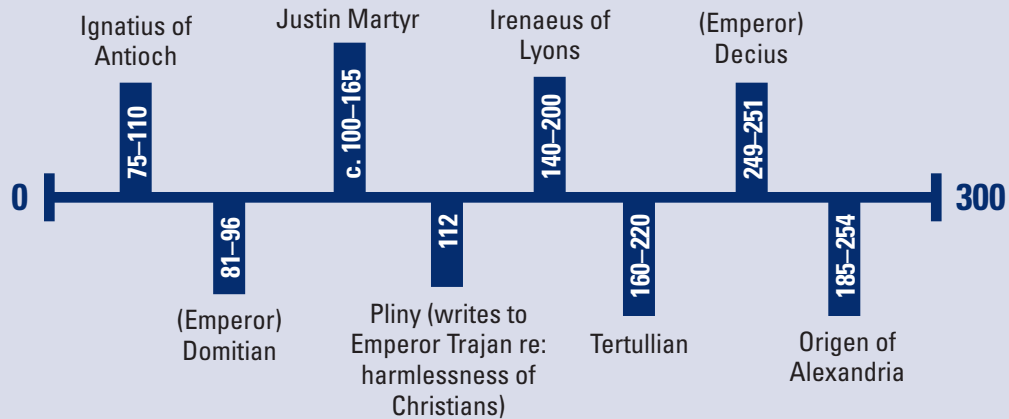


Part One

THE EARLY CHURCH



The Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists

A late seventeenth-century thinker described a group of early Christian writers, including such persons as Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp, as the “Fathers” who flourished in the times of the apostles. Thereafter these writers have been commonly known and referred to as the apostolic fathers. Today the literature ascribed to this period is somewhat extended and includes such additional works as the *Epistle to Diognetus*, the *Didache*, and others.

These writings have some common characteristics. They are: (1) relatively short, (2) preserved for the most part in very few manuscripts, (3) most likely limited in terms of literary quality, and (4) all generally problematic, in the sense that they all belong to a period in the life of the church for which the records are rather sketchy.

For the religious thinker and for the historian, it is only accidentally that these writings form a unity. In some ways, they may be compared to old and very dear pieces that one might find in

an attic or antique shop. Many times, these pieces do not seem to be of much value or significance, and yet, at the same time, they are intriguing. Upon examination, we discover that they are in their own way attractive, even though through the centuries many have tried to tinker with them, either naively to protect them or intentionally with the purpose of deceiving readers.

The apologists are a second, later group of important early writers. In this anthology, we shall focus on Justin Martyr, probably the most noted of them all. In turning from a person such as Ignatius of Antioch, with his great desire to be one with Jesus of Nazareth in martyrdom, to a person such as Justin Martyr, the apologist, we enter a new and different world. Justin was a philosopher, a man who had reflected seriously on the meaning of the Christian faith and who undertook to demonstrate the validity of that Christian faith to outsiders and to vindicate the right of the Christian community and its faith to exist without persecution. To Justin, and to other apologists as well (for example, Athenagoras of Athens and Aristides), Christianity was not simply a harmless religious phenomenon; it was a belief system that contained the very best of the elements of Roman civilization and all the best of the empire. To the mind of the philosophically oriented Christian such as Justin, Christianity and the empire were ideal “soul mates”—if only the empire could understand this reality. Rather than being subversive, as they were accused of being, Christians were ideal Roman citizens. Christian ideas, far from being irreconcilable with Greek philosophy, were the apex of Greek thought. Indeed, Justin saw Christianity as the fulfillment of his Platonism, the completion of his intellectual journey, the key to his understanding of life, which, after all, is one of the functions of philosophy. In the works of the apologists, we find numerous references to great ancient thinkers such as Homer, Sophocles, Socrates, and Plato. Their use of *Logos* made it possible to connect Christian thought to Greek philosophy. The apologists saw Greek philosophy as incomplete without Christianity. And thus Christianity, for better or worse, became intellectual.

The issues addressed by the apologists and the answers they offered may differ significantly from the issues that face us in the modern world. Yet there is much of an apologetic nature that occurs today. Theology must continue to defend its right to exist among academic disciplines. Now it is not usually governments that make religion run the gauntlet, but the descendants of the intellectual traditions of ancient Greece, the more recent intellectual communities that in fact originated in, or were at least spawned by, theology, for example, some of the modern empirical sciences.

Establishing Doctrine

Other significant figures we shall meet in the early church include: Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Origen of Alexandria, Arius, Athanasius, Augustine of Hippo, Pseudo-Dionysius, and John Scotus Erigena. We will also examine the creeds produced by the first ecumenical councils, at which fundamental issues were addressed. Although not satisfying everyone, the councils' work provided a theological base for Christian doctrine still in place to this day.

Theologians and philosophers of the early Christian community, such as Justin, not only defended Christianity against the Greeks, Romans, and Jews but also sought to protect the community from itself, from modification and heresy within the faith. One such person was Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. Irenaeus, as a defender of the faith, took on an early formidable foe: Gnosticism, which was a serious threat to the integrity and unity of the emerging church from within its own boundaries. Gnosticism, in part a “mystery rite,” in part philosophy (or perhaps better put—theosophy), seemed to be eclectic, synthetic—a little bit of everything. It claimed a special saving knowledge (*gnosis*), available only to initiates, and while doing so was quite divisive and destructive. It was not that the early Christians rejected knowledge outrightly; they rather asserted that the apostolic tradition was the only true knowledge.

Gnosticism

In the second century, Gnosticism became both a friend and a foe to Christianity. Those who saw it as an ally did so because it also spoke of God, human beings, creation, and redemption—all major components of the Christian faith. Those who distrusted it, however, saw it as dangerous because, being partly Christian and partly non-Christian, it was capable of seducing the believer. Such deception was far more critical than outright disbelief or skepticism.

Fundamentally, Christian Gnosticism may be said to have at least four principles: (1) the God of the Hebrews is an evil god: this god has disappointed our messianic hopes and aspirations; the Hebrew Scriptures, which present this god, must therefore be rejected; (2) the visible world is evil: this is a world created by the evil god; (3) the God of Jesus of Nazareth is good: this God is completely hidden until revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, who becomes a semi-mythical redeemer of universal or cosmic proportions; (4) the spiritual world is good: it is the creation of the good God who has been revealed (to the Gnostic) in Jesus of Nazareth.

In the early church, there were literally dozens of different Gnostic communities—for example, the Nicolaitans, the Cerinthians, the Basilideans, the Satornalians, the Carpocrations, and the Valentinians, to name just a few.

Expanding Theological Discourse

On the North African continent, at approximately the same time as Irenaeus, we find Tertullian. Tertullian was the first important theologian to write in Latin rather than Greek, which, up to this time, had been the predominant language of the church.

Often referred to as the father of Latin theology, Tertullian set the course for later Western theological terminology. His scathing attacks against the Roman state, pagans, Jews, and heretics are marked by a vivid and direct literary style that explodes with puns, satire, and all kinds of devastating polemical verbal blasts. His argument in favor of Christianity was as simple as it was clear: it was God’s truth handed down by the apostles. All later doctrines were obviously false

and must therefore be rooted out and destroyed. The creed, or “Rule of Faith” (*regula fidei*), was the norm by which heresy was to be judged, and Christians who were tempted into other doctrines only showed that they never really believed correctly in the first place.

Origen of Alexandria stands in grand style among the early theologians and was arguably the very first systematic theologian of the Christian era. Following the Gnostics of the second century and preceding Plotinus (c. 204–70) and Mani (c. 216–75), Origen was a defender of orthodoxy and by rational temperament and ecclesiastical discipline in no way inclined toward heretical fancies of the Gnostic varieties. When it came to his own attempt at integrating scriptural revelation with independent reason and intuition into a coherent and persuasive whole that meant to embrace the totality of things, all of his care could not prevent him from producing a system that the later church would find necessary to condemn. He is, nevertheless, one of the most important, most prolific, and most interesting figures in all of Christian history.

In the fourth century, a new epoch in the history of Christian thought began. The Emperor Constantine, in 313, transformed the fortunes of the Christian church by turning it from a persecuted to a tolerated and finally to a favored community. One of the consequences of becoming what we may call “a department of the State” was that the fourth century became an era of great thinkers in the church for the simple reason that the energy expended in defense of the church against outsiders and devoted to martyrdom, that is, to apologetics, refuting accusations of those outside of the Christian community, could now be channeled to different ends. Thus, some great theologians and philosophers of religion emerged, such as Arius, Athanasius, and Eusebius of Caesarea. Still other Christians gave themselves over to meditation and contemplation and flocked to the deserts of Egypt.

There was also a negative side to the state sponsorship of Christianity. First, mass conversions to the now-favored church detracted from the vitality, the depth, and the moral life that had persisted in the time of persecution. There are, of course, parallels to this in the churches of today. Religious faith just simply became easier. Second, when a religious body receives the blessing of government, it also runs the risk of receiving undesired interference or condemnation from that government. Sometimes government will favor one theological position over another; at other times it will interfere in the internal functions of the church itself and by so doing will fuel theological controversy with political dimensions. In the twentieth century, we have clearly seen this in the case of Nazi Germany, with the Reformed, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches caving in to political pressure, and in the former Soviet Union, with the capitulation of the Russian Orthodox Church. In this early period, we shall be looking at some texts from the pens of Arius and Athanasius, as well as the major creedal formulations that have remained with the church as normative criteria for doctrine to this very day.

KEY TERMS

Anakephalaiosis (Recapitulation)	Incarnation
Apokatastasis	Logos
Apologetics	Logos-Christology
Apostolic Tradition	Orthodoxy
Docetism	Regula Fidei
Gnosticism	Unbegotten
Homoousios	

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1. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (75–110)

Ignatius, second bishop of Antioch during the reign of Emperor Trajan (98–117), was a unique personality. While functioning as leader of this early Christian community at Antioch, he was condemned for his faith and sentenced to death by imperial Rome. He was to be sport for the Roman citizenry at the Colosseum, offering his body to the infamous lions. While on his way to execution, he sent letters to other Christian communities from which we may derive useful information about this infant church and the living faith experiences of its leaders and ordinary believers. These letters were sent to Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia, and Smyrna; to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna; and to Rome. The five cities were Christian communities that had sent representatives to greet him as he passed through on his way to execution.

These letters have some of the most fiery, emotional statements to come out of the early church. They reflect without any doubt the total commitment of Ignatius not only to the church, but, more importantly, to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. There were several issues of importance to Ignatius, as a leader in this relatively new religious community, and by way of Ignatius to us as well.

Ignatius had deep concern for the “unity of the church.” He is the author of the well-known and often repeated phrase, “where the bishop is, there is the church” (a phrase often misunderstood as well).

