



A Reading Plan for Christian Apologists

Part 1

By

Mark McGee

Chapters

Introduction To Top Ten	3
#1 .. The Bible	4
#2 .. Biblical Languages	29
# 3 .. Ancient Apologists	41
Jesus and His Disciples	42
Apostolic Fathers	54

Introduction To Top Ten

Christian apologists must be thinkers. That means they must also be readers. Thinkers read. Readers think. The goal is to become a better thinker for the purpose of becoming a better truth communicator with both Christians and non-Christians. The goal is not to keep what you learn to yourself or amaze your friends with “feats” of knowledge. The goal has not changed since Jesus and His apostles told Christians what to do with the gifts the Lord gave them: 1. glorify God, 2. make disciples (teach them to obey Christ), and 3. equip the saints for their work of ministry for the edifying of the Body of Christ (to name a few).

Your passion for representing Jesus Christ to the world will drive what you read, how often you read, who you talk with, and what you tell them.

Here is the first part of a “Top Ten” list for reading based on what I’ve found most helpful through the years.

#1 .. The Bible

The Bible is more than just a Christian textbook. It is the personal communication of God to His people. I think of reading as internal listening. I “listen” to the author as I read what they wrote. In the case of the Bible, the author is God.

“... for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:12-13

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:11-12

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Bible is much more than the history of what God did in creating and ruling the universe. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have spoken to us. They have communicated their love and will for us. When you read the Bible, think about the Author who inspired it. He loves you deeply. He has great things to teach you. He has wonderful plans for your life and ministry. There is no writer who could ever write something to you that is more important than the words you read on the pages of the Bible.

How Often Should I Read The Bible?

How often would you like to be blessed? How often would you like to hear God's voice? How often would you like to hear Him tell you about His love for you and other people in His world? How often would you like to learn more about what pleases Him? How often would you like to get answers to your most difficult questions? How often would you like to improve your knowledge and abilities to talk with people about God's love for them? How often is your choice, but I certainly recommend often for a Christian interested in being an apologist.

By "often" I don't mean weekly. I don't even mean daily. Often means as "often" as you can. Read in the morning. Read during lunch. Read in the evening. Read the Bible often!

A Christian apologist should become very familiar with both the Old and New Testaments. God revealed all of the Bible to us so we can know Him. We should read it, understand it, believe it and obey it. That's not being legalistic – it's being wise.

One of the primary messages of the Bible is "hear and obey." It sounds easy enough, but it has tripped up generations of God's people for thousands of years. The key is not just "hearing" the Word; it's also "doing" the Word. I'm reminded of the words in Hebrews in the context of God's people who had become "dull of hearing" –

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Hebrews 5:12-14

Notice the last verse – “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Solid spiritual food is an important part of true spiritual maturity. The goal? “to discern both good and evil.” A major role of the Christian apologist is to help the Church in the area of discerning both good and evil through the process of using “reason” to exercise their senses.

A Common Sense Bible Reading Plan

Step One – If you have never read the Bible from Genesis 1:1 – Revelation 22:21, I recommend you do that to get a good sense of the BIG Story God has revealed to the world. Make notes as you read about things you want to come back to later to “study.” If you can commit 40 minutes a day to reading (e.g. 40 minutes at one sitting or 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening), you should complete it in about 4 months (including taking notes). If you want to read longer than that each day, you’ll finish sooner (e.g. reading the Bible two hours a day takes about a month to finish).

Step Two – Refer to the notes you took during your first read-through of the Bible and study those passages of Scripture. Depending on how many notes you took, that may take you 2-3 months to complete the study portion. Try not to get side-tracked. Stick to studying those areas of Scripture that you had questions about from your first full-read of Scripture. Studying will include using other reading materials that we’ll look at in future parts of this series.

Step Three – Make your own “big picture” outline of the Bible. You’ve read the entire Bible from beginning to end. You’ve taken notes and used those notes to get answers to your questions. Now, take a step back and think about the Bible from God’s perspective. God knew what He was going to say and do “in time” from “before time began” (Ephesians 1:3-4; 2 Timothy

1:8-10; Titus 1:1-3). God thinks logically and plans accordingly. Knowing that and having just read the Bible from front to back and studied those areas of greatest importance to you ... why do you think God said and did what He said and did? In other words, what was God's thinking and planning "before time began"? What is God's "big picture" purpose for what He did in creating the world and what has happened since? You may want to draw a literal "picture" of what you believe God's plan is or you may want to put it into words. The important thing is to think about it and record your thoughts in some way that you can refer to easily.

