



Talk II: The Apologists Part I

Justin Martyr

Athenagoras

Irenaeus

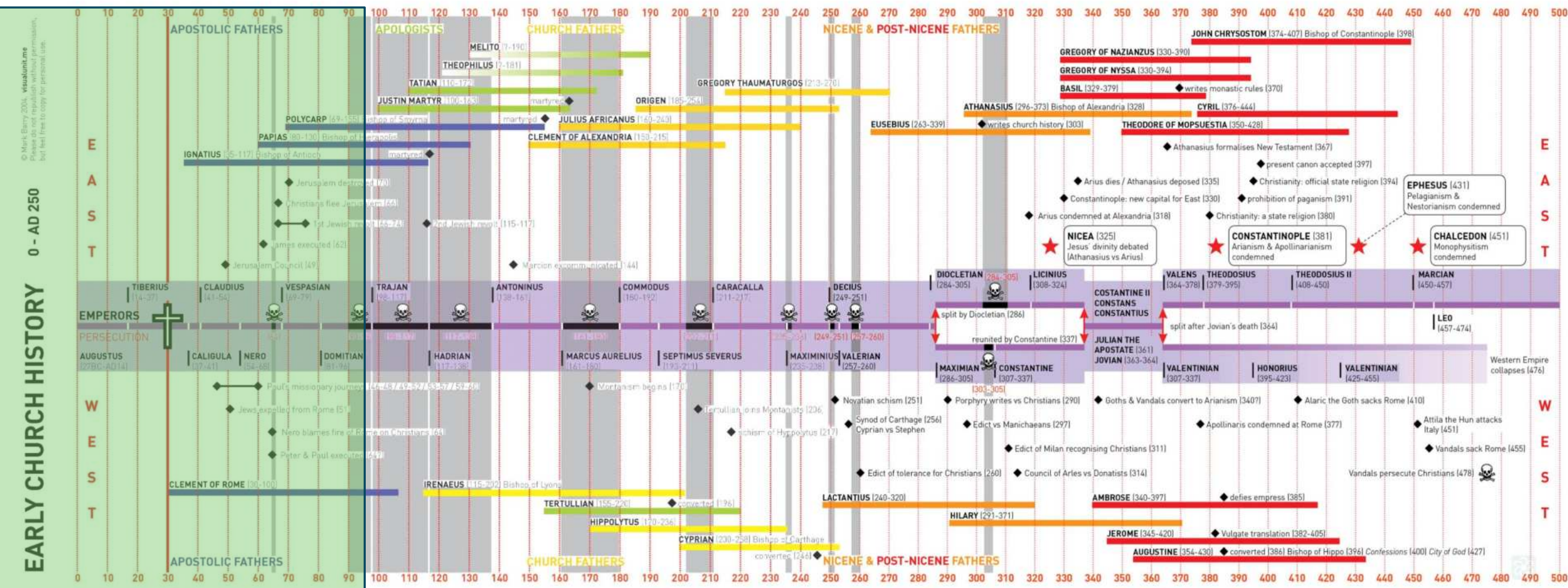
1 Cor 4:15 *“For although you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel, I have begotten you.”*

PATROLOGY II – THE APOLOGISTS

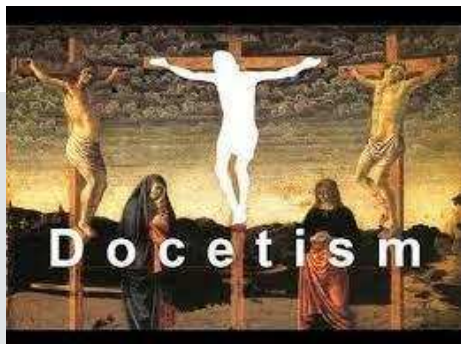
Pre-Servants Program
Ehab Roufail



THE CHURCH FATHERS (300 AD-480 AD)



2. THE SECOND CENTURY - HERESIES



DOCETISM

- Docetic, which comes from the Greek word meaning "to appear." Those who proposed this heresy maintained that Jesus really did not possess, or inhabit a physical body, but only "appeared" to have a body.
- Some of them believed that Simon of Cyrene was crucified instead of Jesus
- Saint **Ignatius of Antioch** responded to this heresy in his writings.
- Type of Gnosticism



MARCIONISM

- Marcion was the son of a bishop. He moved to Rome around 135 AD where he became known in the church and began to teach.
- Marcion observed differences between the God of Old Testament and the God of Jesus in the NT. His answer was to reject the God of the OT, seeing him as the creator of an evil world. He excluded the entire OT, and included only Paul's letters and Luke's gospel.
- **Tertullian** and many fathers responded to his heresy



MONTANISM

- Montanus testified that he had experienced an ecstatic visitation of the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit) and, along with two women (Maximilla and Priscilla), had the ability to deliver prophetic messages from God.
- The Montanist message was about the close return of Jesus and the apocalyptic end of the world, and encouragement to embrace persecution and martyrdom. Some church leaders were women arguments against this position,
- Extreme Asceticism
- He claimed Jesus will reign for 1000 years on earth

3. THIRD CENTURY - HERESIES



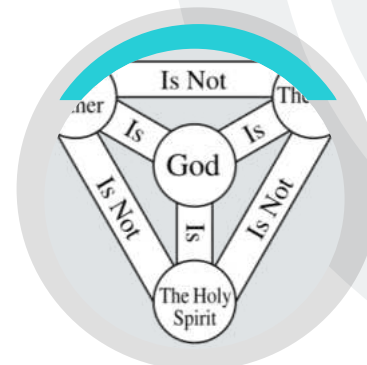
PAUL OF SAMOSATA

- Bishop of Antioch and was supported by Zenobia queen of Palmyra
- He claimed the Jesus was a normal human and was elevated to a God by His baptism.
- He also denied the Holy Spirit as a person of God claiming it's a kind of Godly power
- Excommunicated by Council of Antioch & **Dionysius of Alex (14th Pope) wrote against his heresy**



NOVATIAN/ DONATISTS

- Bishop of Rome who refused readmission of apostates during the persecutions of the time
- He was excommunicated by a council in Carthage, but his ideas remained and developed into a sect called Donatists in 4th century after the great persecution
- **Pope Dionysius of Alex & Bishop Cyprian of Carthage fought his ideas**