He also had a deep and real concern for the *reality* of the humanity of Jesus in opposition to the Docetists. Docetists are those who had, and in many cases still have, difficulty seeing Jesus as a real human being. This issue is central to Christian theology. In formal theology, this issue is part of Christology, the study of the person and status of Jesus Christ. As the church developed its tradition regarding Jesus, this christological issue became one of the most heated controversies in the church.

Consistent with his opposition to the Docetists from a christological point of view, Ignatius also had a *realistic* view of the Eucharist. The theology of the Eucharist is tied very closely to his understanding of the humanity of Jesus. The death of Jesus is real, not mere appearance, as is the celebration of that death on our behalf in the Eucharist.

Further, one cannot consider this fiery Antiochene without considering his preoccupation with his own death, a death that must be significantly related to that of Jesus of Nazareth himself.

Source: The Early Christian Fathers, edited and translated by Henry Bettenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 41, 42–43, 45–46, 48–49.



To the Smyrnaeans

Salvation through the Death of Christ, Human and Divine

I perceived that you are settled in unshakable faith, nailed, as it were, to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in flesh and spirit . . . with full conviction with respect to our Lord that he is genuinely of David's line according to the flesh, son of God according to divine will and power, really born of a virgin and baptized by John that "all righteousness might be fulfilled" (Matt. 3:15) by him, really nailed up in the flesh for us in the time of Pontius Pilate and tetrarchy of Herod—from this fruit of the tree, that is from his God-blessed passion, we are derived—that he might "raise up a standard" (Isa. 5:26, cf. John 12:32) for all ages through resurrection, for his saints and faithful people, whether among Jews or Gentiles, in one body of his church. . . .

[Docetists] have no concern for love, none for the widow, the orphan, the afflicted, the prisoner, the hungry, the thirsty. They stay away from the Eucharist and prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, which the Father raised up by his goodness.

Unity under the Ministry: The Supreme Authority of the Bishop

Shun divisions, as the beginning of evil. All of you follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbytery the Apostles; respect the deacons as the ordinance of God.

Let no one do anything that pertains to the church apart from the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or one whom he has delegated. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; just as wherever Christ may be, there is the catholic church.

To the Magnesians

I advise you, be eager to act always in godly accord; with the bishop presiding as the counterpart of God, the presbyters as the counterpart of the council of apostles, and the deacons (most dear to me) who have been entrusted with the service [diaconate] under Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before all the ages and appeared at the end of time. Therefore do all of you attain conformity with God, and reverence each other; and let none take up a merely natural attitude towards his neighbor, but love each other continually in Jesus Christ. Let there be nothing among you which will have power to divide you, but be united with the bishop and with those who preside, for an example and instruction in incorruptibility.

Thus, as the Lord did nothing without the Father (being united with him), either by himself or by means of his apostles, so you must do nothing without the bishop and the presbyters. And do not try to think that anything is praiseworthy which you do on your own account: but unite in one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope; with love and blameless joy. For this is Jesus Christ, and there is nothing

better than he. Let all therefore hasten as to one shrine, that is, God, as to one sanctuary, Jesus Christ, who came forth from the one Father, was always with one Father, and has returned to the one Father.

To the Ephesians

The Incarnation

Avoid heretics like wild beasts; for they are mad dogs, biting secretly. You must be on your guard against them; their bite is not easily cured. There is only one physician [who can cope with it], a physician who is at once fleshly and spiritual, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true life in death, born of Mary and of God, first possible then impossible, Jesus Christ our Lord. . . .

If Jesus Christ should deem me worthy, through your prayers, and if it should be his will, I intend to write you a second pamphlet in which I shall proceed to expound the divine plan [economy] of which I have begun to treat, with reference to the new man, Jesus Christ, which consists in faith towards him and love towards him, in his passion and resurrection; especially if the Lord should make some revelation to me. Meet together in common—every single one of you—in grace, in one faith and one Jesus Christ (who was of David’s line in his human nature, son of man and son of God) that you may obey the bishop and presbytery with undistracted mind; breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, our antidote to ensure that we shall not die but live in Jesus Christ forever.



To the Romans

Martyrdom

I die for Christ of my own choice, unless you hinder me. I beseech you not to show “inopportune kindness” to me. Let me be given to the wild beasts, for by their means I can attain to God. I am God’s wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of the beasts so that I may appear as pure bread. Rather coax the beasts, that they may become my tomb and leave no part of my body behind, that I may not be a nuisance to anyone when I have fallen asleep. Then shall I be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not even see my body. Entreat the Lord for me that through these instruments I

may appear as a sacrifice to God. I do not lay injunctions on you, as Peter and Paul did. They were Apostles; I am a convict. They were free; I am a slave, up till now: but I suffer, then am I a freedman of Jesus Christ, and shall rise free in him. Now I am learning in my bonds to abandon all desire. . . .

My birth pangs are at hand. Bear with me, my brothers. Do not hinder me from living: do not wish for my death. Do not make the world a present of one who wishes to be God’s. Do not coax him with material things. Allow me to receive the pure light; when I arrive there I shall be a real man. Permit me to be an imitator of the Passion of my God.

A REFLECTION

Any person who picks up the letters of this ancient church leader and reads them without any preparation will most certainly come to the conclusion that here we must have a man who is not in a proper frame of mind. It is not ordinary for anyone, then or now, to wish to die. And yet, when properly understood, these rather rash statements of Ignatius, on his way to death, make very good sense. How then might we understand what this early bishop is saying to his many friends and colleagues in the faith, both in the second century and for us today?

Imitating Christ

Arguably, no author early or late, is as eloquent on the imitation of Jesus, the Christ, as Ignatius of Antioch. If anyone wishes to live the life of Christ and/or God, then that person must adopt the principles and virtues of God and Christ. As Christ imitated his Father, reasoned Ignatius, so we must imitate Christ. As he says in his letter to the Philippians (7), “Do as Jesus did, for He, too, did as the Father did.” This is not merely lip service, but can be seen clearly in conforming oneself particularly to the passion and death of Jesus. Thus, as we have seen in the text of the letter to the Romans, “Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of Jesus, our God” (Rom. 6).

From this conception of a perfect imitation of Christ springs Ignatius’s great enthusiasm for martyrdom. Martyrdom is the perfect imitation of Christ, and only they who are willing to sacrifice their lives for him are true disciples. Today, we have a great many “marginal” Christians. That is, the rolls of the churches are inflated with many who would not, if necessary, take the real risk of “living the faith” of Jesus of Nazareth. To stand for the Christian faith is “costly,” as the noted German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said. Bonhoeffer gave his life in opposition to Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich.

In more recent times, we may point to the example of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who, in his fight for the civil rights of African-Americans and, by virtue of that struggle, the rights of all human beings, was impelled to a large extent by his religious convictions of freedom and love. Joined to these men are thousands of persons who, also sparked by religious convictions, gave of themselves in modern martyrological fashion. It may not be as explicit or fiery as that of Ignatius of Antioch, but it is nevertheless equally real and equally valid.

Christ's Dual Nature

The Jesus to whom Ignatius is so passionately devoted is clearly both human and divine. He vehemently attacks Docetists, who deny a human nature to the Christ, especially as they deny the suffering of Jesus of Nazareth. This is hardly make-believe to Ignatius. If it is, why would he be so foolish as to be in chains with his own life on the line? Indeed, he argues that the Eucharist is the very flesh of his savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for humanity's sins and who was raised by the Father, showing his loving-kindness.

At the same time, Ignatius refers to Christ as “timeless” and “invisible,” concepts that certainly reflect a being of divine quality. However, nowhere does he try to reconcile these elements of suffering, invisibility, and timelessness. At this stage in the development of Christianity, when the so-called end times were considered imminent, why would there be a need? This problem was left for later generations to solve. It was sufficient at the time for the bishop to affirm the reality of Jesus' humanity against the Docetists and the reality of his divinity.

Furthermore, for Ignatius, as it was for other early disciples, something very real occurred in the life of Jesus that affected their lives so dramatically that they were willing to give up their very lives for their personal convictions. No one is willing to die for something that is not very real and true to them.

When Ignatius speaks of imitating the passion of Jesus his God, he would, by later standards, be considered heretical. As the influence of Greek thought begins to take control with such persons as Justin Martyr, the fiery, personal, and dynamic relationship with Christ of which Ignatius speaks becomes more and more problematic. This is clear when Ignatius speaks of the suffering of God—an impossibility for later “orthodox” Christians.

Christ and Church in Unity

The idea of unity brings all of this together for this first-century martyr. Underlying this sense of unity was the idea that the church was the body of Christ (following Paul), an idea that did not simply mean that unity with the church was unity with Christ, but that without a unity with Christ, unity with the church would not be possible. For Ignatius, Jesus the Christ was the essential link.

The idea of unity is a basic presupposition in Ignatius. How then is it effected? His response is simple and clear. Union with Christ is brought about by participation in the Eucharist. This is what is meant by the phrases “medicine of immortality” and “the antidote by which we escape

death.” Obviously, Ignatius again has the Docetists in mind and, at the same time, reflects some sense of the mystical union that we find in both Paul and John of the New Testament. Ignatius speaks very clearly in physical and human terms of a physical oneness with Jesus, and as we participate in this real, fully human sacrifice, we put on the mantle of immortality.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1** Why was Ignatius so concerned to affirm the reality of Christ’s physical presence in the Eucharist?
- 2** Who were the Docetists, and how did Ignatius respond to their challenges?
- 3** Why might Ignatius’s view of Christ—that is, his Christology—be characterized as being martyrological?

2. JUSTIN MARTYR (c. 100–165)

From a theological point of view, one of the most important figures of the second century is Justin Martyr. Justin was born to non-Christian parents in Sichem in Palestine and flourished during the period 143–65. He tried many different approaches to find meaning in life, such as the philosophies of Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, Aristotelianism, and Platonism, the last of which he ultimately found appealing. It was in the new faith of the Christian community, however, that Justin found his truth, for while Platonism had opened many doors of life to him, it was only Christianity that filled his heart.

The Path of Christian Philosophy

Legend has it that an old man at the seashore convinced Justin that Platonism could not fulfill his needs and called his attention to the “prophets who alone announced the truth” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 8). This old man spoke to Justin of many things and bid him attend to them. From that point on, Justin was filled with a desire to pursue this new faith. He found a love for the prophets and a genuine feeling of love and compassion among his newly discovered friends in



Christ. It was this Christian philosophy that Justin found to be safe, profitable, and, perhaps most of all, meaningful. In Christianity, Justin discovered the fulfillment of his philosophical quest. As he puts it: “It was for this reason that I became a philosopher, and I could wish that all men were of the same mind as myself, not to turn from the doctrines of the Savior” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 8).

