

The Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists

A Falling Away Foretold

- **Jesus warned of false prophets – Matt 7:15-20.**
- **Paul gave warnings - Acts 20:28-32; 2 Cor 11:12-14; 2 Thes 2:3-7; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 4:1-3; Titus 1:16**
- **James told the source of fighting - James 4:1-3**
- **Peter warned of false prophets - 2 Pet 2:1-2**
- **Jude foresaw the same - Jude 4**
- **John told of dangerous teachers - 1 John 2:18-19; 4:1; 3 John 9-10; Rev. 2:1-2**

Apostolic Fathers

(Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, p. 75)

- **Men who knew the apostles and their doctrine continued to write, primarily from 95 to 150.**
 - **Writings contain certain well-defined characteristics.**
 - **Informal, simple statements of sincere faith and piety**
 - **Little evidence of training in pagan philosophy**
 - **Great reverence for the O. T. with a heavy use of typological interpretation**
 - **Christianity was considered distinct from Judaism**
 - **Doctrine, ethics and obedience to church leaders were emphasized**

Clement of Rome

- Young men in Corinth rebelled against the elders
- c. A.D. 96 Clement of Rome wrote a letter encouraging them to settle their difficulties
 - 150 quotes from O T
 - Numerous N T references
 - Bishops and deacons are set forth as officers
 - A plurality of elders
 - Obedience to the elders
 - A distinction between his writings and those of inspired men (F. W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom: A History of the Church of Christ*, Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1961, 56-58)

First Clement

- **“According to Irenaeus, Clement was the third successor of Peter as bishop of Rome, following Linus and Anacletus”**
- **“As many Protestant and some Roman Catholic historians have observed, the difficulty arises because there was a plurality of presbyter-bishops at this time in the church at Rome, and Irenaeus and others read back into this time the later organization of only one bishop in a church” (Ferguson Vol. One 53)**

Ignatius of Antioch

- **“The great value to Ignatius of the monarchical bishop is as a rallying-point of unity, and as the best opponent of heresy” (Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970, 42)**
- **“Shun divisions as the beginning of evils. Do ye all follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbytery as the Apostles, and to the deacons pay respect” (Ibid)**
- **His writings did not indicate a bishop’s authority went beyond the church where he worshiped (Mattox 59-61)**

The *Didache* (c. 70-180)

- **“The full title of the Didache is ‘Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations.’ It was a characteristic of the church order literature to claim apostolic origin for the instructions concerning practical arrangements of church life” (Ferguson Vol. One 51)**
- **Dated from 70 to as late as 180**
- **“Another characteristic of the church order literature is that as practices in the church changed, material was brought up to date, so we cannot rule out later interpolations in the basic document available to us” (51)**

More on the *Didache*

- “The *Didache* is a manual of church life in three parts: ‘The Two Ways’ of life and death, on the moral teachings given to new converts; instructions on baptism, fasting prayer, eucharist, treatment of itinerant prophets and teachers, the Sunday assembly, and election of local leaders; and an eschatological conclusion” (Ferguson Vol. One 50-51)
- Pouring was allowed for baptism if not enough water was available (10)
- Christians were encouraged to assemble on the Lord’s day to break bread (Mattox 63)

Epistle of Barnabas (c. 135)

- **It shares “with the Didache a section of moral instruction according to the ‘Two Ways’” (Ferguson Vol. One 51)**
- **“The writer’s extreme position of spiritualizing the Old Testament, and denying it to the Jewish people, was not followed by anyone else known to us” (Ibid 52)**

Papias (125-150)

- **Iraeneus and Eusebius quoted from him showing he gathered oral statements from the apostles and put them into writing**
- **Iraeneus believed he was a disciple of John**
- **He referred to church officers as presbyters, even referring to the apostles with that term**
- **First to state millennial view of Christ setting up a material kingdom (Mattox 63-64)**

Polycarp (115-156)

- **His letter to the Philippians (c. 120) gives no indication of officers higher than elders in the church at Smyrna**
- **The church had been troubled by a covetous elder (Ferguson 11)**
- **Best known as the aged bishop of Smyrna who was martyred for his faith (Mattox 64-65)**