SABELLIANISM

- Libyan priest named Sabellius rejected the idea of three persons of God (Trinity) (Modalism)
- For him, God is described by an analogy: water in its three states of ice, liquid, and steam appear to be different substances, but they all are composed of the same chemical compound. Likewise, God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit appear to be three distinct persons, but they are different manifestations of one solitary God
- **Dionysius of Alex & Hippolytus of Rome (apologists)**



MANICHAISM

- Found by Mani the Persian as a new religion that blended Gnosticism, Christianity, and the teachings of Persian Magi
- He believed that : all religions are equally valid, two cosmic kingdoms, which included a Kingdom of Light (the Primal God) and the Kingdom of Darkness (Satan). Accepted as prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Paul, Mani
- Believed in cycles of life (reincarnation)

CHRISTIANS IN A HOSTILE WORLD

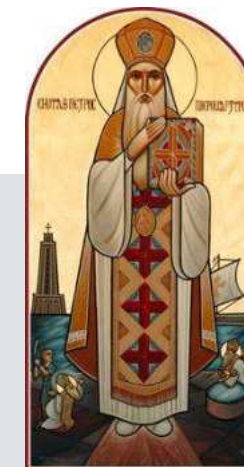
Three main accusations against Christians

- **Atheists**. Because they did not take part in traditional or imperial worship. This threatened the stability of cities as the rejected gods would take their revenge.
- Christians practiced **incest**. When they got together for their evening meals it was only to indulge in orgies, the worst kinds of wickedness between 'brothers' and 'sisters'
- They were **cannibals** as they ate the flesh and blood of a child victim in ritual murder.

SETTING THE STAGE: THE 10 ROMAN PERSECUTIONS



- **Nero** – 64 AD St. Peter and St. Paul Martyred
- **Domitian** – Exiled St. John to Patmos
- **Trajan** – Christians to be killed – Ignatius Bishop of Antioch and Simeon Bishop of Jerusalem
- **Marcus Aurelius** – Actively killed Christians
- **Septimus Severus** – Syrian and African Martyrs



- **Caius Thrax** – evil in his persecution of Christians
- **Decius** – Desired complete extinction of Christians
- **Valerian** – Rome and Carthage lost their bishops and priests
- **Aurelian** – Continued a systematic persecution of Christians
- **Diocletian** – 284 AD his reign and our calendar of Martyrs starts – whole towns massacred till blood spills to the knees of the horses

CHRISTIANS IN A HOSTILE WORLD - ACCUSATIONS

That various heinous crimes were attributed to Christians throughout the second century can be seen in an apology by a Christian. The apologist, **Minucius Felix**, gave the following description of contemporary Christians as probably seen by an educated Roman citizen of the day:

How can we witness without pain the attacks against the gods made by this miserable, unlawful, and fanatical faction? They collect from the scum of the populace ignorant and credulous folk and make them fellow conspirators; in their nocturnal meetings, after solemn fasts and unnatural repasts, they bind themselves together, not by an oath but by a sacrilege; they are a race which hides itself and flies from the light, silent in public, loquacious in their retreats... They recognize each other by secret signs and love each other almost before being acquainted; they are united by a religion of debauchery; they call one another sister and brother...

It is said by some unheard of folly they adore the head of a filthy animal [the ass]: A fine religion and one well worthy of them. Their rites of initiation are as detestable as they are known. A child, covered with flour to deceive the uninstructed, is presented to the one to be initiated; the latter, seeing only a floury mass and thinking his blows harmless, strikes the unseen child and kills him. And then these wicked people greedily drink his blood; they unite themselves together by this sacrifice and bind each other mutually to silence by complicity in the crime.

CHRISTIANS IN A HOSTILE WORLD - ACCUSATIONS

A Greek writer – Lucien (c.124-192) from Samosata Syria. Travelled and wrote extensively. Paints an amusing picture of society in his time. In *The death of Peregrinus* he tell the life-story of a boastful swindler who exploits the naivity of Christians.

The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody; most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once, for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.

CHRISTIANS IN A HOSTILE WORLD- ACCUSATIONS

But the most dramatic account comes from a later Christian author, **Epiphanius of Cyprus**, who claimed to have knowledge of a Christian group called the **Phibionites** which practiced ritual intercourse and the eating of an unborn child. (20)

When they thus ate together and so to speak filled up their veins from the surplus of their strength they turn to excitements. The man leaving his wife says to his own wife: "Stand up and perform the agape with the brother." Then the unfortunates unite with each other, and as I am truly ashamed to say the shameful things that are being done by them, because according to the holy apostle the things that are happening by them are shameful even to mention, nevertheless I will not be ashamed to say those things which they are not ashamed to do, in order that I may cause in every way a horror in those who hear about their shameful practices.

After they have had intercourse in the passion of fornication they raise their own blasphemy to heaven. The woman and the man take the fluid of the emission of the man into their hands, they stand, turn toward heaven, their hands besmeared with the uncleanness, and pray as people called *stratitotikoi* [στρατιωτικοι] and *gnostikoi* [γνωστικοι], bringing to the father the nature of all that which they have on their hands, and they say: "We offer to thee this gift, the body of Christ."

And then they eat it, their own ugliness, and say: "This is the body of Christ and this is the Passover for the sake of which our bodies suffer and are forced to confess the suffering of Christ." Similarly also with the woman when she happens to be in the flowing of the blood they gather the blood of menstruation of her uncleanness and eat it together and say: "This is the blood of Christ."
[Panarion 26.4-5]