By the time we finish reading the entire Bible and studying the parts that interested us most, we should have a good sense about who God is, what He did, when He did it, where He did it and how He did it. Every Christian should know those basics about God and the Bible. What Christian apologists want to know in addition to the who, what, when, where and how is "why." Why did God do what He did? Why did He say what He said? Many of the toughest questions apologists hear from critics and skeptics are "why" questions. Having a good "big picture" view of the Bible will help lead us to both the questions and the answers to those tough "why" questions.

Step Four – Take your "big picture" view of God and the Bible and divide it into "smaller picture" views. Smaller picture views can include how the Bible is organized (e.g. Old Testament, New Testament, Books of Moses, Books of History, Books of Wisdom and Poetry, Major Prophets, Minor Prophets, Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Pauline Epistles, General Epistles, Apocalyptic/Revelation), how God works with people (e.g. Covenants,

Dispensations), etc. Other “smaller picture” views include memorizing Scripture. That is helpful for your own spiritual growth and the growth of others as you share God’s Word with them.

Step Five – Keep reading! Reading and studying the Bible should be a continuing discipline of joy for Christian apologists (and all Christians for that matter).

In Context, Please!

If you choose to follow this plan, or something similar, you will learn how to read and study the Bible “in context.” That’s why Step One is to read the Bible in order from first verse to last verse. I don’t believe I can over-emphasize the importance of reading and studying the Bible “in context.” If you learn how to do that and then continue to do it consistently for the rest of your life, you will know how to find answers to the “why” questions people are asking every day. More importantly, you will know the importance and process of “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). And, in the context of that statement, you will be “approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed.” In the larger context of that statement, you will follow Paul’s admonition to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” and take those things you learn and “commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” and “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:1-3).

In an even larger context of the statement about “rightly dividing the word of truth,” you will “not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” and will “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:8, 13). In an expanded context, you will know how to deal with “perilous times” that will come in the “last days” when men will be “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”

You will also know the importance of turning “away from “such people” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Those statements in the same context lead to an understanding of the importance of being ready to “preach” God’s Word and be ready at all times to “convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” The reason for that is that there will come a time when people “will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” What’s a Christian apologist to do? “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

That’s the power of context! Context is not just about referencing a few verses in the Bible to defend the Christian faith. It’s about knowing and understanding what was written before and after the referenced text. Knowing the textual “context” helps explain its meaning. Context is absolutely vital to “getting it right” and that’s what God has called us to do. Christian apologists must get it right.

Overarching Truths

The first and most important part of a reading plan for a Christian apologist is to have a powerful grasp on God's Word – the Bible. Before moving to Part 2 of the reading plan, I'd like to share personal thoughts about some of the "overarching" truths about God and the Bible I believe every Christian apologist should acknowledge. I've been involved in ministry for almost 47 years and am familiar with the fact that Christians disagree on many things. However, I believe Christians can and should agree on particular truths concerning God based on the clear teaching of the Bible.

Coming into Christianity from atheism these overarching truths struck me powerfully during my early years as a Christian. Reading the Bible as a new Christian is different than reading it as an atheist investigating the credibility of the historical text. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Holy text for the believer and shines the light of grace and truth through Jesus Christ.

Overarching Biblical Truth About God

God is Supreme, Sovereign and Perfect.

God is Supreme in Being ... Sovereign in Rule ... and Perfect in all His Attributes.

A truth that is overarching is a truth that dominates and overshadows everything else. I believe that the Supremacy, Sovereignty and Perfection of God is an overarching truth and as such dominates and overshadows everything and everyone. If it is true that the Bible teaches God is Supreme, Sovereign and Perfect, then every other truth would be impacted by that truth.

We see this overarching theme throughout the Bible. In fact, the first chapter in the Bible states emphatically that this is true:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (God is Supreme)

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” (God is Sovereign)

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.” (God is Perfect)

This theme of God’s Supremacy, Sovereignty and Perfection continues throughout Scripture all the way to the end of the Bible.

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.’” (God is Supreme)

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away ... And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.’” (God is Sovereign)

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ And he carried me

away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” (God is Perfect)

“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.” (God is Supreme)

“But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.” (God is Perfect)

“And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.” (God is Sovereign)

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” (God is Supreme)

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” (God is Sovereign)

Definitions

With that as our spiritual road map, let's see what we learn about God's Supremacy, Sovereignty and Perfection in Holy Scripture.