Justin speaks elsewhere of this experience (*Second Apology* 1, 2), where he writes: “I myself used to rejoice in the teaching of Plato and to hear evil spoken of Christians. But, as I saw that they showed no fear in face of death and all other things which inspire horror, I reflected that they could not be vicious and pleasure-loving.” An honest search for truth and humble prayer brought him to accept the faith of Christ: “When I discovered the wicked disguise which the evil spirits had thrown around the divine doctrines of the Christians to deter others from joining them, I laughed both at the authors of these falsehoods and their disguise and at the popular opinion. And I confess that I both prayed and strove with all my might to be found a Christian” (*Second Apology* 13).

Defending Christianity

After converting to this new Christian philosophy, Justin devoted the remainder of his life to the defense of Christianity. He never relinquished his role of philosopher, however, and continued to wear his philosopher's pallium, a cloak signifying that special status.

He traveled from place to place undertaking the propagation of the only true philosophy, developing his own schools of Christian philosophers. These were the first schools of a Christian nature that were not so-called community church schools. Instead, they were philosophical schools in the old Greek style, groups of young scholars gathered around a master who had the reputation for challenging lectures and exciting classroom dialogue. The schools soon developed a reputation for knowing how to embarrass visiting scholars.

Justin's primary adversaries were Greek philosophers and Roman government officials, personified in the Roman emperor. "Your Majesty," Justin argued, "has seen fit to listen to unpatriotic things about Christians. Let the plaintiffs bring forward their evidence. Your Majesty is herewith guaranteed that the Christian community will not protect the guilty, for the Christians are your Majesty's loyal citizens. And is not your Majesty praised far and wide for his philosophy, for his culture, for his justice? Excellent—now we shall see whether there is a particle of truth in it! Examine the evidence yourself! You can only kill us, you cannot do us harm" (*First Apology* 2).

When you speak with such audacity to the ruler of the Roman Empire, you can expect not to die with your boots on! As a spokesperson for a group of Christians on trial for refusing to sacrifice to the gods, Justin added characteristically that if he were going to die for the truth, it would be because his judges, blinded by error, were unworthy of the truth. For that kind of holy folly, Justin was beheaded.

Experiencing Discrimination and Persecution

What Justin began in the mid-second century blossomed into a significantly different type of Christianity: intellectual. The Christian-hating emperors were no longer soldiers persecuting an oriental sect but intellectuals persecuting intellectuals. The philosopher's persecution was nonetheless as bloodthirsty as the soldier's, and the apologists wanted to understand why. Was it merely the name "Christian" that brought down the wrath of the empire on the heads of those who gloried in that name? It was indeed, claimed the apologists. Discrimination because of a name was discrimination at its most despicable, and the apologists made the entire world aware of this.

There are parallels to this discrimination in modern society. While our political, social, and economic institutions do not put people to death because of their religious views, as was the case in the Roman Empire, they understand that religious values have the capacity to challenge the legitimacy of societal practices and policies and are often disruptive. The ensuing turmoil,

within society and within religious communities themselves, can be seen in recent struggles in the United States over civil rights, foreign policy issues, and most recently in the area of sexuality, particularly gay rights. Church stands on government policies or on issues of race, poverty, and sexuality have repercussions for the public's attitude toward the issues and toward religious communities and for membership rolls. Like the early church, the modern church must address societal problems. The challenge is unlikely to result in death, as it did for Ignatius of Antioch or Justin Martyr, but indifference and mockery may be equally powerful chastisements.

Writings of an Apologist

We now turn to some of the texts of Justin Martyr for information on the early church and for inspiration for the modern church. As we have stated, Justin is an apologist; that is, he is a person who speaks to those generally outside of the Christian community and in its defense. This will be one area that we shall examine. Another equally significant area in the thought of Justin is his use of *logos*. *Logos* was a term common to both Greek philosophy and Christian theology and denotes the principle of rationality that informs all being. In many Greek philosophical schools (for example, Platonism), it was one of the ways in which humans saw themselves connected to the Creator of the universe. In Christian thought, it is very prominent in the literature of the Johannine tradition, especially the prologue to the Gospel of John, where Jesus is first seen as the *logos* personified. We have always translated *logos* in this Gospel with the English term “word,” although it is more technical than that.

In the *Apology* written around the middle of the second century, Justin undertook to defend Christianity from its detractors and to commend it to the favorable attention of the secular rulers. His *Dialogue with Trypho*, written most likely soon thereafter, is a series of conversations, perhaps even imaginary, as we have suggested, with a Jew named Trypho. The aim of the document is to demonstrate from the Hebrew prophets that Christianity, according to God's plan and purpose, has superseded Judaism and that Jews as well as Gentiles may only achieve redemption if they become Christians. (Justin's work here certainly would not be looked upon with much favor today in the dialogues between Jews and Christians, as it expressed the exclusivity of Christianity, while modern Christianity is trying to advance tolerance and understanding between religions.) While these two works seem to be written from entirely different perspectives, it is clear that both were written not only to convince others of the validity of Christianity but to fortify the faith of fellow Christians as well.

Sources: “*The First Apology*,” “*The Second Apology*,” and “*Trypho the Jew*,” Early Christian Fathers, translated by Edward R. Hardy, *Library of Christian Classics, volume 1* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 46, 242ff.



Defense of Christianity

1. To the Emperor Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antonius Pius Augustus Caesar, and to Verissimus his son, the Philosopher, and to Lucius the Philosopher, son of Caesar by nature and of Augustus by adoption, a lover of culture, and to the Sacred Senate and the whole Roman people—on behalf of men of every nation who are unjustly hated and reviled, I, Justin, son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, of Flavia Neapolis in Syria Palestina, being myself one of them, have drawn up this plea and petition.

2. Reason requires that those who are truly pious and philosophers should honor and cherish the truth alone, scorning merely to follow the opinions of the ancients, if they are worthless. Nor does sound reason only require that one should not follow those who do or teach what is unjust; the lover of truth ought to choose in every way, even at the cost of his own life to speak and do what is right, though death should take him away. So do you, since you are called pious and philosophers and guardians of justice and lovers of culture, at least give us a hearing—and it will appear if you are really such. . . .

9. Certainly we do not honor with many sacrifices and floral garlands the objects that men have fashioned up in temple and called gods. We know that they are lifeless and dead and do not represent the form of God—for we do not think of God as having the kind of form which some claim that they imitate to be honored—but rather exhibit the names and shapes of the evil demons who have manifested themselves [to men]. You know well enough without our mentioning it how the craftsmen prepare their material, scraping, and cutting and molding and beating. And often they make what they call gods out of vessels used for vile purposes, changing and transforming by art merely their appearance. We consider it not only irrational but an insult to God whose glory and form are ineffable, to give his name

to corruptible things which themselves need care. You are well aware that craftsmen in these [things] are impure and—not to go into details—given to all kinds of vice; they even corrupt their own slave girls who work along with them. What an absurdity, that dissolute men should be spoken of as fashioning or remaking gods for public veneration, and that you should appoint such people as guardians of the temple where they are set up—not considering that it is unlawful to think or speak of men as guardians of gods.

10. But we have learned [from our tradition] that God has no need of material offerings from men, considering that he is the provider of all. We have been taught and firmly believe that he accepts only those who imitate the good things which are his—temperance and righteousness and love of mankind, and whatever else truly belongs to the God who is called by no given name. We have also taught that in the beginning he in his goodness formed all things that are for the sake of men out of unformed matter, and if they show themselves by their actions worthy of his plan, we have learned that they will be counted worthy of dwelling with him, reigning together and made free from corruption and suffering.

11. When you hear that we look for a kingdom, you rashly suppose that we mean something merely human. But we speak of a Kingdom with God, as is clear from our confessing Christ when you bring us to trial, though we know that death is the penalty for this confession. For if we looked for a human kingdom we would deny it in order to save our lives, and would try to remain in hiding in order to obtain the things we look for. But since we do not place our hopes on the present [order], we are not troubled by being put to death, since we will have to die somehow in any case.

12. We are in fact of all men your best helpers and allies in securing good order, convinced as we are that no wicked man, no covetous man or conspirator, or virtuous man either, can

be hidden from God, and that everyone goes to eternal punishment or salvation in accordance with the character of his actions. If all men knew this, nobody would choose vice even for a little time, knowing that he was on his way to eternal punishment by fire; so as to receive the good things that come from God and avoid his punishments. . . .

13. What sound-minded man will not admit that we are not godless, since we worship the Fashioner of the Universe, declaring him, as we have been taught, to have no need of blood and libations and incense, but praising him by the word of prayer and thanksgiving for all that he has given us? We have learned that the only honor worthy of him is not to consume by fire the things he has made for our nourishment, but to devote them to our use and those in need, in thankfulness to him sending up solemn prayers and hymns for our creation and all the means of health, for the variety of creatures and the changes of the seasons, and sending up our petitions that we may live again in incorruption through our faith in him. It is Jesus Christ who has taught us these things, having been born for this purpose and crucified under Pontius Pilate, who was procurator in Judea at the time of Tiberius Caesar. We will show that we honor him in accordance with reason, having learned that he is the Son of the true God himself, and hold him to be in the second place and the prophetic Spirit in the third rank. It is for this that they charge us with madness, saying that we give the second place after the unchanging and ever-existing God and begetter of all things to a crucified man, not knowing the mystery involved in this, to which we ask you to give your attention as we expound it.

God

6. But to the Father of all, *who is unbegotten*, there is no name given. For by whatever name he be called, he has as his elder the person who gives him the name. But these words, Father and God and Creator and Master, *are not names*,

but appellations derived from his good deeds and functions. . . . The appellation "God" is not a name, but an opinion implanted in the nature of men of a thing that can hardly be explained.

Trypho the Jew

60. He who has but the smallest intelligence will not venture to assert that the Creator and Father of all things, having left all supercelestial matters, was visible on a little portion of the earth. . . .

127. For the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither has come to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor rises up, but remains in his own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, having neither eyes, nor ears, but being of indescribable might; and he knows all things, and none of us escapes his observation. And he is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for he existed before the world was made. How then could anyone talk to anyone, or be seen by anyone or appear on the smallest portion of the earth, when the people at Sinai were not able to look even on the glory of him who was sent from him.

The Logos

We have been taught that Christ is the firstborn of God, and we have declared that he is the *Logos*, of whom every race of man were partakers, and those who lived according to the *Logos* are Christians even though they have been atheists, as among Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and others like them, and among barbarians, Abraham and Ananias and Azarias and Misael and Elias and many others whose deeds and whose names we refrain from recounting now because it would take too long. And thus those who in other days lived irrationally were wicked and enemies of Christ and murderers of those living rationally. But they that lived and are living in accordance with reason are Christians and fearless and undisturbed.