CHRISTIANS IN A HOSTILE WORLD

Accusation of Atheism

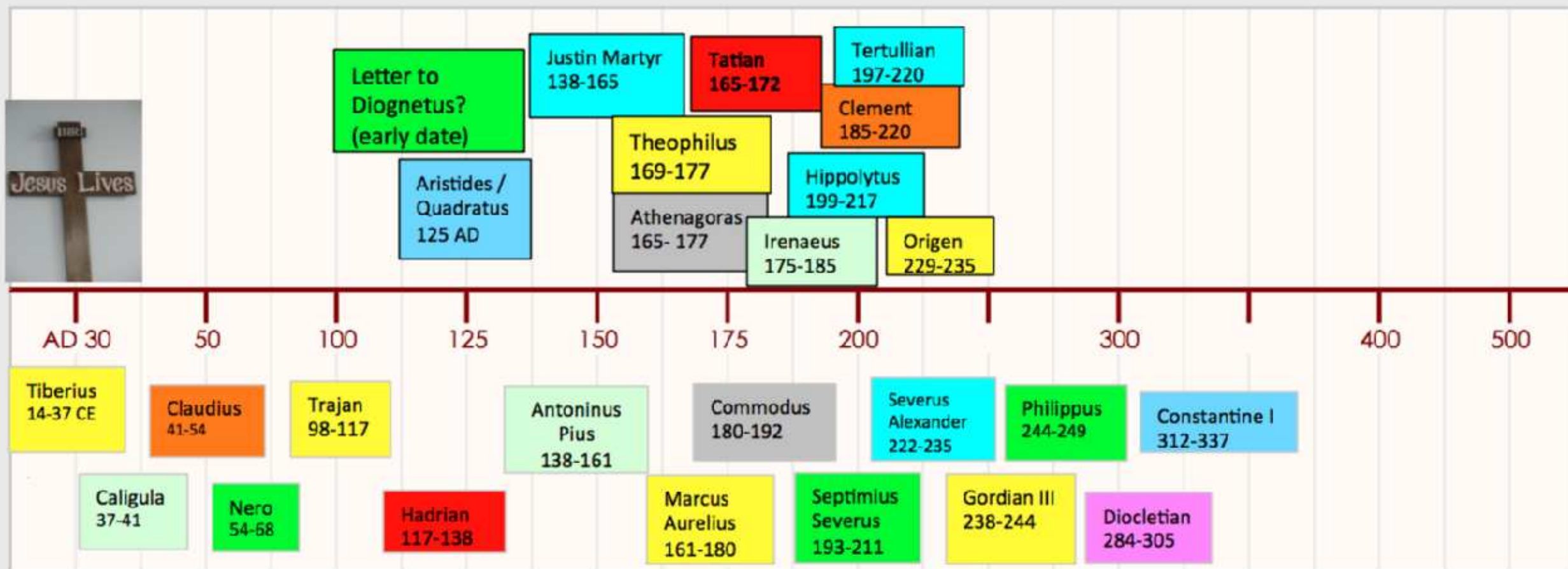
Celsus:

Celsus, a 2nd-century Greek philosopher, was a vocal critic of Christianity. He accused Christians of atheism due to their rejection of the Roman gods and their failure to participate in traditional worship. In his work *The True Doctrine*, he writes, **"Christians have abandoned the gods revered by their ancestors, and by their disloyalty to the national religion, they bring misfortune upon themselves and their city"** (*The True Doctrine*).

Tertullian:

Tertullian, an early Christian apologist, responded to these accusations by clarifying the Christian stance. In his *Apology*, he states, **"We are accused of atheism. And we do confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God"** (*Apology*, Chapter 10).

Early Christian Apologists Timeline



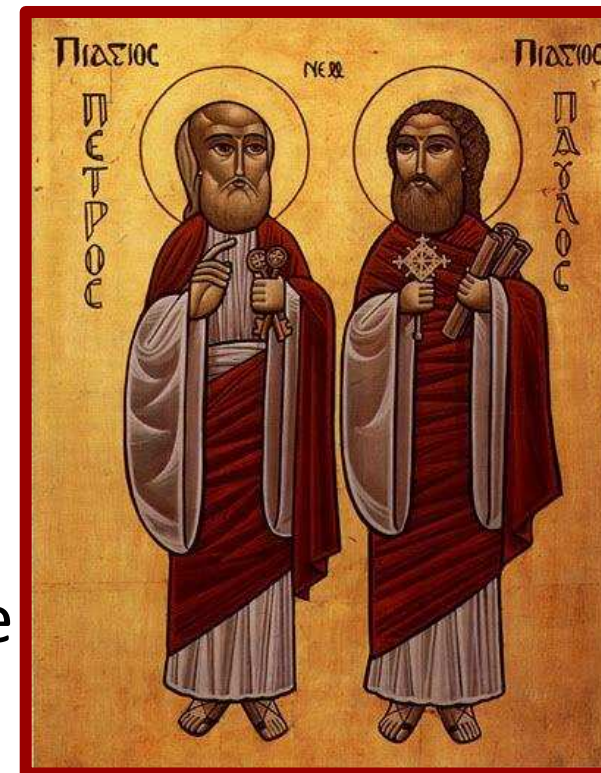
THE APOLOGISTS — DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

Universal Gospel Message: Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles avoided privileging any one race, nation, or people.

- **Acts 2:** The Holy Spirit inflames people from diverse Mediterranean backgrounds.
- **Acts 15:** Even Jews, the initial recipients of the Gospel, are not privileged over others.

Transcultural Vision: The Gospel transcends cultural boundaries, embracing all people.

Missionary Approach: Evangelists adapted the Gospel to local cultures rather than imposing a single cultural framework.



THE APOLOGISTS — DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

Missionary Growth: Christianity spread from coastal regions (Mediterranean) to interior areas like Asia Minor, Egypt, and Africa.

- Example: Pliny the Younger documented Christians near the Black Sea.

Western Expansion: By 177 AD, under Bishop Pothinus, Christianity spread from Gaul to Germania (e.g., Trier, Cologne).

Urban Influence: Christianity flourished in cities like Antioch and Alexandria, attracting diverse groups:

- Workers and commoners.
- Intellectuals, including rhetoricians and philosophers.

Engagement with Philosophy: The Church adapted its teachings to Greek philosophical frameworks, addressing Hellenistic cultural challenges.

THE APOLOGISTS — DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

Role and Purpose:

- Apologists defended Christianity against misconceptions, idolatry accusations, and philosophical critiques.
- Presented Christian faith to educated audiences, emphasizing belief in the singular God revealed through Jesus Christ.

Apologetic Strategies:

- Exposed errors and corruptions in pagan culture.
- Highlighted Christianity as fulfilling and perfecting the best aspects of Mediterranean culture.