Supreme

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary

- Highest in authority; holding the highest place in authority, government, or power
- Highest; greatest; most excellent or most extreme; utmost; greatest possible
- Situated at the highest part or point

Hebrew – עֶלְיוֹן *'elyōwn*, Most High (e.g. Genesis 14:18-19; Numbers 24:16; Deuteronomy 32:8; Psalm 7:17; 46:4; 83:18; 97:9)

Aramaic – עֶלְיוֹן *Elyon*, Highest One (Daniel 7:18, 22, 25, 27)

Aramaic – אֵלָּא *Illyay*, Highest, Most High (Daniel 3:26; 4:2, 17, 24, 25, 32, 34, 5:18, 21, 25)

Greek – ὑψίστοις, *hupsistos*, Highest, Most High (Luke 1:32, 35; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; Hebrews 7:1)

Sovereign

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary

- Supreme or highest in power; superior to all others; chief; as, our sovereign prince.
- Independent of, and unlimited by, any other; possessing, or entitled to, original authority or jurisdiction; as, a sovereign state; a sovereign discretion.
- Princely; royal.
- Predominant; greatest; utmost; paramount.

Hebrew – אֲדֹנָי *adon*, lord, master, owner, sovereign

Greek – Παντοκράτωρ *Pantokratōr*, Almighty, Ruler of all (2 Corinthians 6:18)

Greek – βασιλεύς *basileus*, a king, a sovereign (Rev. 19:16)

Greek – δυνάστης *dunastes*, a ruler, a potentate, sovereign (1 Timothy 6:15)

Greek – βασιλικός *basilikos*, a royal, a sovereign (James 2:8)

Perfect

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary

- Brought to consummation or completeness; completed; not defective nor redundant; having all the properties or qualities requisite to its nature and kind; without flaw, fault, or blemish; without error; mature; whole; pure; sound; right; correct.

Hebrew – שָׁלֵם *shalem*, perfect, finished, whole, complete, blameless

Hebrew – תָּמִים *tamim*, perfect, complete, blameless, unblemished (Psalm 18:30)

Greek – τέλειος *teleios*, perfect, full grown, complete in all its parts (Matthew 5:4)

Ramifications of this Overarching Truth

Christians believe, rightly so, that God is One Being in Three Co-Equal Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When God spoke to Israel and explained His ancient plan to redeem His people, He spoke as One Being and Three Persons –

“Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last. Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; When I call to them, They stand up together. ‘All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The Lord loves him; He shall do His pleasure on Babylon, And His arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken; Yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper. ‘Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit Have sent Me.’ Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the Lord your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.’” Isaiah 48:12-17

Jesus Christ revealed Himself to be the First and the Last, the Almighty God –

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”
Revelation 1:8

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.” Matthew 28:19-20

The Holy Spirit revealed Himself to be God, hovering over the waters of creation, proceeding from the Father, testifying of the Son, guiding the saints –

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” John 15:26

“The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” Genesis 1:2

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” John 14:16-17

“You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.” Psalm 104:30

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.” John 16:12-15

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’” Acts 5:1-4

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Acts 13:2

“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13

“Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all ...” 1 Corinthians 12:3-7

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” 2 Corinthians 13:14

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:16-21

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’” Hebrews 3:7-11

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” 1 Peter 1:1-2

Christian apologists deal with truth and the greatest truth of all is that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are Supreme, Sovereign and Perfect. That means everything they say and do are dominated by Supremacy, Sovereignty and Perfection. Everything they say and do are true and without error. God does not make mistakes.

There are many things in the Bible that are difficult to understand and explain. However, difficulty in understanding and explaining does not mean they are not true. The overarching truth about God’s Supremacy, Sovereignty and Perfection is where we go when we do not understand, when we struggle to explain.

There are many things in life that are difficult to understand and explain. However, difficulty in understanding and explaining does not mean they are not true. The overarching truth about God’s Supremacy, Sovereignty and Perfection is where we go when we do not understand, when we struggle to explain.

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is

spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." 1 Corinthians 2

#2 .. Biblical Languages

The first part of a reading plan for Christian apologists is to read the Bible in depth, in context and often. The next part is to study the Bible in the original languages.

