



## OVERTURE THE FIRST 500

### Questions for discussion

1. **Identity and Separation:**

How did early Christians navigate their separation from Judaism while still affirming the Hebrew Scriptures? What challenges or opportunities did this create for their identity?

2. **Faith and Culture:**

Justin Martyr argued that Christianity was the “true philosophy.” What do you think it means for Christianity to engage with surrounding culture while remaining faithful to Christ?

3. **Persecution and Witness:**

How did the willingness of martyrs like Polycarp and Ignatius to suffer and die for their faith strengthen the church? What lessons might this hold for Christians facing opposition today?

4. **Truth and Heresy:**

Irenaeus said error often looks attractive, “decked out in an attractive dress.” What heresies or false ideas today might seem appealing, and how can the church respond faithfully?

5. **Monastic Witness:**

Why did some Christians feel called to withdraw into the desert after persecution ended? What might modern Christians learn from the discipline and devotion of the Desert Fathers and Mothers?

6. **Scripture and Authority:**

How did the struggle with false teachings push the church toward forming the biblical canon? Why is it important for Christians today to know where the Scriptures came from?

7. **Church and State:**

When Ambrose confronted Emperor Theodosius, he insisted that even rulers are accountable to God. How should the church today relate to political power and leaders?

8. **The Trinity and Christ:**

Why was the Council of Nicaea's affirmation that Jesus is "true God from true God" so essential? How does the doctrine of the Trinity shape our understanding of salvation?

9. **Grace and Human Nature:**

Augustine insisted that only God's grace could heal human sin and make us whole. Do you think people today still struggle with Pelagius's idea that we can "be good on our own"? Why or why not?

10. **Mission and Expansion:**

St. Patrick's mission to Ireland showed Christianity moving beyond the Roman Empire. What does this teach us about how the gospel adapts to new cultures while staying faithful to Christ?