THE APOLOGISTS — DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

Key Figures:

- **Justin Martyr:** His preserved writings provide insights into early Christian intellectual defense.
- **Athenagoras:** Another notable apologist of the era.
Irenaeus of Lyons: Defended apostolic tradition against Gnostic heresies and emphasized the unity of faith.
- **Tertullian:** Developed Latin theological vocabulary, argued against pagan criticism, and emphasized the moral superiority of Christianity.
- **Clement of Alexandria:** Integrated Greek philosophy with Christian thought, showing Christianity as the true philosophy.
- **Hippolytus of Rome:** Criticized heresies and provided early Christian exegesis and doctrinal clarity.
- **Origen:** Used allegorical interpretation to defend Christian doctrine and provided responses to pagan criticisms in *Contra Celsum*.

Methodology:

- Identified critics' objections and offered reasoned counter-arguments.
- Balanced Gospel understanding with awareness of critics' perspectives.

THE APOLOGISTS — DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

Some scholars state that the apologists began by presenting petitions to **Hadrian on his visit to Athens** in 124 A.D. After the martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, St. Justin wrote to Antoninus Pius around 156 A.D.

Three more addressed **Marcus Aurelius** in 176 A.D, after the suppression of a revolt.

This appeal failed with the bloody martyrdom in Gaul, and Tatian delivered a violent counterattack addressed not to the emperors but to Greeks in general.

A few years later St. Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, created an apologetic Jewish-Christian theology which was soon modified by better theologians.

Petitions to the emperors had ceased and apologists wrote for non-Christian groups or individuals to tell outsiders about Christian truth.

THE APOLOGISTS — DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

The defense of Christianity was not limited to clergy but extended to **lay writers** who operated independently of official Church preaching.

- **Countered false accusations**, including the claim that Christianity endangered the State.
- **Used philosophical reasoning** while critiquing and adapting philosophical language, laying the foundation for traditional Christian theology.

Objectives:

1. **Refute False Statements:** Defended the Church's political harmlessness.
2. **Expose Pagan Immoralities:** Highlighted the superiority of Christian understanding of God, monotheism, the divinity of Christ, and resurrection.
3. **Critique Philosophy:** Argued that human reason alone failed to attain full truth, contrasting it with Christianity as the "divine philosophy" based on the Logos (Divine Reason).

Goal: Presented Christianity as politically harmless, morally pure, and culturally superior to paganism

APOLOGIST JUSTIN, THE MARTYR (C. 100–165 AD)

- Born in Flavia Neapolis (Palestine) in the 2nd century.
- Sought truth across philosophical schools: Stoicism, Peripateticism, and Pythagoreanism.

Journey to Christianity:

- Found philosophical systems inadequate in explaining God and existence.
- Influenced by:
 - A wise old man who introduced him to Christian teachings.
 - The fearless faith of Christians facing persecution and death.
- Renowned for his defence of Christianity through literature.
- His writings blend philosophical inquiry with Christian doctrine, addressing critics and affirming the faith.



APOLOGIST JUSTIN, THE MARTYR (C. 100–165 AD)

After his conversion, Justin dedicated his life to defending Christianity, traveling as an itinerant teacher and eventually founding a school in Rome. His teachings influenced many, including his pupil Tatian, who followed in his footsteps as an apologist.

Justin's legacy lives on through his writings, although only a few have survived. Notable among them are his two Apologies [against the Greeks](#) and his [Dialogue with the Jew Trypho](#). In these works, Justin seeks to reconcile faith and reason, asserting that Christianity alone offers true rationality. He emphasizes the incarnation of the Word as a means to teach truth and deliver humanity from the clutches of darkness.

St. Justin's intellectual rigor and unwavering commitment to truth continue to inspire seekers of faith and knowledge, underscoring the enduring relevance of his teachings in the quest for understanding and enlightenment.



APOLOGIST JUSTIN, THE MARTYR (C. 100–165 AD)

CHAP. LXVII.—WEEKLY WORSHIP OF THE CHRISTIANS. And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost. **And on the day called Sunday**, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of **the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read**, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all **rise together and pray**, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, **bread and wine and water** are brought, and the president in like manner **offers prayers and thanksgivings**, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are **absent a portion is sent by the deacons**. And they who **are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit**; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours **the orphans and widows** and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; **and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead**. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.

1st Apology addressed to Emperor Antoninus – Chp 67 [St.JustinMartyr-1stApology.doc \(basilica.ca\)](#)

[0100-0160, Iustinus, Dialogus cum Tryphone \[Schaff\], EN.pdf \(documentacatholicaomnia.eu\)](#)



APOLOGIST JUSTIN, THE MARTYR (100-165)

Chapter 6. The relation of Christians to the world To sum up all in one word— what the soul is in the body, Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded by the visible body, and Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it, 1 Peter 2:11 though itself suffering no injury, because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures; the world also hates the Christians, though in nowise injured, because they abjure pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and [loves also] the members; Christians likewise love those that hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body yet preserves that very body; and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle; and Christians dwell as sojourners in corruptible [bodies], looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens. The soul, when but ill-provided with food and drink, becomes better; in like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake. **Epistle to Diogenes Chapter 6**

[DiognetusV1-0.pdf \(romanroadsstatic.com\)](http://romanroadsstatic.com)



THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA - ORIGINS

St. Mark and the Establishment of the School:

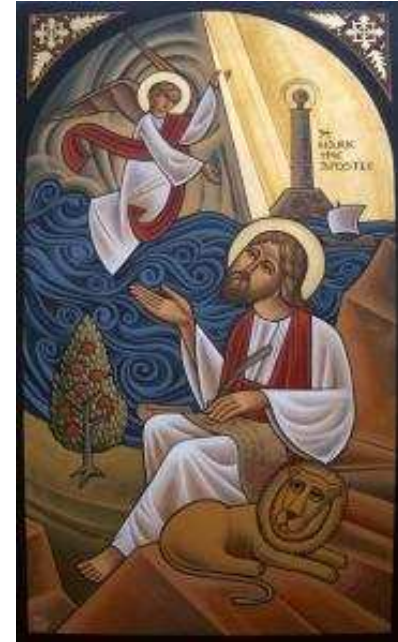
- According to St. Jerome, St. Mark the Evangelist founded the School of Alexandria to aid in his mission of preaching to three primary groups in the city: Greeks, Jews, and Egyptians.
- Recognizing the difficulty of engaging these diverse audiences, St. Mark envisioned a school that was encyclopaedic in nature, addressing a wide range of disciplines beyond theology.

Early Impact and Leadership:

- The School of Alexandria became a hub for intellectual and spiritual formation, producing many leaders, including bishops and popes of the Coptic Church.
- One of its deans, St. Justus, later became the second Pope of Alexandria, a testament to the school's influence in shaping Church leadership.