Original writings of the Bible were in three ancient languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, but parts of Daniel and Ezra were written in Aramaic. All of the New Testament was written in Greek.*

[Some scholars believe Matthew may have written his Gospel account in Hebrew or Aramaic and that someone in the Church may translated it into Greek. Some 2nd century church leaders mentioned Matthew's Gospel as a Hebrew text (e.g. Papias, Irenaeus)]

The Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages, including English, so why bother learning to read/study the Bible in the original languages? Aren't translations good enough to learn everything God wants us to know about His Word?

Two of the earliest translations of the Hebrew Bible include the Aramaic Targums and Greek Septuagint. The translations met the needs of many Jews who spoke Aramaic and/or Greek as their spoken language. Both were in use prior to the birth of Christ. The New Testament was written after

the death and resurrection of Christ in Koine Greek. The Hebrew Old Testament was later translated into Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic and other ancient languages. The Greek New Testament was later translated into Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Armenian, Persian, Georgian, Soghdian and other old languages.

The history of the English Bible goes back more than a thousand years with translations from the Latin Vulgate into Old English (Anglo-Saxon). John Wycliffe translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into Middle English toward the end of the 14th century AD. Translations into early Modern English began in the early 16th century, including William Tyndale's translation from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Other English translations of the 16th century were the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Bishop's Bible. The Authorized King James Version, still in use today, was published in the early 17th century. Modern English translations of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries include: Wesley's New Testament, Quaker Bible, Young's Literal Translation, Darby Bible, English Revised Version, American Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, New American Standard bible, World English Bible, New International Version, Lexham English Bible, The Living Bible, The Message, New Living Translation, Good News Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Common English Bible, English Standard Version, and New King James Version. There are formal equivalence (literal) translations, dynamic equivalence translations (meanings), and idiomatic (paraphrastic) translations.

With so many English translations available to Christian apologists why should we bother learning about the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts? Doesn't English give us everything we need to understand God's purpose for inspiring His Word? Isn't it a waste of time to focus on learning ancient languages?

Importance to Apologetics

I learned about the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts of the Bible while investigating the historicity and legitimacy of the Old and New Testaments. One of the men who helped me investigate was a Christian apologist who studied the Bible in the original languages. Some of my questions as an atheist concerned centuries of Bible translations and how people could trust what they read since the English translations were so far removed from the originals. Talking with a Christian who was conversant in the original languages of the Bible took that argument off the table. I had to move directly to questions about the original language texts, which put me at a disadvantage when talking with an apologist who knew the history of the texts and could use the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek to answer me.

One of the pastors at the first church I attended after becoming a Christian taught from the Greek New Testament. I learned to appreciate the beauty and complexity of the Koine Greek and how it contained so much more information and insight to God's Word than translations. I didn't own a Bible, so my mother asked the pastor for a recommendation – he suggested the Amplified Bible. It uses both word meaning and context to translate from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek to English. I liked it as a new Christian because it listed explanatory alternate readings and amplifications to help me understand what the Scripture meant. When the pastor told us what the original Greek words meant, the Amplified Bible usually included that original meaning as part of the translation.

What became obvious as I studied the Bible, knowing a little about what the translated words meant in the original languages, was that God used those languages in ways that would have been understood clearly by the people who received the original messages. It also became obvious that translating those original messages into other languages through the centuries was problematic “if” we did not know the meaning of original words and how the original audience would have understood those words. After moving to different cities for work and attending new churches, I soon discovered that many pastors and Bible teachers did not refer to the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek in their teaching. It became obvious that I would need to learn enough about those languages to use them in my own study if I wanted to discover what the Holy Spirit said, what He meant and how original audiences understood the Spirit’s message. I started with Greek.

Greek To Me

The Greek of the New Testament was literally “Greek to me.” Learning Greek, especially Koine Greek that was no longer spoken, was an interesting challenge but a challenge that seemed important to overcome. My experience in studying a foreign language during high school was based on a “listening” lab. That was more than 50 years ago, so language training in high school may have changed a bit since then. Each student sat in a cubicle and wore headsets (state of the art at the time). We listened to a recording of a person first saying a word in the foreign language, followed by a pause, then the translation in English, followed by another pause. My job as a student was to use the first pause to pronounce the foreign word in the same way as the recorded voice. We used the second pause to say the English word. That continued several times before moving to the next word in the lesson. We later learned how to string together multiple words into short sentences using the same method. The teacher also wore headsets and was able to listen to each student as they pronounced the words.

