave him willingly, but never forgot this strange incident in the life of his most famous schoolteacher”.

Controversies

- Origen travelled widely, and in 216 AD went to Jerusalem. The bishops there asked him to preach.
- Pope Demetrius was angry when he returned as a layman is not to preach in the presence of Bishops
- Approx 230 AD Origen returned to Palestine, and the Bishops there ordained him as a priest so that he could preach
- This angered Pope Demetrius far more as:
 - i) Origen was ordained by another Bishop, and
 - ii) A self-mutilated person should never be ordained a priest
- He was then excommunicated

Controversies

- Some teachings were incorrect:
 1. He believed all creation would return to God, and all mankind would be saved such that eternal punishment had an end
 2. Satan and all evil spirits would be saved in the end
 3. Souls existed before bodies, and were bound to bodies as a punishment for sins previously committed. The world was a place to purify souls.
- Origen accepted his excommunication and left Alexandria for Palestine. There he continued to teach for 20 years.

Last Days

- Origen was imprisoned and tortured severely during the reign of Emperor Decius (250 AD):
 - “The number and greatness of Origen’s sufferings during the persecution...the number and nature of bonds which the man endured for the word of Christ...punishments as he lay in irons in the recesses of the dungeons...and the sayings he left behind him after this...for those who need consolation” (Eusebius).
- Origen died shortly after his persecution
- Pope Dionysius sent him a letter on martyrdom renewing his relation with Alexandria

Origen's writings

- One of the most gifted intellects of the church, his writings were voluminous.
- He wrote 6,000 works (most of them now lost)
- St Jerome says:
 - “Which of us can read all that he has written?”
- St Gregory the Miracles Performer:
 - “The Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets...honoured him as a friend, and appointed him as an interpreter....He has the power to listen to God, understand His sayings and explain them to men so that they also may understand.”

Origen's writings

- Textual writings:
 - Hexapla - First scientific attempt to study the text of the OT
 - 6 columns - Hebrew text of OT, Hebrew text in Greek letters, Septuagint, 3 other OT translations
 - Took 28 yrs and spanned 50 volumes
- Biblical exegetical writings:
 - Wrote commentary on nearly the entire Bible. It is said he spent nights kneeling, praying, reading the Bible and writing commentaries
- Apologetic writings
- Dogmatic writings
- Practical writings (eg. on prayer and martyrdom)
- Letters

Origen's writings

- R. Payne, "The Holy Fire":
 - "...no one ever wrestled with the inner meanings of Christianity with such formidable energy, such titanic power...."
 - "This eunuch was the first great doctor, the founder of scientific Biblical scholarship. He would use reason and make reason itself the servant of Christ. He would batter down the walls of heaven by the main force of logic alone"
 - "His influence on Christian thought was gigantic, and cannot be escaped even now"
 - **"There was none like him, and there will be none like him again..."**

Summary

- Alexandria was a centre of learning and philosophy around the time of Christ
- When Christianity was established there, the church needed to develop educated scholars to be able to discuss Christian theology with the educated pagans and Jews
- The School of Alexandria started as a catechetical school, and then developed more broad areas of learning and research within theology, philosophy and the sciences

Summary

- The characteristics of SoA theology were:
 1. Knowledge an important instrument of faith
 2. Saw philosophy as a friend, and not contradictory to Christianity
 3. Oneness of academic and spiritual life
 4. Allegorical biblical interpretation

Summary

- The SoA produced many of the early Popes, Bishops and Priests of the church
- Early Deans: Yostius, Eumenius, Marcianus
- Athenogoras
- Pantaneus, Clement and Origen

Questions?