Global Influence:

- The school revolutionized how theology and philosophy were interpreted, with its effects reaching far beyond Egypt. It became a model for Christian education, influencing thought across the ancient world.



APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)

- Athenagoras, initially sought to refute Christianity and devoted himself to studying the Scriptures critically.
- During this process, the Holy Spirit illuminated him, leading to his conversion to Christianity.
- He later became the Dean of the School of Alexandria, contributing significantly to its intellectual and theological legacy.

Life and Conversion:

- Athenagoras, a philosopher, initially set out to disprove Christianity.
- He dedicated extensive time to studying the Old and New Testaments in order to write against the faith.
- However, through his study and the work of the Holy Spirit, Athenagoras was illuminated to the truth of Christianity and converted.
- In his later years, he became the Dean of the School of Alexandria, contributing greatly to its legacy.



APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)

Athenagoras and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

- During Athenagoras' time, many Greeks and Jews struggled to accept the Resurrection of Christ.
- In response, Athenagoras wrote the [Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead](#), a work aimed at addressing these doubts.
- Interestingly, Athenagoras did not use any Scripture in this treatise.

Philosophical Approach:

- Understanding that his audience was composed of philosophers who valued logic, Athenagoras used reason and philosophical proofs to demonstrate the truth of the Resurrection, rather than relying on Biblical references.
- This approach highlights his ability to engage with the intellectual culture of his time while maintaining faith in the power of reason to lead to truth.

(Athenagoras' writings reflect a deep integration of philosophy and faith, as he used the tools of logic to reveal the truth of the Christian message.)



APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)

His idea of God is fundamentally biblical. Athenagoras is confident that God's providence guides the righteous through all difficulties. God is for him the Creator whose providence guides and governs all men's lives in their smallest details.

God, as *the Father*, controls the world splendidly, and nothing is beyond the reach of His guardianship and forethought. God works upon matter much as a potter works upon his clay, fashioning it and giving it differentiation, shape, and order, indeed there is an analogy between man's creative activity and God's. From His hand and mind come all created beauty seen on earth.

The heart of his belief is the unique, creative activity of God. He holds that the purpose of life is an inseparable companionship with the ultimate realities, an unceasing and exultant contemplation and service of the Creator as He is in Himself, and that *contemplation would be the Christian's lot for all eternity*.

God, who is the Father, is also transcendent, unbegotten, possessing goodness, separated from matter which He nevertheless shapes in His creative purpose. He is Light *inaccessible*, Himself a universe of perfection and beauty, superior to the exigencies of change and decay, uncaused by anything outside of Himself.



APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)



his *Plea (Embassy or Legatio)* addressed to the two emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and his son co-ruler Lucius Aurelius Commodus, spread without his name and was wrongly attributed to St. Justin before the fourth century.

Athenagoras' doctrine of God culminates in Trinitarian theology. The essential passage is as follows:

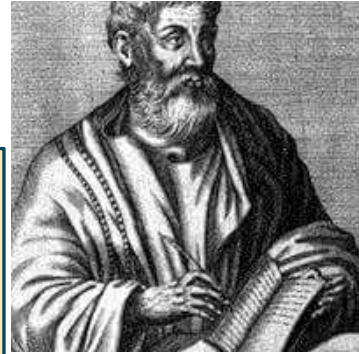
"I have given sufficient proofs that we are not atheists, but hold God to be one, unbegotten, eternal, invisible, suffering nothing, comprehended by none, circumscribed by none, apprehended by mind and reasoning alone, girt about with light and beauty and spirit and power indescribable, Creator of all things by his Word, their embellisher and master.

*We do indeed think also that God has a Son - please let no one laugh at the idea of God having a Son! This is not a case of the myths of the poets who make the gods out to be no better than men; we have no such ideas about God the Father or the Son. The Son of God is Word of the Father in thought and power. All things were made through Him and after His fashion. **The Father and the Son are one, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son by the powerful union of the Spirit - the Son of God is Mind and Word of the Father.***

APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)

*Now, if in your exceeding great sagacity, you wish to investigate what is meant by the Son, I will tell you in brief. He is the first-begotten of the Father. He did not indeed come to be, for God was from the beginning Being eternal Mind and had His Word within Himself **being from eternity possessed of a Word**; but He **proceeded** to become thought and power over the elements of undifferentiated nature when all the material elements were like a substrate in quiescence and the heavier elements lay mixed with the lighter. The Spirit of prophecy agrees with this account saying, 'The Lord made Me in the beginning of His works' (Prov 8:22). Then again this same **Holy Spirit** that works in those who utter prophecy, we call **an outflow from God flowing out and returning like a ray of the sun**. Who then would not be amazed hearing those called atheists who call God Father and Son and Holy Spirit, proclaiming their power in unity and their diversity in rank (order)?*

Athenagoras' work "A Plea for the Christians" (or "A Plea Regarding Christians") in Chapter 10.



APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)

The Eucharist for Athenagoras as for the early Fathers, such as St. Ignatius and St. Clement of Rome, was a real sacrifice. Athenagoras certainly deserves the credit for introducing into the vocabulary of Christian theology the term '**unbloody sacrifice**' where the sword is a word and where no blood is shed.

The kiss of peace, the liturgical or apostolic kiss in the Christian liturgy is mentioned by Athenagoras. It is still exchanged in the Coptic and the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches while it disappeared from other churches. St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, "Do not think that this kiss is like that which friends are accustomed to give one another when they meet in the agro. This kiss unites the souls together and destroys all resentment."



APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)

In Embassy 13 Athenagoras seems to be quoting from a **public prayer in praise of the Creator**:

"who stretched out the heavens and reared them into a vault and established the earth as the center of things, who gathered the waters into seas and separated light from darkness, who bedecked the sky with stars and made the earth bud forth every green thing, who made the animals and fashioned man." Similar prayers are to be found in Melito's Homily on the Passion and in the Apostolic Constitutions.