The Second Apology

10. For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the *Logos*. But since they did not know the entire *Logos*, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves. And those who by human birth were more ancient than Christ, when they tried to consider and prove things by reason, were brought before tribunals, as impious persons and busybodies. And Socrates, who was more zealous in this direction than all of them, was accused of the very same crimes as ourselves. For they said that he was introducing new divinity and did not consider those to be gods whom the state

recognized. . . . But these things our Christ did through his own power. For no one trusted in Socrates as to die for this doctrine, but in Christ who was partially known even by Socrates, for he was and is the *Logos* who is in every man. . . .

13. Whatever all men have uttered aright is the property of us Christians. . . . For all writers through the implanted seed of the *Logos* which was engrafted in them, were able to see the truth darkly, for the seed and imitation of a thing which is given according to the capacity of him who receives it is one thing, and quite a different one is the *thing itself* of which the communication and the imitation are received according to the grace from God.

A REFLECTION

Justin's Defense of Christianity

To the Greeks and Romans, who were most educated, the religious ideas of this new faith must have appeared to be pure nonsense (not unlike some phenomena we have today, such as Gateway to Heaven). At its very best, the moral sobriety and the devotional piety of the Christians made them appear to be somewhat unconventional. At its very worst, Christian theology made the Christians obnoxious and most likely politically dangerous. To the Romans, it might be said that the Christians were in fact atheists because they refused to acknowledge any visible gods. To the Jews, who worshiped a single invisible God, this new faith was clearly a perversion of the religion of the prophets and the patriarchs.

Having been accused of atheism and disloyalty by the Romans and foolishness by the Greeks, Justin tried to clear the name of the Christians by playfully pointing out that a Christian (*Christianios*) is not only a follower of Christ (*Christos*), but is one by necessity or nature (*Chrestos*). The charge of atheism is untenable according to Justin. The heathen are actually the ones who are guilty. It is they who are to be condemned for idol worship. Christians, on the other hand, are those who follow the highest moral standards, the standards of Jesus Christ. Christians are by far the superior citizens of Rome. If they teach some doctrines that are problematic, have these ideas not been offered by other religions and philosophers as well? Whatever good is in the secular world, Justin maintains, may be seen in Christianity and not the least from Plato himself. His conclusion is simple. The Christians are being persecuted *merely because they are Christians*. They are being attacked simply because of their name.

Justin argues that Christianity is the realization on this earth of everything that, for the philosophers, Plato and the highly ethical Stoics in particular, was only an *ideal*. In Christianity,

the ideal becomes real. And so Justin begs the emperor to treat Christians with justice and see to it that all proceedings against them be for real offenses and in regular courts.

Here we see responses to the charges of irrationalism, immorality, political subversion, and atheism, and, from Judaism, apostasy. It is an appeal to the mind rather than the hearts of the antagonists. Justin used philosophical dialectic and rhetoric rather than homily and exhortation (a method distinguishing him from Ignatius of Antioch). He reminded the Romans that the prophets of the Jewish faith, whose authority was accepted by both Christians and Jews, antedated the Stoics, Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras. He tried to convince them that these great Hebrew thinkers were wiser than philosophers and even an important source for Greek philosophy itself.

Justin's Theology

Plato taught that God can be known by human beings by way of natural reason, for God and human beings are alike. Justin understood the essence of philosophy to be the knowledge of God and was therefore in fundamental agreement with the great Greek philosophers. Justin's conversion to Christianity, however, led him to deny the philosophers' viewpoint and to argue that God may only be truly known by revelation (*Dialogue* 4). Nevertheless, Justin believed that even without revelation, human beings are capable of understanding many things about God. This knowledge is abstract, however, and lacks the clarity and assurance that comes from revelation alone.

Justin's view of God was basically practical and not speculative. It is important to understand that God is an ethical God who requires righteousness and who rewards goodness and punishes evil. Human beings are endowed with freedom and consequently can live properly if they choose to do so. Justin is quite clear about this, as we may see from the following passage:

God did not make men like other things such as trees and quadrupeds which are unable to act freely. For men would be unworthy of reward or praise if he did right not from choice but because he was made thus: nor would he be justly punished if he did evil not of himself but because he was unable to be other than he was. (*First Apology* 43)

In Justin's mind, we have in our freedom the first step toward leading a Christian life. In this regard, Christianity reflects the superiority of this religion compared to other approaches, whether philosophically or politically inspired. Justin emphasizes the excellence of the ethics or moral teachings of Jesus Christ, and he calls attention to the virtuous lives of the Christians, contrasting them with the lives of their heathen contemporaries. In particular, he stresses the Christians' superiority over the fear of death and their willingness to die for Jesus Christ. This is basic evidence of their high moral character and personal integrity (see especially *First Apology* 15–17; *Second Apology* 3, 10; and *Dialogue* 93).

Like Plato, Justin understands God to be a wholly transcendent being (otherworldly), immutable (unchangeable), incorporeal (without body), and uncreated (without origin). This God,

Justin and the Greeks say, is “nameless”; this is a God who by nature could not possibly be in contact with the “created” world, including human beings. The term *God* itself and the designations with which we are so familiar—Father, Creator, Master, and the like—are not names but appellations derived from God’s good deeds and functions. Justin argues that in fact “*God is not really a name but an opinion implanted in the nature of human beings of something that can hardly be explained.*”

Justin’s Christology

The concept of the *Logos* played a major role in the life and work of Justin. He called Christ *Logos*, and his use of this term was led to a large degree by his apologetic interests. *Logos* was used frequently by Greek thinkers. The Stoics believed it represented divine forces resident in the world, including human beings, and was the linking device between this world and God. The Platonists thought it referred to the intermediate being or agent that bridged the chasm between God and the world, making it possible for God to relate to this world and act upon it. In Justin’s view, God is revealed exclusively through the *Logos*.

In a sense the *Logos* is a guide to God and the instructor of all human beings. Originally, the *Logos* dwelt within God as a power. Shortly before the Creation, the *Logos* proceeded from God and became the instrument of the creation of the world. The externalization of the *Logos* can be seen in biblical literature as well. For example, for Justin, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exod. 3:2), it was not really God who was appearing but rather the *Logos*—God’s reason, God’s creative word. Accordingly, the *Logos* is personalized and identified with the God of the Old Testament theophanies (revelations) and also with Jesus Christ, in whom the *Logos* became incarnate (John 1:14). In Justin, who identifies the *Logos* with Christ, there is a tendency toward a subordination of the *Logos* to God. Sometimes Justin even refers to the *Logos* as a second God, a lesser God (*Dialogue* 61).

The *Logos* doctrine of Justin is his most important teaching for at least two reasons: (1) it forms the bridge between Greek philosophy and the Christian faith; (2) it is the starting point of a long history to which is attached a great deal of controversy. Although Justin argued that the divine *Logos* appeared fully only in Jesus Christ, a seed [*sperma*] of the *Logos* was scattered among all humankind. It is to the *Logos* that human beings owe their reason and whatever truth they possess. All truth we possess comes from the *Logos*, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. The *Logos* spoke in a special way through the figures of the Old Testament and ultimately became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Christ differs from the others because he was in possession of the fullness of the *Logos* and was therefore in possession of all truth, not just a portion of the truth. “The whole *Logos* on our account became Christ, body, mind, and soul” (*Second Apology* 10). Since this is the case, all who are in possession of truth are in possession of Christ and are therefore Christians. This enables Justin to argue that Socrates, Plato, Heraclitus, the Greek poets and dramatists, and so forth, who lived according to the direction of the *Logos*, are truly Christians (*First Apology* 46). This concept enabled Justin to give metaphysical proof for the

existence of elements of truth in philosophy and Hebrew literature and to show that there can really be no opposition between any of these divergent positions. Christians alone possess the entire truth, however, because in Christ, truth itself appeared to them. Today we can see some potential for using the concept of *Logos* in ecumenical dialogue and in interfaith discussions, including the religion of humanism.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1** Justin was one of the leading apologists of his time. What is apologetic theology? How effective do you think Justin was as an apologist?
- 2** In what ways did Justin “intellectualize” Christian faith?
- 3** What role did the *Logos* play in Justin’s thought? How did he modify his Neoplatonic views of God in light of Christian revelation?

3. IRENAEUS OF LYONS (140–200)

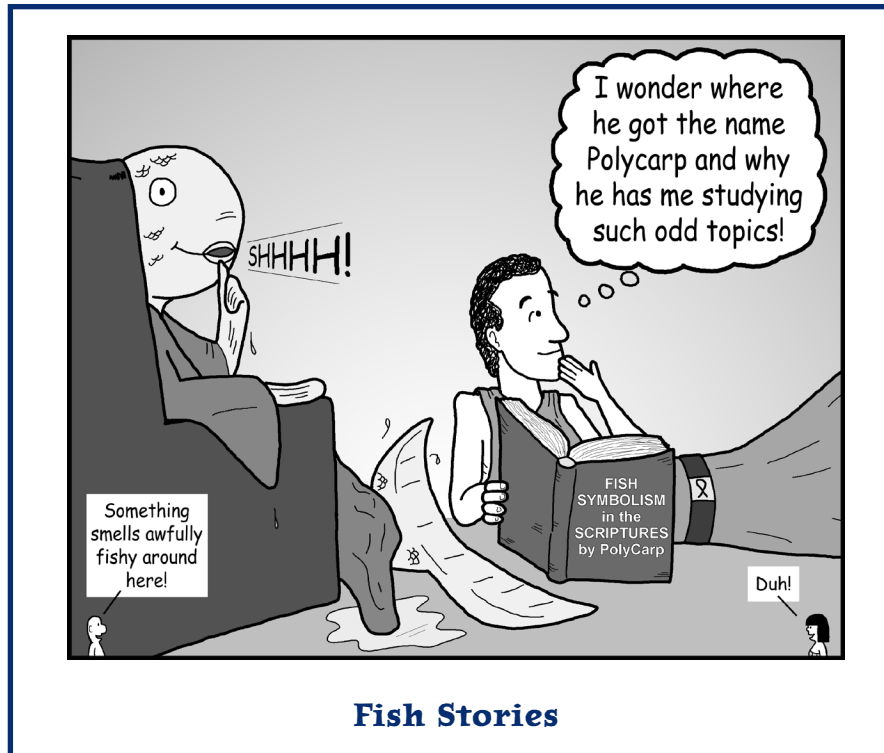
Irenaeus was from Asia Minor, born somewhere between 130–140. He states that as a young man he sat at the feet of Bishop Polycarp (purported to have been a disciple of the “beloved” John the apostle), who was martyred somewhere between 155–156. By nature Irenaeus was a man of tradition and quite proud of his link to the apostolic age. At some point, Irenaeus left Asia Minor for Gaul and most likely spent some time in Rome on his way. In some ways, Irenaeus and Gnosticism were both at home in the busy two-way traffic of culture and religious ideas and in different ways were links between the distant parts of the empire, between Gaul and Asia Minor, between the Johannine tradition and the emerging Western Latin Catholic theology.