I began learning about Koine Greek using concordances (e.g. Strong, Cruden, Young) and dictionaries (e.g. Vine, Smith, Newman) during my personal studies and reading commentaries (e.g. Henry, Poole, Robertson, Vincent, Trench, Lightfoot, Wuest) after finishing my studies to increase my understanding of the original text. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing how the meanings of original words added to my understanding of God’s Word.

I also saw how Greek grammar impacted meaning and that led to a desire to learn how to read Greek. I started by learning the alphabet and basic grammar, which opened up the Greek text to reading it for myself. Once you can read Greek you will be able to use Greek-English dictionaries (e.g. Newman, Collins, Zodhiates), lexicons (e.g. Thayer, Moulton, Mounce, Abbott-Smith, Liddell and Scott, Brown and Driver) and interlinear Bibles (e.g. Green, Berry, Hodges, Marshall).

As you use them in your study of the New Testament your understanding of the original text will grow, as will your confidence. That knowledge and confidence will help you in your service as a Christian apologist.

You may also find it helpful to take online classes to learn Koine Greek. Bible colleges and seminaries also offer biblical language classes.

Learning Hebrew

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, so having some knowledge of those languages is important to grasping how Jews have understood the words through the centuries and millennia.

My experience with the Hebrew language has been similar to learning Greek, except I found it to be more difficult. I started by using concordances (e.g. Strong, Cruden, Young, Wigram) and dictionaries (e.g. Vine, Wilson) during my personal studies and reading commentaries (e.g. Keil and Delitzsch, Edersheim) after finishing my studies to increase my understanding of the original text. Hebrew grammar is also important to learn and there are many good study aids available (e.g. Gesenius, Weingreen, Pratico and Van Pelt, Young and Shaffer).

Some of the differences between learning Hebrew and Greek include learning to read right to left and the lack of vowels in Hebrew. Fortunately, rabbis added pronunciation guides (*nikkud*) centuries ago to help. Hebrew letters also have numerical values, which means that words have numerical values. One of the first places I saw the Hebrew alphabet was in Psalm 119. It is the longest chapter in the Bible and is divided into 22 sections – each section titled after a Hebrew letter. Each section contains eight verses.

Learning Online

Learning Koine Greek and Hebrew today is accessible to anyone who can get on the Internet. I like having language aids in book form, but that does come at a cost. Books and recorded materials were the only tools available in the early 1970's when I began my studies in apologetics, but today's apologists can get online and use a variety of study aids for free. Here are some you may find helpful as you study the Bible from the original languages.

Bible Hub

Includes parallel versions, Strong's concordance, commentaries with Hebrew and Greek references, Hebrew and Greek interlinear, text analysis, lexicons, codex

Bible Study Tools

Includes Bible versions and translations, commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, encyclopedias, lexicons

StudyLight

Includes Bible versions and translations, commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, encyclopedias, lexicons, interlinear

BibleGateway

Includes Bible versions and translations, commentaries, dictionaries, topical, keyword search

Bible Tools

Includes Bible versions and translations, book notes, commentaries, definitions, interlinear, topical studies, cross references

Blue Letter Bible

Includes Bible versions and translations, commentaries, dictionaries, lexicons, encyclopedias, charts, maps, timelines

My WORDsearch Bible

Includes Bible versions and translations, word study tool, parallel tool, commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, interlinear, maps

Bible Study Software

If you would like to have access to Bible study software loaded on your computer, you will find some that are free and others that cost.

[Logos Bible Software](#)

[e-Sword](#)

[Accordance Bible Software](#)

[BibleWorks Software](#)

[BibleSoft](#)

[SwordSearcher Software](#)

Full Disclosure

Becoming a serious student of the Bible from the original languages takes time .. lots of time. It's also addictive because of how much you learn from the original. I have found studying from Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek to be extremely helpful to me as a Christian, apologist, writer and teacher. I pray you will find it helpful as well as God moves you through your lifetime of apologetics service.

3 .. Ancient Apologists

Christian apologists today have a great advantage because of the excellent apologists who have gone before us and fought many of the same battles we are fighting. There is much we can learn from them.

The ancient “era” of Christian apologists is generally considered to be from the end of the 1st century AD to the middle part of the 4th century AD. We’ll take a look at some of the leading apologists of that time period soon, but let’s first consider Christian apologists who lived earlier in the 1st century.