A minor liturgical reminiscence seems to have survived at the end of Embassy 10, where a Trinitarian phrase echoes the style of many **early church prayers to the Trinity**. The words:

*We 'call God Father and Son and Holy Spirit, proclaiming their power in unity and in rank their diversity,' have the articulation of later Trinitarian prayers with the balance of contrasting clauses. That Christians of the period did call upon the Trinity is shown by the hymn which runs: 'As we sing to Father Son and Holy Spirit, may all the powers join with us to say Amen. To the only giver of all good things be power and praise. Amen.' **This liturgical hymn is published in Oxy. papyrus 1786, along with the music that it was sung to, and again in Patrologia Orientalis 18:507.***



APOLOGIST ATHENAGORAS (133-190)

HIS MOST IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL MISTAKES

The church calls him philosopher not saint, due to his fall into some theological mistakes.

1. He calls Satan as the prince of materialism; God made him its forebearer.
2. He thinks the spirit incomplete if not united to the body.
3. He calls for no punishment to children for their mistakes.
4. He stated that demons practiced sexual intercourse with girls who brought forth the Amalekites.

[Fr. Tadros Malaty – Before Origen](#)



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

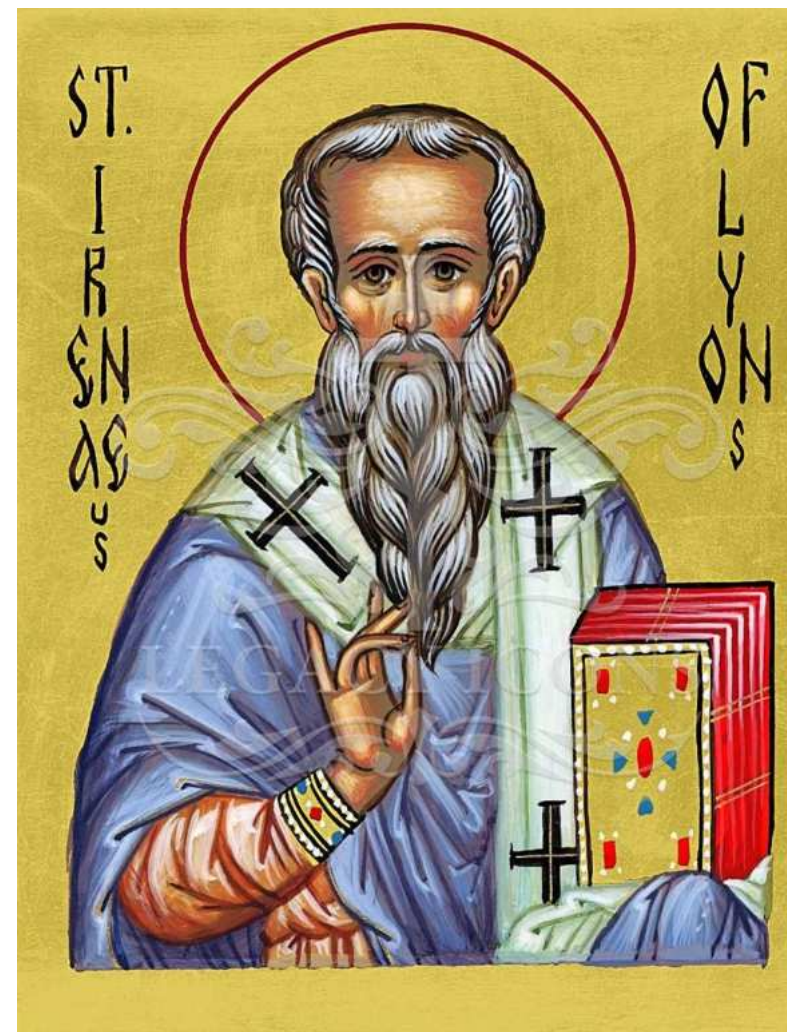
Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul (now Lyon, France)

Bishop and 'Martyr'

Born 2nd century Smyrna in Asia Minor (modern-day İzmir, Turkey)

Known for his refutation against the heresy of Gnosticism

Died 202 Lugdunum in Gaul (modern-day Lyon, France)



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

Irenaeus (c. 130–202) was a Greek thinker who was born in Asia Minor to a Christian family. His historic connections to early Christianity ran deep, as he was a **student of the apostolic father Polycarp (69–155)**.

Christian tradition asserts that Polycarp actually knew the apostle John—so Irenaeus wasn't too far removed from the time of the apostles. Irenaeus was both a sophisticated theologian and a careful apologist.

In fact, he was the **first Christian apologist to defend Christianity from specific heresies** (false teachings that deny essential Christian doctrines).

Irenaeus defended Christianity from the influential heresy known as **Gnosticism**. He also wrote about the early Christian church having four Gospels that were distinct from the counterfeit Gnostic Gospels.

Irenaeus was also a leader in the church and ultimately **became the bishop of Lyons**.

There is a late tradition that Irenaeus was martyred, but this claim is not well supported by historical evidence and is rejected by modern scholars.



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

What Did Irenaeus Write?

Irenaeus' two most important books are *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.

The first book is a defence of Christianity, and a critique of early Gnostic claims.

The second is a catechism (a summary of Christian teaching) that includes both apologetic and pastoral themes since Irenaeus was also a spiritual shepherd in the early Christian church.



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

What Did Irenaeus Teach?

Christians of various traditions continue to uphold beliefs articulated by Irenaeus. Perhaps Irenaeus' three most important Christian apologetics accomplishments are the following:

1. Irenaeus **critiqued Gnosticism**, a heretical religious philosophy that affirmed esoteric knowledge, dualism (spirit is good, matter is evil), and a transcendent non-creator God above Jehovah.
2. Irenaeus **critiqued Marcionism**, a heretical religious philosophy that affirmed Jesus as the Saviour and Paul as his chief apostle, but rejected the Hebrew Bible and the God of Israel.



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202) AGAINST THE HERESIES

Against Heresies is the largest Christian work from the first two centuries, consisting of five books.

Content Breakdown:

- **Book 1:** Describes Gnostic and heretical views.
- **Book 2:** Refutes these views, highlighting their inconsistencies and misuse of Scripture.
- **Books 3–5:** Presents the apostolic Christian faith as taught by Christ and the apostles, preserved in the Church.

Key Themes:

- The apostolic tradition is consistent and universal across churches founded by the apostles.
- True Christian teaching is found in these churches, faithfully transmitting Christ's teachings.