Challenge to Gnosticism

Irenaeus appealed to the unity and priority of the Christian message while challenging the Gnostics. Gnosticism was a radical dualism; that is, it made a sharp distinction between spirit and matter. The Gnostics took the position that, since God is clearly spiritual and the world is

clearly material, the redeeming God could not be the same as the God who created the world. More directly, the God of the Hebrews and the Hebrew Scriptures *was not* the God of Jesus of Nazareth. It is just one step from here to the position that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, must also be purely spiritual or divine and only seemingly human or historical. This is a clear form of Docetism that even at this early date the church rejected.

Irenaeus wrote a great number of works, of which only two have survived, but both are extremely important. To the earlier and lengthier of the two he gave the cumbersome title *Five Books of Detecting and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So-Called*. This is usually referred to simply as *Against Heresies*. Briefly stated, in this work, Irenaeus affirmed that the God of creation and the God of redemption are one and the same God and that Jesus was both *human and divine*. In elaborating on this latter point he made use of Paul's analogy between Adam as the first man and Christ as the second man, that is, the new creation (1 Cor. 15:21–22). In this manner, Christ is the renewer of humanity and, as Irenaeus puts it, the “recapitulation” of God's creative and redemptive purpose. In the preface to his fifth book, Irenaeus sums up what he is suggesting with a now familiar and oft-quoted phrase. This phrase sums up not only his Christology, but indeed his entire theology. “Christ became what we are, in order that we might become what he is” (*Against Heresies* V, Preface).



In these works, we see a theology developing that struggled to maintain what was understood to be the authentic form of the century-old Christian tradition against the various forms of Gnosticism. The following selections from Irenaeus's writings give us a picture of one of the earliest formal Christian theologies. In the first century, Paul the apostle wrote letters to respond to specific issues and questions. In the second century, other Christians, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and others, wrote letters and treatises explaining and defending Christian beliefs and practices. Toward the end of the second century, Irenaeus went well beyond letters and apologies for the faith to create a prototype of Christian theology and what is probably (even if somewhat cumbersome) the most thorough of all the earliest explanations of the Christian faith. (Of course, those who are Origen enthusiasts may have a different view on this matter.)

In our texts, we shall focus briefly on a few of the issues of importance to Irenaeus: Gnosticism, his understanding of Christ, and eschatology. In addition, we shall explore his view of evil and his rather positive understanding of the human person. This is significant, as we shall see quite a different theological anthropology coming from the experience and pen of Augustine of Hippo a couple of centuries later.

Source: The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Fathers down to AD 325, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers: Justin Martyr—Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1885), 400, 415, 442, 448, 450, 454, 511, 521, 523, 541.



The Incarnation, Recapitulation, and Redemption

If anyone says to us “How was the Son produced by the Father?” we reply to him, that no man understands that production or generation or calling by whatever name one may describe his generation, which is in fact altogether indescribable . . . but the Father only who begat and the Son who was begotten. Since, therefore, his generation is unspeakable, those who strive to set forth generations and productions cannot be right in their minds, inasmuch as they undertake to describe things which are indescribable (II, 28, 6).

According to them [the Gnostic heretics], neither the Word nor Christ nor their Savior was made flesh. They hold that neither the Word nor the Christ ever entered this world,

that the Savior never really became incarnate or suffered, but that he descended as a dove upon that Jesus who belonged to the dispensation, and then when he had proclaimed the unknown Father, he again ascended into the Pleroma. . . . Others, again, declare that Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary, and that the Christ of the upper realms, being without flesh and the capacity of suffering, descended upon him. But according to no school of the Gnostics did the Word of God become incarnate. For if anyone examines their “rules,” he will find that the Word of God is represented in them all as without humanity and the capacity to suffer. Some regard his manifestation as that of a transfigured man, neither born nor incarnate. Others hold that he did not, indeed, assume the figure of a man, but as a dove descended upon Jesus who was born of Mary (III, 2, 3).

They err from the truth because their view is opposed to Him who is truly God, not knowing that His Only-begotten Word, who is always present with the human race, united and blended with his own creatures according to the Father's pleasure, and being made flesh, that he is Jesus Christ our Lord, who both suffered for us and rose on our behalf, and will come again in the glory of the Father to raise all flesh, and to manifest salvation, and to show the rule of a just judgment to all under him. Therefore, there is one God the Father, and one Christ Jesus our Lord who cometh by a universal dispensation, and sums up all things into himself. Man is in every respect the formation of God, and therefore he [Jesus Christ] *recapitulates men into himself*, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible, comprehensible, the one superior to suffering becoming subject to suffering, and the *Word becoming man*. Thus he summeth up all things in himself, that as the Word of God is supreme in heavenly and spiritual and invisible matters, he may also have the dominion in things visible and material and that by taking to himself the preeminence and constituting himself head of the Church, he may draw all things in due course unto himself (III, 16, 6).

When he [the Son of God] became incarnate and was made man, he recapitulated in himself the long history of man, summing up and giving us salvation in order that we might receive again in Christ Jesus what we had lost in Adam, that is, the *image and likeness of God* (III, 18, 1).

God recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of man, that he might kill sin, deprive death of its power and vivify man (III, 18, 7).

What then did the Lord bring at his coming? Know that he brought *all newness*, by bringing himself, who had been foretold. For this was announced, that a newness would come, to renew and give life to man (IV, 34, 1).

The thing which had perished possessed flesh and blood. For the Lord, taking dust from the earth, molded man; and it was upon his

behalf that all the dispensations of the Lord's advent took place. He had himself, therefore, flesh and blood, recapitulating in himself not a certain other, but that *original handiwork of the Father*, seeking out that thing which had perished (V, 14, 2).

Anthropology

Everyone will allow that we are composed of a body taken from the earth, and a soul which receives the spirit from God (III, 22, 1).

This, therefore, was the [object of the] long-suffering of God, that man, passing through all things acquiring the knowledge of moral discipline, then attaining to the resurrection from the dead, learning by experience what is the source of his deliverance, may always live in a state of gratitude to the Lord, having obtained from him the gift of incorruptibility, that he might love Him the more; for "he to whom more is forgiven, loves more (Luke 7:43)" (III, 20, 2).

By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a source of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after *the image and likeness of the uncreated God*—the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. . . . Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been given strength, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and having been glorified, should see his Lord (IV, 38, 3).

If, then, you are God's workmanship, await the hand of your maker which creates everything in due time; in due time as far as you are concerned, whose creation is being carried out [*efficeris*]. Offer to Him your heart in a soft and

tractable state, and preserve the form in which the Creator has fashioned you, having moisture in yourself, lest, by becoming hardened, you

lose the impression of His fingers. But by preserving the framework you shall ascend to that which is perfect (IV, 39, 2).

A REFLECTION

In considering the theology of Irenaeus, we should keep in mind that we are not dealing with a systematic theologian or philosopher of religion who derives all of his or her conclusions from a few speculative principles. It is best to see theology and religion as a journey, as Irenaeus himself saw it, from creation to consummation.

The Concept of God

The God of Irenaeus has existed from eternity and has created all things out of nothing. This is of the utmost importance to Irenaeus because it has great implications for both the world and for humanity. One of his main opponents, as we have noted, was the Gnostics, who were always attempting to absolve God from the responsibility of having made this material world with all of its imperfections. To accomplish this, the Gnostics developed complicated theories of how the world came into existence as the result of an error in a long chain of emanations. This was also the reason why Marcion, another early Christian thinker, distinguished between the God of the Hebrew Scriptures and the God of Jesus of Nazareth. In opposition to this, Irenaeus flatly and clearly affirmed that our redeemer God is the very same as the creator God. Here one might also see the influence of the Johannine tradition (especially John 1:1-14) manifesting itself in his work. All things have been created by God, and nothing can exist against the will of God.

For Irenaeus, God has created and rules this world by means of his “two hands”: the Son and the Holy Spirit. Most of the texts in which Irenaeus refers to the doctrine of the Trinity are really too brief to allow us to draw conclusions regarding that doctrine (which will become a matter of heated debate in the beginning of the fourth century). He simply bypasses the more subtle aspects of trinitarian theology and affirms, as he must have heard from his leaders in the faith, that God is Father, Son, and Spirit, without ever making specific reference to the relationship between the three. And, indeed, why should he? It was not yet an issue!

In this context, Irenaeus makes use of the doctrine of the *Logos* (Word) as well as his own metaphor of the two hands of God. Nevertheless, when he refers to the Son as “the Word of God,” he is not using that term as an intermediate being between God and the world, as Justin did, for example. Rather, Irenaeus is emphasizing the unity between God and God’s Word. The Son and the Holy Spirit are the way in which God chooses to relate to the world as God.

The Theory of Recapitulation

To understand Irenaeus is to understand his theory of recapitulation (*anakephalaiosis*). Although the term has a variety of meanings among ancient writers, in Irenaeus, the principal and most

characteristic meaning of the term is that which sees in it the very best way to express the work of Jesus Christ as the head of a *new humanity*. Even though the plan God had for redemption was in operation from the very beginning, that plan finds its greatest and final expression in the recapitulation of all things by Christ in the incarnation (that is, God entering the human sphere in the person of Jesus of Nazareth). Before that time, while it is necessary to affirm that the Son was present in the actions of God, one cannot speak of a recapitulation in the strictest sense. Recapitulation is a summary and a culmination of what has happened before, and it can be understood only within the context of those previous events.

While recapitulation is to a certain extent a new starting point, it is closely related to what went before it. Even though the incarnation is “a new beginning” in the history of the world, it is not opposed to Creation, but rather is the continuation and fulfillment of Creation. Christ is the second Adam—the “New Being” to use Paul Tillich’s phrase—and the new Creation. In Christ, the history of the old Adam is repeated but now in an opposite direction. In Adam, human beings had been created to be like the Son; in Christ, the *Son takes humanity to himself*. As a human, Christ is all that Adam should have been had he not succumbed to temptation. Thus, in Christ, the very image of God is united to humanity, and the world may be overcome.

The Dual Nature of the One Christ

Irenaeus does not discuss the union of the divinity and humanity in Christ as if these were two opposed natures. Rather, humanity was created to enjoy union with God, and in Christ that union achieves its highest goal. God and humanity are not seen as “two substances” or as “two natures” as they will in the great debates surrounding the Council of Chalcedon a few centuries later (451). It is rather that in Christ divinity is united to humanity because he is the Word that God addresses to humanity and is also the human person who responds to that Word. Irenaeus uses *dynamic* rather than substantialist concepts and language and thus avoids the difficulties that gave rise to those bitter debates from Nicea to Chalcedon and beyond. It is interesting to note that in the so-called modern era of theology, from the time of Friedrich Schleiermacher to the present, there are many theologians who have an unacknowledged debt of gratitude to this ancient theologian of Lyons for his “dynamic” insight, which is, after all, only a return to a more biblically oriented theology.