Jesus Christ and His Disciples

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” John 1:1-2

The first and greatest ancient Christian apologist is Jesus Christ. Even though He didn’t write an apologetic, the Lord’s disciples recorded his verbal defense of the Gospel He came from Heaven to preach.

One of the most powerful apologetics by Jesus Christ is his response to the attacks of Satan in the wilderness –

“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and

afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.' Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' 'Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you To keep you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' 'Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.'" Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, who the Apostle John identified as the *λογος* (speech, word, reasoning expressed by words) of God, presented a powerful and penetrating message that cut deeply into the false interpretation and teaching of the Mosaic Law by Israel's religious leaders. Jesus demonstrated great logic and reason through His words – something every Christian apologist should strive to both understand and use in defense of

Christianity. Here are a few examples from the many we have available to us in the Gospel accounts –

“As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard that, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Matthew 9:9-13

“Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, ‘Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ But He said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?’ And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” Mark 2:23-28

“So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. Then they asked Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’ But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, “Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?’ They answered and said, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.” Luke 20:20-26

Harkening back to the importance of reading the Bible from beginning to end, I also recommend that Christian apologists read the Gospels at least twice a year. As you do that, note carefully how Jesus presented His apologetic. His words are brilliant beyond human genius. They are the words of God.

Luke

Luke's Gospel and Acts are excellent examples of an apologetic. Luke began his Gospel account with these words –

“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Luke 1:1-4

Luke's purpose was apologetic in nature. He followed that up with a second letter to Theophilus that continued the same purpose –

“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:1-3

Peter

The Apostle Peter has two letters identified as being written by him included in the New Testament. He is also credited by the early church of influencing Mark's Gospel account. Peter's perspective in writing his letters is strongly apologetic –

“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” 1 Peter 3:13-17

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your

hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2

Peter 1:16-21

John

The Apostle John is credited with writing five Books of the New Testament. All of them contain excellent insights for Christian apologists. John began his Gospel account with a bold statement that Jesus Christ is the eternal God, then proceeded to provide powerful evidence to support the truthfulness of that statement.

John outlived all of the other apostles and defended Christianity until he died. His apologetic had a profound impact on the early church and continues to this day –

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” 1 John 1:1-4

“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” 1 John 2:22-23

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” 1 John 4:1-3

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” 1 John 1:7

Jude

The letter written by Jude is brief, but includes great insight into defending the faith under attack –

“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ ... These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” Jude 1:3-4, 16-19

Paul

The Apostle Paul wrote more Books included in the New Testament than any other writer. He also had a strong influence on Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Every Christian apologist should study carefully how Paul defended Christianity to Jews and Gentiles. Here are just a few examples of his excellent apologetic arguments –

“Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ‘God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also

His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:22-31

“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:27-31

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time ... Now if Christ is

preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 12-21

We can learn much from the life, ministry and writings of one of Christianity’s most influential apologists, the Apostle Paul.

Apostolic Fathers

Some of the best known of the ancient apologists are known as the “Apostolic fathers.” They were men who were disciples of the apostles. They lived during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and their apologetic ministries had a powerful influence on the early Christian Church. They included Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna (some scholars include Papias of Hierapolis in the group). We’ll begin with Clement of Rome.

Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome was a 1st century Bishop of Rome who reportedly knew the apostles Peter and Paul. Some scholars believe he may have been the same Clement mentioned in Paul's letter to the Philippians (Philippians 4:3). He wrote a lengthy letter to the Church in Corinth known as 1 Clement. The letter offers a unique look into the apologetics of Christianity at the end of the 1st century AD –

“The Church of God which sojourneth in Rome to the Church of God which sojourneth in Corinth, to them which are called and sanctified by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from Almighty God through Jesus Christ be multiplied. By reason of the sudden and repeated calamities and reverses which are befalling us, brethren, we consider that we have been somewhat tardy in giving heed to the matters of dispute that have arisen among you, dearly beloved, and to the detestable and unholy sedition, so alien and strange to the elect of God, which a few headstrong and self-willed persons have kindled to such a pitch of madness that your name, once revered and renowned and lovely in the sight of all men, hath been greatly reviled.”