Use of Scripture:

- Irenaeus extensively cites almost all New Testament writings (except Philemon and 3 John), demonstrating their widespread acceptance in the Church.
- He integrates the Gospels, apostolic writings, and the Septuagint to defend orthodoxy.

[Saint Irenaeus Against Heresies Complete.pdf \(archive.org\)](#)



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

- 3. Irenaeus critiqued the false Gnostic Gospels and differentiated them from the four apostolic Gospels.

The Gospel of Thomas: This is one of the most well-known Gnostic gospels, which presents sayings of Jesus that are often cryptic and philosophical. Irenaeus critiques this gospel for its distortion of the teachings of Christ and its lack of apostolic authority.

- The Gospel of Mary:** Associated with the Gnostic tradition, particularly the idea of Mary Magdalene's special knowledge and status, this gospel was not widely recognized in the early Church. Irenaeus critiqued it for promoting unorthodox views about the role of women in the Church and the nature of salvation.

- The Gospel of Judas:** While not explicitly mentioned in *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus' writings point to Gnostic texts that elevate figures like Judas Iscariot as having a special role in the divine plan, which was a key feature of some Gnostic writings. The Gospel of Judas, discovered in the 1970s, presents a similar perspective, portraying Judas as acting on Jesus' instructions.

- The Gospel of the Egyptians:** Irenaeus mentions this text in passing as one of the many Gnostic writings circulating at the time. This gospel was associated with the Egyptian Gnostic tradition, and Irenaeus criticized it for promoting teachings that were incompatible with the apostolic faith.

- The Gospel of Truth:** This gospel, attributed to Valentinus (a prominent Gnostic teacher), is mentioned by Irenaeus as an example of Gnostic literature that presented a version of the gospel that was not in harmony with the apostolic tradition. It was heavily allegorical and symbolic in its teachings.



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

The Gospel of Thomas:

- **Irenaeus' Critique:** Irenaeus vehemently criticized the *Gospel of Thomas* for its presentation of a **gnosticized** version of Jesus' teachings. The gospel includes sayings attributed to Jesus, many of which are enigmatic, cryptic, and often at odds with the message found in the canonical Gospels. The text emphasizes secret knowledge (gnosis) and personal enlightenment, presenting a Jesus who teaches a form of esoteric wisdom reserved for a select few, rather than the universally accessible Gospel of salvation through faith and repentance.
- **Theological Issue:** The *Gospel of Thomas* reflects a Gnostic worldview that rejects the material world as inherently corrupt and views salvation as the escape from the physical world into the spiritual realm. Irenaeus rejected these views, arguing that the physical world and creation were good, as demonstrated in the doctrine of the Incarnation, in which Christ assumed human flesh to redeem it.
- **Apostolic Authority:** Irenaeus also pointed out that the *Gospel of Thomas* lacked apostolic authority. It was not written by an apostle or someone closely associated with the apostles, as the canonical Gospels were. He emphasized the importance of apostolic succession and the faithful transmission of teachings within the Church.



The Gospel of Thomas

APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

The Gospel of Thomas:

Key Quote: “For this is the way in which they assert that they possess the truth: they say that some of the sayings of the Lord were preserved by those who were with Him, and that these were handed down secretly to certain of the faithful, who have in this way obtained a special and higher knowledge.” (*Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 20)

Key Quote: “But as for the Gnostics, their doctrines are a great deal more full of error, for they set up a Christ who did not come in the flesh, nor was He born of the Virgin, nor was He crucified, nor did He rise from the dead; but they hold that He passed through them as though they were mere phantoms, and that He was a mere appearance.” (*Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 11)



The Gospel of Thomas

APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

The Gospel of Mary Magdalene:

Irenaeus' Critique: The *Gospel of Mary* (traditionally attributed to Mary Magdalene) presents a radically different view of the role of women in the Church and their relationship with Jesus. Irenaeus criticized this gospel because it portrayed Mary Magdalene as the recipient of special, secret teachings of Jesus, which were not shared with the male disciples. It also suggests that Peter (and other apostles) failed to fully understand Jesus' teachings, a theme common in Gnostic texts that undermine the authority of the apostolic leadership.

Theological Issue: The Gnostic narrative presented in the *Gospel of Mary* challenges the orthodox Christian understanding of salvation and authority. Irenaeus rejected the idea that salvation was only accessible to those who had special knowledge or that Mary Magdalene's role could be elevated to such a degree that it undermined the authority of the apostolic teachings handed down from Peter and the other apostles.

Apostolic Authority: Irenaeus noted that the *Gospel of Mary* was not recognized by the broader Church and lacked the apostolic foundation that the canonical Gospels had. He emphasized the unity of the faith as taught by the apostles and criticized the tendency of Gnostic writings to create divisions and factions within the Christian community.



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

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Key Quote: "For neither did the apostles, nor the Church of God, receive the doctrine of the Gnostics, but the Church has the apostles for its foundation, and this foundation is the ground of the truth, not merely in a hidden and secret way, but in open and manifest doctrine, in the word and in the body."
(*Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 10)



APOLOGIST – IRENAEUS (130-202)

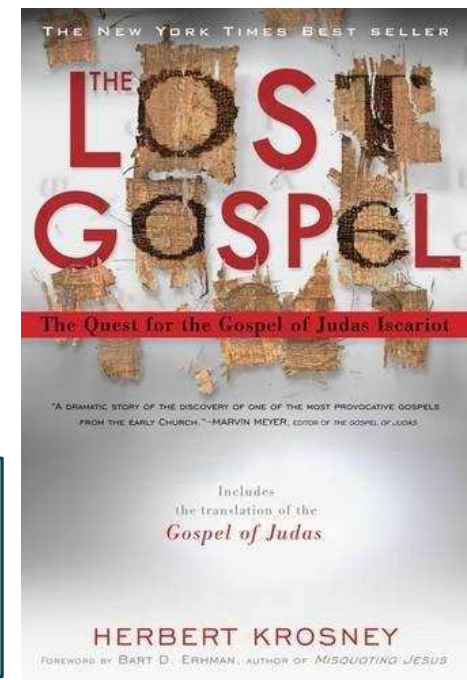
The Gospel of Judas:

Irenaeus' Critique: While Irenaeus does not directly reference the *Gospel of Judas* (as it was not rediscovered until modern times), his critique of the Gnostic tendency to elevate figures like Judas Iscariot can be seen as foreshadowing the themes found in this gospel. The *Gospel of Judas*, rediscovered in the 1970s, portrays Judas not as a traitor, but as a key figure who acted in accordance with Jesus' instructions to help him fulfill his divine mission.