God, the triune God, creates humanity according to God’s own image. Humanity itself is not the image of God, however; that image is the Son, in whom and by whom humanity has been created. “As the image of God hath He made man; and the ‘image’ is the Son of God, in whose image man was made” (*Ancient Christian Writers*, 16, 61). Thus the image of God is not something to be found in the human person but rather is the direction in which we are to grow until we attain “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature and fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). This idea of growth and development is important for understanding Irenaeus. Simply

stated, what he means is that Adam was not created as a perfect being in the sense that he was all that God called him to be but rather was created so that he could develop and grow in the image of God that is the Son. The Son, in other words, becomes a “touchstone,” a model, indeed an image for us all.

Irenaeus has no place in his thought for an original state in which Adam, gifted with powers far above our own, wandered around in Eden or Paradise. Rather, Adam was only the beginning of the purpose of God in Creation. Metaphorically speaking, Adam was “childlike,” whose purpose was to grow to a fuller, closer, richer relationship with God. This growth is not something Adam achieves on his own but is a part of the continuing creation of God.

As creatures of God with the purpose of growth, human beings are free. This freedom, however, is not to be understood in idealistic terms. It is simply the possibility of fulfilling the purpose of God in our lives. Adam’s freedom, and of course our freedom, is in no way incompatible with God’s omnipotence; it is rather the result of it and its clearest expression.

There is an optimism here that has been generally absent in Western theology, which has been so dominated by the pessimistic views of the human person found in the thought of St. Augustine and later Calvinism. Certainly, Irenaeus’s view is more compatible with modern views of progress and development found not only in the areas of process theology and philosophy but also in developments that have taken place since the Enlightenment in the so-called hard sciences. To see that we have responsibility and that God is in this process with us is both refreshing and realistic, not only from our point of view but from the point of view of God as well (if we may so speculate). For what kind of a God would desire a relationship that is based not on freedom of the will but on coercion?

The view of Irenaeus is also useful in dealing with the problem of evil. Since the world is yet in process, moving toward completion, there will be moments of difficulty, periods of despair, as there are in every good growth process. Our confidence is in the knowledge that there is One who is in ultimate control, who will eventually lead us and the creation itself to its final completion.

John Killinger, a novelist and theologian, captures this thought very clearly in his work *Jessie: A Novel*, in which Jessie is queried by a young friend about all of the evil in the world and how a God who is loving and all-powerful allows it all to happen. Jessie, who is an artist, uses art to answer the question by pointing out that as an artist, in the midst of his or her work, must continue to work on the chaos that sometimes appears on the canvas, so also God works to bring all things to completion while at the same time allowing us to participate freely in the process.

In spite of all our human difficulties, God does not abandon humanity (or the creation in its entirety for that matter), but loves us continually. In doing this, God is simply carrying forward the plan (like the artist) that God had conceived from the very beginning. The plan is a single one but is made clear to us in a series of particular covenantal events that culminate in Jesus, the Christ, “the express image of God.”

The Significance of Irenaeus

It is not really possible to exaggerate the significance of this man Irenaeus. Like the Gnostics, he vindicated what was new in Christian thought, but unlike the Gnostics, he preserved the Hebrew Scriptures and the Hebrew tradition for the church. He explained the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and indicated why the Christians were justified in retaining Jewish moral law while abandoning the ceremonial. Irenaeus saw revelation as a *process*; he read the past historically and perceived different stages in its development.

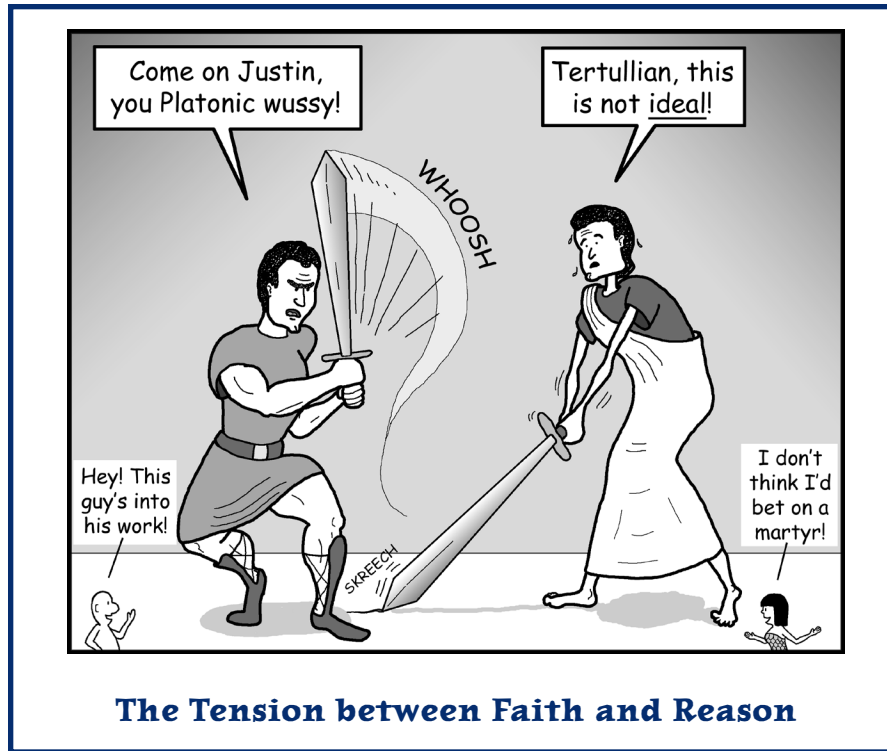
The incarnation of Jesus, in Irenaeus's view, is only the beginning of God's victory over evil and the incompleteness of the world. The life and work of Christ is part of the restoration that continues until the final consummation. After being united to humanity, the Son of God must live a human life and die a human death. He must face temptation—all human temptations. The final fulfillment that we await, when all things will be subject to him, will be Christ's last victory. For now, we who live in the period between the resurrection and the consummation are not living in a period of truce in the struggle of the centuries: we are living precisely at the time in which Christ is making his victory on the cross effective, in order to lead us to the final day.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1** Gnosticism was a major problem for Irenaeus and the church of his time. What were the essentials of Gnosticism? How well did Irenaeus address the challenge?
- 2** What was Irenaeus's theory of recapitulation (*anakephalaisis*)? How did it work? Give some examples.
- 3** How did Irenaeus deal with the "problem of evil"? Compare his views with those of Augustine of Hippo.

4. TERTULLIAN (160–220)

In the early church, the coast of North Africa produced many defenders of the faith, three of whom achieved theological immortality: Tertullian of Carthage, Origen of Alexandria, and Augustine of Hippo. Directly across the Mediterranean from Rome lay the ancient city of Carthage (modern Tunis), where Tertullian—one of the keenest minds and sharpest tongues in



the early church—was born (c. 160). Son of a proconsular centurion, Tertullian studied law at Rome and as a young man converted to the Christian faith. Perhaps the ramrod discipline of the father and the son’s legal training conspired to make Tertullian a stern moralist and precise defender of theological orthodoxy.

Attacking Heresy, Defending Orthodoxy

Brilliant in his attacks on heretics and vices within and without the church, unsparing in his denunciation against all who departed from the true faith, utterly intolerant of any philosophical intrusion into Christianity—Tertullian was an unyielding authoritarian.

Tertullian was the first important theologian to write in Latin rather than Greek, which up to this time had been the official language of the church. Often referred to as the Father of Latin theology, Tertullian set the course for later Western theological terminology. His scathing attacks against the Roman state, pagans, Jews, and heretics are marked by a vivid and direct literary style that explodes with puns, satire, and all kinds of devastating polemical blasts. His argument in favor of Christianity was as simple as it was clear: it was God’s truth handed down

by the apostles. All later doctrines were obviously false and must therefore be rooted out and destroyed. The creed, or “Rule of Faith” (*regula fidei*), was the norm by which heresy was to be judged, and Christians who were tempted into other doctrines only showed that they never really believed correctly in the first place.

To guard the faith against perversions and distortions, Tertullian tried to disentangle it from every possible philosophical influence. Faith and reason are as different as day and night; theology and philosophy should not be mixed together; the church is not a Socratic Academy; Jerusalem has absolutely nothing to do with Athens. In one of his more startling paradoxes, Tertullian wrote: “The Son of God died: it is immediately credible—because it is absurd [*ineptum*]. He was buried, and rose again: it is certain—because it is impossible [*certum est quia impossibile*]” (*On the Flesh of Christ* 5).

The legal precision of Tertullian’s theology and the earnestness of his moral imperative migrated down the centuries in Western thought to reappear in different ways in both Roman Catholic and Protestant faith and life. The mind of Tertullian saw everything sharply defined as white or black, true or false, right or wrong. Such a person makes a powerful advocate for the faithful and a formidable prosecutor of the unbeliever.



The Prescriptions against the Heretics

1. The times we live in provoke me to remark that we ought not to be surprised either at the occurrence of the heresies, since they were fore-told, or at their occasional subversion of the faith, since they occur precisely in order to prove faith by testing it (Matt. 7:15; 24:4, 11, 24; 1 Cor. 11:19). To be scandalized, as many are, by the great power of heresy is groundless and unthinking.

Fever, for example, we are not surprised to find in its appointed place among the fatal and excruciating issues which destroy human life, since it does in fact exist; and we are not surprised to find it destroying life, since that is why it exists. Similarly, if we are alarmed that heresies which have been produced in order to weaken and kill faith can actually do so, we ought first to be alarmed at their very existence. Existence and power are inseparable.

2. Faced with fever, which we know to be evil in its purpose and power, it is not surprise

we feel, but loathing; and as it is not in our power to abolish it, we take what precautions we can against it. But when it comes to heresies, which bring eternal death and the heat of a keener fire with them, there are men who prefer to be surprised at their power rather than avoid it. But heresy will lose its strength if we are not surprised that it is strong. . . . Matched subsequently against a man of real strength, your victor goes off beaten. Just so, heresy draws its strength from men’s weakness and has none when it meets a really strong faith.

3. Those who are surprised into admiration are not infrequently edified by the captives of heresy—edified to their downfall. Why, they ask, have so-and-so and so-and-so gone over to that party, the most faithful and wisest and most experienced members of the church? Surely such a question carries its own answer. If heresy could pervert them, they cannot be counted wise or faithful or experienced. . . . Do we test the faith by persons or persons by the faith? No one is wise, no one is faithful, no one

is worthy of honor unless he is a Christian and no one is a Christian unless he perseveres to the end.

