



# **Christian Apologetics**

## The Apologetic Fathers

# Christian Apologetics



- ❖ Christian apologetics is a field of Christian Theology which aims to present a rational basis for the Christian faith and defending the faith against objections.
- ❖ Christian apologetics has taken many forms over the centuries, starting with St. Paul the Apostle in the early church, and Patristic writers such as Origen, Augustine of Hippo, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian.
- ❖ Apologists have based their defense of Christianity on historical evidence, philosophical arguments, scientific investigation, and arguments from other disciplines.

## Biblical Passages

- "...always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..." (1 Pet 3:15),
- The defense of the faith is not a luxury or intellectual vanity. It is a task appointed by God that you should be able to give a reason for the hope that is in you as you bear witness before the world."
- The verse quoted here reads in full: "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

## Biblical Passages

- "Come now, let us reason together."  
(Is 1:18).
- "The heavens declare the glory of  
God; the skies proclaim the work of  
his hands" (Ps 19:1)
- "For since the creation of the world  
God's invisible qualities—his eternal  
power and divine nature—have been  
clearly seen, being understood from  
what has been made, so that men  
are without excuse." (Rom 1:20)

# The Apologetic Fathers



- Since Christianity was illegal under the Roman Empire and stood in opposition to traditional pagan religion, early Christians faced periodic persecution as well as slander.
- Additionally, heretical sects and Gnosticism threatened to lead many astray from the Christian faith.
- The Apologetic Fathers wrote in defense of the faith, addressing their appeals to emperors, pagans, heretics and Jews alike.

Examples that we will discuss today:

- Justin Martyr
- Athenagoras of Athens
- Tertullian

# Justin Martyr

- **Justin Martyr**, also known as just **Saint Justin** (AD 100–165), was an early Christian apologist, and is regarded as the foremost interpreter of the theory of the Logos in the 2nd century.
- Most of his works are lost, but two apologies and a dialogue did survive.
- He is considered a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Eastern Orthodox Church

# First Apology of Justin Martyr

- The *First Apology* is dated to between 155-157 AD, based on the reference to Felix as a recent prefect of Egypt.
- Robert Grant has claimed that this Apology was made in response to the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, which occurred around the same time as the Apology was written.
- This correlation would explain why the Apology heavily focused on punishment by fire; a reference to Polycarp's burning at the stake.
- It is also generally believed that the *Second Apology* was originally part of the larger *First Apology*, although there is uncertainty among scholars about this point.

# Themes in the First Apology



## ○ Addressing Criticisms of Christians

- “The name” of Christianity by itself is not reason enough to punish or persecute.
- Urges the Empire instead to only punish evil actions, writing
- Justin demonstrates his desire to separate the Christian name from the evil acts performed by certain individuals



# Themes in the First Apology



## ○ Jesus Christ as the Logos

- Throughout the *First Apology*, Justin argues that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the logos, which leads him to the proof that any individual who has spoken with reason, even those who lived before Christ, connected with the logos in the form of Christ, and is thus, in fact, a Christian
- For Justin, Christianity represents the full truth (logos), meaning that Christianity is not only a meaningful philosophy, but it also completes and corrects prior thought to achieve the highest level of knowledge and reason

# Themes in the First Apology



## ○ Early Church Practices

- The *First Apology* provides one of the most detailed accounts of contemporary Christian practice.
- Those that are baptized are “brought by us where there is water,” where they are “born again in the same manner of rebirth by which we ourselves were born again.”

# Themes in the First Apology



## ○ Early Church Practices

- After the discussion of baptism, Justin describes the practice of the Eucharist, as well as the miracle of transubstantiation
- “we have been taught that the food eucharistized through the word of prayer that is from Him, from which our blood and flesh are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of Jesus who became incarnate.”

# Themes in the First Apology



## ○ Early Church Practices

- Finally, he provides information on the weekly Sunday meetings of the congregation, consisting of readings from the Jewish prophets and "the memoirs of the apostles", prayers, and a meal.

## Second Apology of Justin Martyr

- The *Second Apology* of Justin Martyr is supposed to have been written as a supplement to the First Apology of Justin Martyr
- This is on account of certain proceedings which had in the mean time taken place in Rome before Lollius Urbicus as prefect of the city, which must have been between 150 and 157.
- The Apology is addressed to the Roman Senate.