Theological Issue: Irenaeus would have rejected the Gnostic re-interpretation of Judas as a hero or secret agent of God. For Irenaeus, the betrayal of Jesus by Judas was a tragic act of sin, not part of a divine plan to bring salvation. The Gnostics' attempt to elevate Judas subverted the moral and theological implications of Christ's Passion.

Apostolic Authority: The *Gospel of Judas* is considered a later, non-apostolic text that contradicts the accepted teachings of the Church. Irenaeus emphasized the importance of maintaining the apostolic faith as handed down through the bishops, which was consistent with the teachings of the canonical Gospels, and he rejected any texts that claimed to offer secret or hidden knowledge contrary to this tradition.

Key Quote: “They are false apostles, who bring in secret and hidden doctrines, and are not the servants of Christ. They neither acknowledge Him as the Son of God nor do they profess His suffering and death in the flesh, but say that it was through these things that He was made known.” (Against Heresies, Book 1, Chapter 26)



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

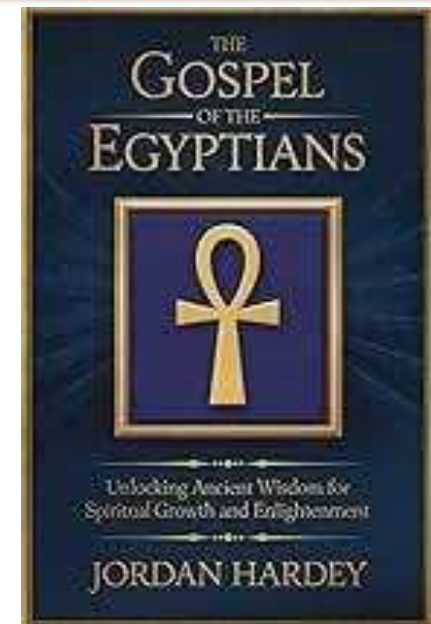
The Gospel of the Egyptians:

Irenaeus' Critique: In passing, Irenaeus mentions the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, a Gnostic text associated with Egyptian Gnosticism, which presented a version of Christianity deeply intertwined with mystical and symbolic teachings. Irenaeus criticizes this gospel as one of the many heretical writings circulating among Gnostic sects, particularly for its promotion of teachings that diverged significantly from the apostolic tradition.

Theological Issue: The *Gospel of the Egyptians* was part of a larger Gnostic tradition that saw salvation in terms of mystical knowledge rather than repentance, faith, and the grace of God. Irenaeus rejected this approach, which denied the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection for salvation, and instead promoted an esoteric and symbolic interpretation of Christianity that lacked a foundation in the apostolic Gospel.

Apostolic Authority: As with other Gnostic texts, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* was not considered apostolic or authoritative. It was not written by any of the apostles, nor was it accepted by the universal Church. For Irenaeus, this was a critical flaw, as he argued that true Christian teaching must be passed down through those with apostolic succession.

Key Quote: "They also speak of the Gnosis, as though it were a mystery which is known only to them, while the Church receives from the apostles and the apostles' successors the knowledge of God, handed down in its fullness." (Against Heresies, Book 1, Chapter 30)



APOLOGIST – IRENAEUS (130-202)

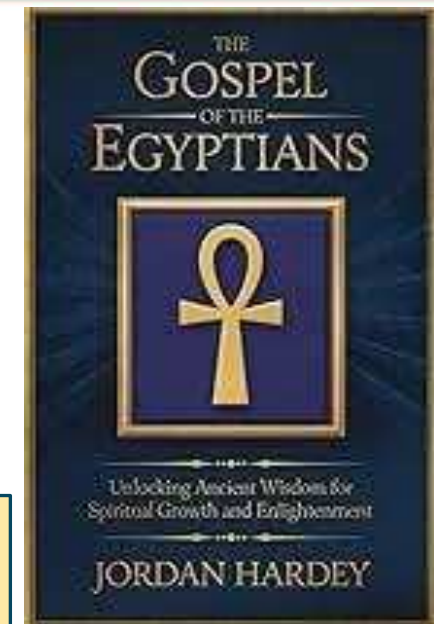
The Gospel of Truth:

Irenaeus' Critique: Irenaeus specifically mentions the *Gospel of Truth* in the context of the Valentinian Gnostic sect, which developed a complex cosmology and soteriology based on secret knowledge. The *Gospel of Truth*, attributed to the Gnostic teacher Valentinus, contains a highly allegorical and symbolic interpretation of Christian doctrine, emphasizing gnosis as the means of salvation.

Theological Issue: The *Gospel of Truth* presented a version of Christianity that Irenaeus saw as a distortion. It interpreted the creation narrative in an allegorical way, separating the God of creation from the God of salvation, and promoted a spiritualized version of Christ's work that did not align with the orthodox Christian understanding of the Incarnation and redemption. Irenaeus rejected the Gnostic notion that salvation was found in hidden knowledge rather than in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Apostolic Authority: Irenaeus emphasized that the *Gospel of Truth* and similar Gnostic writings were not part of the true apostolic tradition. They lacked the authority of the apostles and the established Church, which had faithfully transmitted the Gospel message through the canonical Gospels and the teachings of the bishops.

Key Quote: “The Valentinians, moreover, speak of the Gospel of Truth, which, as they say, is the true Gospel, whereas the Apostles themselves, who were the ministers of the Gospel, did not speak in this manner.” (*Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 8)



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

Why Does Irenaeus Matter Today?

On the Holy Trinity

For the Church, although dispersed throughout the whole world even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and from their disciples the faith in one God, Father Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them; and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who announced through the prophets the dispensations and the comings, and the birth from a Virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, and his coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to reestablish all things; and the raising up again of all flesh of all humanity, in order that to Jesus Christ our Lord and God and Savior and King, in accord with the approval of the invisible Father, every knee shall bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth (***Against Heresies, 1:10:1***).



APOLOGIST — IRENAEUS (130-202)

Why Does Irenaeus Matter Today?

On the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist

He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies. When, therefore, the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receives the Word of God and becomes the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life—flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and is in fact a member of him?
(*Against Heresies*, 5:2).