These [heresies] are human and demonic doctrines, engendered for itching ears by the ingenuity of that worldly wisdom which the Lord called foolishness, choosing the foolish things of the world to put philosophy to shame. For worldly wisdom culminates in philosophy with its rash interpretation of God's nature and purpose. It is philosophy that supplies the heresies their equipment. . . . A plague on Aristotle, who taught them dialectic, the art which destroys as much as it builds, which changes opinions like a coat, forces its conjectures, is stubborn in argument, works hard at being contentious and is a burden even to itself. For it reconsiders every point to make sure it never finishes a discussion.

7. From philosophy come those fables and endless genealogies and fruitless questions, those "words that creep like as doth a canker." To hold us back from such things the Apostle testifies expressly in his letter to the Colossians that we should beware of philosophy. "Take heed lest any man circumvent you through philosophy or vain deceit, after the tradition of men," against the providence of the Holy Spirit (1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:17; Col. 2:8). He had been at Athens where he had come to grips with the human wisdom which attacks and perverts truth, being itself divided up into its own swarm of heresies by the variety of its mutually antagonistic sects. What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? Our principles come from the Porch [*Stoa*] of Solomon (John 10:23; Acts 5:12), who had himself taught that the Lord is to be sought in simplicity of heart. I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research. When we come to believe, we have no desire to believe anything else; for we begin by believing that there is nothing else which we have to believe. . . .

9. My first principle is this. Christ laid down one definite system of truth which the world must believe without qualification, and which we must seek precisely in order to believe it when we find it. Now you cannot search indefinitely for a single definite truth. You must seek until you find, and when you find, you must believe. Then you have simply to keep what you have come to believe, since you also believe that there is nothing else to seek, once you have found and believed what he taught who bids you seek nothing beyond what he taught. . . .

13. The Rule of Faith [apostolic tradition; creed]—to state here and now what we maintain—is of course that by which we believe that there is but one God, who is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced everything from nothing through his Word, sent forth before all things; that this Word is called his Son, and in the Name of God was seen in diverse ways by the patriarchs, was ever heard in the prophets and finally brought down by the spirit and power of God the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, was born of her and lived as Jesus Christ; who thereafter proclaimed a new law and a new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles, was crucified, on the third day rose again, was caught up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father; that he sent in his place the power of the Holy Spirit to guide believers; that he will come with glory to take the saints up into the fruition of the life eternal and the heavenly promises and to judge the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both good and evil with the restoration of their flesh.

This Rule, taught (as will be proved) by Christ, allows of no questions among us, except those which heresies introduce and which make heretics.

14. Provided the essence of the Rule is not disturbed, you may seek and discuss as much as you like. You may give full rein to your itching curiosity where any point seems unsettled and ambiguous or dark and obscure.

A REFLECTION

Tertullian was not a speculative theologian. In general he followed the thought of the apologists, Irenaeus of Lyons, and to some degree the tradition of Asia Minor and not quite as much of Stoicism and legal conceptions. Everything he touched, however, he formulated with the clarity of a trained judicial mind and gave precision to many previously vague theological ideas.

On Faith and Sin

Tertullian saw the Christian faith as divine foolishness, wiser than the most sophisticated philosophical speculations of human beings, and in no way to be reconciled with existing philosophical systems (see *De Praescriptione* 7). In reality, Tertullian looked at Christianity principally through the spectacles of Stoicism. Christianity is primarily knowledge of God. It is based on reason and authority, which is seated in the church alone and only in the “orthodox” church, which solely possesses the truth, expressed in the creed, and alone has the right to use the Scriptures. Like Irenaeus before him, Tertullian saw “true” churches as the ones in agreement with the faith of the apostles, wherein the apostolic tradition has been maintained by episcopal succession. Like Justin and gentile Christianity of the second century, Tertullian identified Christianity as a new law. “Jesus Christ . . . preached the new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven” (*De Praescriptione* 13).

Tertullian also had a deeper sense of sin than any other Christian writer since Paul, and his teachings greatly influenced the development of the conceptions of sin and grace in the Latin church. Though it was not fully developed, Tertullian possessed a doctrine of original sin. “There is, then, besides the evil which supervenes on the soul from the intervention of the evil spirit, antecedent, and in a certain sense a natural evil, which arises from its corrupt origin” (*De Anima* 41). Nevertheless, “the power of grace is more potent than nature” (*De Anima* 21). The nature of this grace is nowhere explained, but it evidently included not only the forgiveness of sins, but the grace of divine inspiration, by which the power to do right is infused into the feeble but free human will. This seems to be a legacy of his Stoicism. Though redemption is based on grace, human beings have much to do. Although God forgives previous sins at baptism, satisfaction for those that follow must be made by voluntary sacrifices. The more a person punishes her/himself, then the less God will punish.

Tertullian’s Christology

Tertullian’s most significant work stemmed from his *Logos* Christology, although he preferred the designation Son rather than *Logos*. While he may have done little to advance what had been presented by the apologists and other early leaders, his legal mind gave some clarity to its explanation. He defines the Godhead in terms almost anticipating the Nicene Creed. “All are one, by unity of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded which distributes the unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit;

three, however . . . not in substance but in form; not in power but in appearance, for they are one of one substance and one essence and one power, inasmuch as He is one God from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned under the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*Against Praxeas* 2). He describes then three distinctions of the Godhead as *persona* (*Against Praxeas* 12), meaning by person not our understanding of the word, that is, in the sense of personalities, but objective modes of being. For Tertullian, this unity of substance is material, for he was Stoic enough to hold that “God is a body . . . for spirit has a bodily substance of its own kind” (*Against Praxeas* 7). Similarly, Tertullian distinguished between the human and divine in Jesus Christ. “We see his double state, not intermixed, but conjoined in one person, Jesus, God and man” (*Against Praxeas* 27). “Since both Son and Spirit are derived from the Father, in other words, emanate from the Father, both are subordinate to Him” (*Against Praxeas* 7, 9). This subordination doctrine, already seen in the apologists, was characteristic of the pre-Nicene, pre-Chalcedonian periods.

Tertullian himself broke with the Roman church around 200. He was attracted to the puritanism of Montanism, an otherworldly, ascetic movement, and founded a sect of his own.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1 What was Tertullian’s attitude toward philosophy? Why?
- 2 What is the *regula fidei*, and how was it employed by Tertullian?
- 3 What was Tertullian’s use of *Logos*, and in what ways may it be said that his view anticipated what was accomplished at Nicea?

5. ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA (185–254)

In majestic terms, Dante Aligheri described a panoramic view of human destiny that he called a “comedy.” Posterity has added the term *divine*. This combined title suggests several things:

1. It is a drama with one pervading plot;
2. In contrast to tragedy, which ends in disaster, this action moves to a serene ending;

3. And finally, while focusing on human beings, it is more than that limited scope. In fact it is God's great interaction with humanity, in which the divine cause is at stake.

As we view the stage on which the drama unfolds or is enacted, we observe that it is not a one-storied plane, but rather multileveled—hell, earth, heaven—through which the action moves up and down, as does the journey of Dante himself.

This cosmic spiritual drama can be traced back to the early stages of the Christian era. During the first centuries, there burst forth—partly inspired by the general philosophical climate of the age, partly by the Christian message—a surprising efflorescence of bold visionary and speculative constructions of the total scheme of things, many Christian at least in name, others pagan, all of them reaching for an ultimate truth by which humanity could understand its own condition and goal. These speculations with their ever-shifting versions of the cosmic drama of redemption were followed in the third century by the more rigorously constructed systems of the mythology of Mani and the philosophy of Plotinus.

The First Systematic Theologian

Standing in grand style among these early system builders was Origen of Alexandria, perhaps the very first systematic theologian of the early Christian era. Following the Gnostics of the



second century and preceding Plotinus (c. 204–70) and Mani (c. 216–75) slightly, Origen was a defender of orthodoxy and by rational temperament and ecclesiastical discipline in no way inclined toward heretical fancies of the Gnostic varieties. Yet when it came to his own attempt at integrating scriptural revelation with independent reason and intuition into a coherent and persuasive whole that meant to embrace the totality of things, all of his care could not prevent him from producing a system that the later church would find necessary to condemn.

In his epoch-making work, *On First Principles* (*peri archon/de Principiis*), we see an explicit attempt to rally philosophical support for theology—the first such in the history of Christian thought. This *First Principles* sought to unite Greek philosophy with Christian thought without subordinating either to the other. Origen was neither a nineteenth-century idealist, ranking religion below philosophy, nor a twentieth-century theologian, such as Karl Barth, vowing to use philosophy only on the rare occasion necessary and, for the rest, keeping it at a distance.

Origen demonstrated, throughout the course of his enormous production and with notable ease and competence, his fundamental conviction that Christianity meshed with many ideas from contemporary philosophy. Gregory Thaumaturgus (that is, the “wonderworker”), an ardent admirer of Origen, in his work *Panegyric*, demonstrates the exacting formation in Greek philosophy that Origen demanded of his students.

Sources: Origen: *On First Principles*, translated by G. W. Butterworth (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 2, 9–10, 52, 56–57, 70, 76, 125–26, 134, 251, 313, 326.



On God

The kind of doctrines which are believed in plain terms through the apostolic teaching are the following: First, God is One, who created and set in order all things, and who, when nothing existed, caused the universe to be. . . . [Preface, 4]

[God is] a simple intellectual existence, admitting of himself no addition whatever, so that he cannot be believed to have in himself a more or less, but *is unity, or if I may say so Oneness throughout*.