Shepherd of Hermas

(140-150)

- **The main theme was to show there is forgiveness for the erring Christian who repents**
- **Church organization was with elders or bishops (no distinction)**
- **Baptism was immersion for remission of sins (Mattox 65-66)**

Persecution

- **Christianity was politically intolerable because it set up a “state within a state” and exhibited an exclusive loyalty (Ferguson 15)**
- **As Christians were distinguished from Jews, Emperor-worship was imposed as a test**
 - **Christians viewed it as idolatry, while authorities saw refusal as disloyalty**
- **Tacitus says Nero made Christians the scapegoat for the fire in Rome in A.D. 64**
 - **They did teach “a final conflagration”**

Apologies

- **“By the second century Christianity had begun to win converts from the upper level of society and from among the better educated”**
- **“Apologies” were “formal literary defenses of Christianity” (Ferguson 16-17)**
 - **They attacked pagan cults**
 - **Defended against popular charges while pleading for tolerance (they were good citizens who prayed for the Emperor)**
 - **An explanation of the Christian faith**

Early Apologists

- **Quadratus was an early apologist and is quoted by Eusebius**
 - **His composition was addressed to Hadrian, the emperor, in Athens about A.D. 129**
- **Aristides (138-147) shows familiarity with the four gospel accounts, Acts, Romans and 1 Peter**
 - **His is the first complete apologetic document**
- **Epistle to Diognetus is from an unknown author who “argues for the divine origin of Christianity as superior to the idolatry of pagans and the ritualistic worship of Jews” (Ferguson 71-72)**

Tatian

- Traveled over Greece studying Greek philosophy
- Met Justin before 150 and was converted
- He wrote an “Address to Greeks”
 - Ridiculed Greek superiority and the immorality expressed by their sculpture and art
 - Showed the superiority of Christianity
 - He said Moses and the prophets were older than Greek religions, therefore Christianity preceded them
- He wrote the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four gospels
- He became over exalted after Justin’s death, resulting his becoming a gnostic

Athenagorus

- **A teacher in Athens and early example of a person being converted to Christ through personal reading of scripture**
- **“Plea for Christians” (177) refuted charges against Christians**
- **“On the Resurrection of the Dead” “contains nearly all the arguments which human reason can draw from nature for the resurrection” (Ferguson 17)**

Theophilus

- He became a Christian through his own study of scripture and was the sixth bishop of Antioch
- His defense of Christianity (180) was addressed *To Autolycus*, an educated pagan official he hoped to convert
- He first dealt with the existence of God, absurdities of pagan gods/idolatry and a discussion of the fact of the resurrection
- In the second part, he contrasted the defense Greeks made of their gods/religion with that set forth in the Old Testament

Justin Martyr

- Born in Samaria, he studied philosophy until he met an old man “who in Socratic method raised questions that only the ‘Christian philosophy’ could answer (Ferguson *Church History Volume One* 73)
- *Apology* (150) is addressed to Antoninus Pius urging him to learn the truth about Christianity
 - Described how Christians met on the first day of the week
 - Said baptism was called a washing because immersion was common
 - Referred to the bishop in charge of the assembly as the president

Dialogue with Trypho

- **Justin presented Jesus as the Messiah foretold in O. T. prophecies**
- **He used Greek philosophy and the allegorical method to defend Christianity**
- **He believed all Christians are priests**
- **He presented Christ as God's faculty of reason, the Logos, who by voluntary process was caused to be generate as the Christ (Mattox 70-71)**

Melito

- **Melito was a bishop of Sardis**
- **He wrote 18-20 compositions, three of which are significant: “On the Lord’s Day”; “On Baptism”; and “Apology” (170)**
 - **He shows the emperor the church is a positive force that he should defend**
 - **Defended Christianity as God’s final revelation to man foreshadowed in the O. T.**
 - **That sacrifices were all typical of Christ’s**
 - **That the Law was a forerunner of the gospel**