## Purpose of the Writing

- The Second Apology was meant to expose the real reasons behind the recent persecutions of Christians under Urbicus. It also tried to expose the utter irrationality of allegations and propaganda spread against the Christians.
- He portrays the Christians as those who love God and His Word (Jesus Christ). He desires that this appeal be published that the world will not be superstitious about Christians.

# Athenagoras of Athens

- **Athenagoras** was a Father of the Church, a Ante-Nicene Christian apologist who lived during the second half of the 2nd century
- Little is known for certain about him, besides that he was Athenian (though possibly not originally from Athens), a philosopher, and a convert to Christianity.
- In his writings he styles himself as "Athenagoras, the Athenian, Philosopher, and Christian".

# Athenagoras of Athens

- He is noted as one of the ablest Christian apologists of the second century.
- Athenagoras was born about the year 133 and died in 190.
- The quality of his writings show that he was well educated, familiar with Platonism, and may have been well known and influential.
- Only two of his works, his *Apology* or *Embassy for the Christians* and *Treatise on the Resurrection*, have come down to us.
- The absence of any mention of his writings among other Christian writers may have been due to his anonymous writings having been thought to be the work of other writers.



# Writing Themes

- His writings are credited by some later scholars as having had a more significant impact on their intended audience
- He establishes the principle of monotheism, citing pagan poets and philosophers in support of the very doctrines for which Christians are condemned.
- He meets the charges of immorality by exposing the Christian ideal of purity, even in thought, and the inviolable sanctity of the marriage bond

# Tertullian

- **Tertullian** (160 – 225 AD), was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa.
- He is the first Christian author to produce an extensive amount of Latin Christian literature. He also was a notable early Christian apologist and a polemicist against heresy.
- Tertullian has been called "the father of Latin Christianity" and "the founder of Western theology." Though conservative, he did originate and advance new theology to the early Church.

# Tertullian

- He is perhaps most famous for being the oldest existing Latin writer to use the term **Trinity** (Latin **trinitas**), and giving the oldest extant formal exposition of a Trinitarian theology.
- Other Latin formulations that first appear in his work are "three Persons, one Substance"
- However, unlike many Church fathers, he was never canonized by the Catholic Church, as several of his later teachings directly contradicted the actions and teachings of the apostles.

# Writings

- Thirty-one works are existing, together with fragments of more. Some fifteen works in Latin or Greek are lost, some as recently as the 9th century
- Tertullian's writings cover the whole theological field of the time — apologetics against paganism and Judaism, polemics, polity, discipline, and morals, or the whole reorganization of human life on a Christian basis
- His writings gave a picture of the religious life and thought of the time, which is of the greatest interest to the church historian.

# Writings

- Among his apologetic writings, the *Apologeticus*, addressed to the Roman magistrates, is a most pungent defense of Christianity and the Christians against the reproaches of the pagans.
- It is an important legacy of the ancient Church, proclaiming the principle of freedom of religion as an inalienable human right and demands a fair trial for Christians before they are condemned to death.

# Writing Themes

- Tertullian was the first to break the force of such charges as that the Christians sacrificed infants at the celebration of the Lord's Supper and committed incest.
- He pointed to the commission of such crimes in the pagan world and then proved by the testimony of others that Christians pledged themselves not to commit murder, adultery, or other crimes.
- He presented also the inhumanity of pagan customs such as feeding the flesh of gladiators to beasts. He argued that the gods have no existence and thus there is no pagan religion against which Christians may offend.

# Writing Themes

- Christians do not engage in the foolish worship of the emperors. They do better: they pray for them.
- Christians can afford to be put to torture and to death, and the more they are cast down the more they grow; "the blood of the martyrs is seed" (*Apologeticum*, 50).
- In the *De Praescriptione* he develops as its fundamental idea that, in a dispute between the Church and a separating party, the whole burden of proof lies with the latter, as the Church, in possession of the unbroken tradition, is by its very existence a guarantee of its truth.

## Writing Themes

- His five books against Marcion, written 207 or 208, are the most comprehensive and elaborate of his polemical works, invaluable for gauging the early Christian view of Gnosticism.
- Of the moral and ascetic treatises, the *De patientia* and *De spectaculis* are among the most interesting, and the *De pudicitia* and *De virginibus velandis* among the most characteristic.



# Why Learn about the Apologetic Fathers?

- They followed the Bible's call to witness for the Lord.
- Some of them were martyred in defense of their ideology.
- They teach us the early doctrines of the church.
- They teach us to follow them in defending our faith in any means possible.