[God is] the fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind . . . the first principle of all things. [I, 1, 6]

On the Homouision of All Minds

All rational creatures, that is: the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, all angels, authorities, dominions, and other powers, and even man himself in virtue of his soul’s dignity are of one substance. [III, 4, note 1]

Every rational creature can, in the process of passing from one order to another, travel through each order to all the rest and from all to each, while undergoing the various movements of progress or reverse in accordance with its own actions and endeavors and with the use of its power of free will. [I, 6, 3]

[These] different movements (i.e. of the rational natures) result in the creation of

different worlds, and after this world in which we live there will arise another world quite unlike it. [III, 5, note 6]

[The demons] themselves and the rulers of the darkness in any world or worlds, if they desire to turn to better things, become men and so revert to their original condition, in order to be disciplined by the punishments and torments which they endure for a long or short period while in the bodies of men they may in time reach the exalted rank of angels. [I, 6, note 4]

All rational beings existed as minds bodiless and immaterial without any number or name, so that they all formed a unity by reason of the identity of their essence and power and activity and by their union with and knowledge of the Word of God. [II, 8, 3]

They were seized with weariness of the divine love and contemplation and turned toward the worse. [II, 8, 3]

Now since the world is so varied and comprises so great a diversity of rational beings, what else can we assign as the cause of existence except the diversity in the fall of those who decline from unity in dissimilar ways? [II, 1, 1]

This was the cause of diversity among rational creatures, a cause that takes its origin not from the will or judgment of the Creator, but from the decision of the creature's own freedom. . . . And these were also the reasons which gave rise to the diversity of the world. [II, 9, 6]

On the Devil

Our contention is, however, that among all rational creatures there is none which is not capable of both good and evil . . . not even the devil himself was incapable of good. [I, 8, 3]

[The devil and a host of kindred minds] of their own fault have departed from holiness and descended to such a pitch of negligence as to be changed into opposing powers. [I, 5, note 1]

The devil was not created as such, but he fell to this state as a result of his own wickedness. [I, 8, 3; Greek fragment]

[After] many ages and the one restoration of all things, Gabriel will be in the same state as the devil, Paul as Caiaphas, and virgins as prostitutes. [I, 6, note 1]

[The contrary powers:] even an archangel may become a devil as on the other hand the devil may turn again into an angel. [I, 6, 3]

On the Apokatastasis

[THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS]

Out of all the original unity of rational beings one mind (at the time of the general fall) remained steadfast in the divine love and contemplation, and he, having become Christ and king of all rational beings, created all bodily nature. [II, 8, note 3]

[Now this mind] because he pitied the various falls that had happened to those who originally belonged to the same unity, and wished to restore them, went through all modes of being and was invested with different kinds of bodies and took different names, becoming all things to all, being changed into an angel among angels, into a power among powers, and into other ranks or species of rational beings according to the necessities of each particular case, and then at last shared in flesh and blood like us and became a man among men. [IV, 4, note 1]

[Even the kingship of Christ will one time come to an end;] one day he will lose his kingship. [III, 6, note 3]

All beings are equal and each, even the devil will be restored to his ancient rank . . . and Jesus will then together with the devil be reigned over by God. [III, 5, note 1]

The heavenly powers and all men and the devil and the spiritual hosts of wickedness are as unchangeably united to the Word of God as the mind itself which is called Christ and which was in the form of God and emptied himself; and there will be an end to the Kingdom of God. All rational beings will form one unity, hypostases and numbers alike being destroyed; and knowledge of rational truth will

be accompanied by a dissolution of the worlds, an abandonment of bodies and an abolition of names; and there will be an identity of the knowledge as well as of the hypostases; and in the state of restoration only the bare minds will exist. The life of the spiritual [minds] will be the same as it formerly was, when they had not yet descended or fallen, so that the beginning is the same as the end, and the end is measure of the beginning. [III, 6, note 3]

On the Image of God

“And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image and likeness’” (Genesis 1:26). He then adds: “In the image of God he made him” (Genesis

1:27), and is silent about the likeness. This indicates that in his first creation man received the dignity of the image of God, but the fulfillment of the likeness is reserved for the final consummation; that is, that he himself should obtain it by his own effort, through the imitation of God. The possibility of perfection given to him at the beginning by the dignity of the image, and then in the end, through the fulfillment of his works, should bring to perfect consummation the likeness of God. The Apostle John defines this state of things more clearly when he declares: “My little children, we do not yet know what we shall be but if it shall be revealed to us concerning the Savior, without doubt you will say: We shall be like him” (I John 3:2).

A REFLECTION

The Unity of God

For Origen of Alexandria, the divine One, which is “Unity Absolute,” stands at the peak of the scale of being, devoid of all diversity in its own essence. Considered purely by itself, the Godhead is “One,” “Simple,” “Unity,” or “Oneness.” Moreover, God is “mind or even beyond mind and being,” and at least for human thought—incomprehensible. Only God, as Father (in traditional terms), is uncreated. The obvious implication of this insight is that it suggests that the other two hypostases or persons of the traditional Godhead are creatures. God is never alone, however. Even as God is primordial mind, God is the source of all intellectual existence; in other words, God is the first principle of all things. In this creative process or procreative role, God is likened to the sun, with its rays emanating forth from it—a simile widely used in Origen’s time. This lends an aspect of natural necessity to divine creativity—whose creation, therefore, at least in its original form, must be “eternal creation”—as distinct from the biblical simile of the free fiat by a purposeful maker and shaper of things, which issues in a temporally unique act. Adhering to his principle, Origen derives the Trinity from this creativity of God by whose radiance it is generated and sustained, as an aura is generated and sustained by a source of light.

The immediate splendor of God is the Son. As Origen puts it, “the only-begotten Son is the brightness of this light proceeding from God without separation; as brightness from light and enlightening the whole Creation” (*On First Principles* I, 2, 7). Radiating from this first brightness and mediated by it, the Holy Spirit subsists as God’s brightness at a second remove. Both realities or hypostases, as they are traditionally called, are *creations*, but they are creations from eternity as the light simile implies: eternal radiances of the eternal light (cf. *On First Principles*

I, 3, 3 and I, 2, 11). But perhaps even more significant than the dogmatically delicate points of createdness within the Trinity is the subordinationism that the light simile imparts into the *internal relations of the Trinity*, establishing a very clear *vertical, linear, descending order of divine natures* that accords well with the vertical structure of reality. Origen's view reveals the dominating influence of Neoplatonic philosophy and echoes many of the thoughts contained in the writings of the secular philosopher Plotinus in his work *Enneads*. In Origen's day, this was less a problem than it would be about a century later, in the Arian crisis, when the coequality of the Son with the Father was demanded for purposes of achieving redemption.

The Concepts of Freedom and Equality

Origen suggests to us that, before all Creation, God was surrounded by a "world" of pure rational beings, or natures, whose primary characteristic or essence was that of being "free" or "rational." This was the goal of God's creativity. Everything that comes into existence does so out of the initiative of these "free, rational beings." For Origen, they are all equal and free because within God's self nothing existed that could give rise to diversity. Here we may see reflections or shadows of the influence of Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism in the thought of the great Alexandrian. Origen also suggests that only a certain number of these natures exist, basically a number that the divine essence would be able to control. This implies that Origen believed in divine finitude.

A question that arises is this: How did the spirits or minds begin to move? To put it simply: into this realm of blessed tranquility and continued enjoyment of God, movement entered through the freedom of the will with which the minds were endowed. And since they were in union with God, the only movement that could occur would be movement away from God. Origen is almost tantalizing in his indication of motive at this critical point. They were simply seized with weariness of divine love and contemplation and turned toward the worse. In other words, they grew tired of too good a situation.

There is also a neat play on words in this context, for when Origen speaks of a turning away, he speaks of a "cooling" of love's ardor, and we are in consequence called souls. The Greek word for "cooling" is *psychros*, while the Greek word for soul is *psyche*. Thus the conception of the human soul is that it is a deteriorated, lessened, cooled off condition of "original mind."

The Devil and Redemption

Given the initial equality of all rational creation combined with the absolute freedom of the will, there had to be one who, in the exercise of that freedom, was the first to turn away from God and in its continued exercise moved farthest away. To that being we attribute the name of the devil, or Satan, for as long as that being occupies that place and role in the hierarchy of beings. Rehabilitation is open to that being, however, as it is to any other being, and indeed in some other world cycle another may take that being's place. In the thought of Origen, there is no eternal principle of evil opposing the goodness of God.

In Origen, we see two fundamental ideas at work: (1) that diversity as such (subjects being of this kind or that) is a faulty condition—a defect brought about by themselves in the first place—and a condition that remains a function of their own will throughout their career; and (2) the complementary notion that the deed of differentiation—that is, these distinctions—can be undone, and that its undoing is *the final goal*. This is the central principle of Origen’s theological system.

Origen’s teaching on Satan, or the devil, is truly indicative of the radicalism of his thought. The devil belonged to the same unity of minds as all rational creatures. But the devil and a host of minds due to the exercise of their free will “descended to such a pitch of negligence” that they were changed into opposing powers. It is easily the greatest triumph of the absoluteness of the will that it can lead to the extreme opposite of the original unity, while at the same time *retaining its essential nature*, namely, its freedom for good and evil. As a result, it also retains the freedom to restore itself to its original state. So the devil and those of the devil’s ilk can rise again to the highest level, and the ultimate consummation includes the restoration of the devil, who will be redeemed along with the Christ in the restored unity of all minds.

Origen’s Christology

One may ask what role the Christ plays in all of this for Origen. Origen’s peculiar Christology, which lies almost entirely outside the doctrine of the Trinity, connected only by the most slender of threads, is perhaps the most offensive of Origen’s theological opinions for those of an orthodox position. Issues of Christology and universal restoration were central to Origen’s condemnation in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The main point is that the Christ is not the *Logos*, that is, not the second person of the Trinity, but rather that Christ is a rational creature who is called “mind” in the sense that only Christ preserved his original status unimpaired while the others were forfeiting theirs through their defection, in other words through their fall. It was neither predictable which of the equally endowed minds would remain faithful on that occasion nor predictable which will remain so in coming and ever new beginnings. Therefore, it appears that Christ is no less an exchangeable figure than the devil; Christ is Christ because he happens to be the nonfallen mind of the time. He too exemplifies the general principle of the equality of all natures combined with the limitless mutability of the will—the principle that admits no unique individual figures, thus no real proper names, into the system but knows only role and rank designations.

Pursuing this yet further, we find that through the steadfastly maintained knowledge of God the “One,” this mind was made Christ; in particular, he has before all ages been so intimately united with God the Word (the Second Person of the Trinity) that “by a misuse of language” this too is called “Christ,” whereas the name genuinely pertains to the mind thus clinging to him. This mind pitied our situation and so goes through all modes of being; it was invested with different kinds of bodies—changed into everything from angel to human being—for the redemption of all. Of such a role, the divine *Logos* was incapable because of its immutability (unchangeability).

In general terms, the role and function of the Christ is to help fallen minds, by instruction and by example, to find their way back. The doctrine of his suffering many times in many different spheres and forms means that the uniqueness of his one appearance, on which the message of the New Testament grounds itself, somehow dissolves into the universality of a process in which “Christ” is a function rather than a unique event.

Finally, in view of all this, it is not surprising to have it made known that even the kingdom of Christ will one time come to an end. The kingdom will end since it is just the aim of Christ’s mission that in the end, when all beings are again equal to each other as they were in the beginning, even the devil will be restored to his ancient rank.

Today it might seem as if we have nothing in common with Origen and the people of his age. We certainly do not share their metaphysics, nor do contemporary biblical scholars utilize his allegorical method of scriptural interpretation to any large degree. At the same time, we should be aware that some two thousand years from now those who look at the work we do will likely have similar reactions to those we have to Origen and his colleagues. This should give us some pause, at least, in our criticism of the great Alexandrian.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1** How would you describe Origen’s anthropology? What did he suggest by the *homoousion* of all minds? And how did the devil fit into this scheme? What was Origen’s doctrine of the *apokatastasis*?
- 2** Describe Origen’s Christology. How did he distinguish between the *Logos* and the Second Person of the Trinity? What is the significance of this distinction?
- 3** How did Origen understand the doctrine of the *imago Dei*?