[The First Epistle of Clement To The Corinthians](#), Prologue – 1:1,

Translated by J.B. Lightfoot

Clement's letter is believed to be the oldest Christian epistle (approx. 96 AD) outside of the New Testament. Clement called on Christians in Corinth to unity and harmony by referring to many Old Testament writings. He also referenced Peter and Paul –

“But, to pass from the examples of ancient days, let us come to those champions who lived nearest to our time. Let us set before us the noble examples which belong to our generation. By reason of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars of the Church were persecuted, and contended even unto death. Let us set before our eyes the good Apostles. There was Peter who by reason of unrighteous jealousy endured not one but many labors, and thus having borne his testimony went to his appointed place of glory. By reason of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance. After that he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith, having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bounds of the West; and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance.” 1 Clement 5:1-6

In addition to dealing with the strong anti-Christian sentiment in society at the time, Clement dealt with a serious problem inside the Corinthian church – a revolt against church leadership by young people. Clement reminded them how Christ's Apostles had appointed leaders in the local church –

“And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office. For this cause therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons, and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration. Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church, and have ministered unblamably to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration. For it will be no light sin for us, if we thrust out those who have offered the gifts of the bishop's office unblamably and holily. Blessed are those presbyters who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe: for they have no fear lest any one should remove them from their appointed place. For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honorably, from the ministration which had been respected by them blamelessly. Be ye contentious, brethren, and jealous about the things that pertain unto salvation. Ye have searched the scriptures, which are true, which were given through the Holy

Ghost; and ye know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them. Ye will not find that righteous persons have been thrust out by holy men.” 1 Clement 44:1 – 45:3

Clement also reminded the younger people in the Corinthian church of what Paul had written to them years before about the dangers of divisions in the church. He also warned them about how unbelievers would use those divisions to harm the Gospel message.

“Your division hath perverted many; it hath brought many to despair, many to doubting, and all of us to sorrow. And your sedition still continueth. Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle. What wrote he first unto you in the beginning of the Gospel? Of a truth he charged you in the Spirit concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos, because that even then ye had made parties. Yet that making of parties brought less sin upon you; for ye were partisans of Apostles that were highly reputed, and of a man approved in their sight. But now mark ye, who they are that have perverted you and diminished the glory of your renowned love for the brotherhood. It is shameful, dearly beloved, yes, utterly shameful and unworthy of your conduct in Christ, that it should be reported that the very steadfast and ancient Church of the Corinthians, for the sake of one or two persons, maketh sedition against its presbyters. And this report hath reached not only us, but them also which differ from us, so that ye even heap blasphemies on the Name of the Lord by reason of your folly, and moreover create peril for yourselves. Let us therefore root this out quickly, and let us fall down before the Master and entreat Him with tears, that He may show Himself

propitious and be reconciled unto us, and may restore us to the seemly and pure conduct which belongeth to our love of the brethren.” 1

Clement 46:9 – 48:1

Christian apologists can learn much about dealing with serious problems with logic and reasoning and a deep understanding of the Scriptures. Clement quoted heavily from the Old Testament in presenting his defense for unity in the Church and the supremacy of the Gospel of Christ.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius of Antioch was a 1st century Bishop of Antioch who reportedly knew the apostles Peter and John. The Romans arrested Ignatius when he was an old man and took him to Rome to be killed. Ignatius wrote several letters to churches as he traveled to Rome for martyrdom, including to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Smyrneans, Trallians, Philadelphians, and Romans. He was a prisoner, in bonds, taken by force to Rome, so his writings reflect his difficult situation.

Ignatius desired to imitate the “passion” of Christ – “Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God. If any man hath Him within himself, let him understand what I desire, and let him have fellow-feeling with me, for he knoweth the things which straiten me.” (Ignatius to the Romans, 6:3, Translated by J.B. Lightfoot, 1891) He also emphasized the importance of “unity” in the Church – “And do ye, each and all, form yourselves into a chorus, that being harmonious in concord and taking the key note of God ye may in unison sing with one voice through Jesus Christ unto the Father, that He may both hear you and acknowledge you by your good deeds to be members of His Son. It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity, that ye may also be partakers of God always.” (Ignatius to the Ephesians, 4:2, Translated by J.B. Lightfoot, 1891)

Of important note to Christian apologists today is Ignatius' emphasis on addressing heretical schisms vigorously – “Be not deceived, my brethren. If any man followeth one that maketh a schism, he doth not inherit the kingdom of God. If any man walketh in strange doctrine, he hath no fellowship with the passion.” (Ignatius to the Philadelphians, 3:3, Translated by J.B. Lightfoot, 1891)

Here are some examples from the writings of Ignatius of Antioch. Notice the variety of heresies he addressed and how many of them we still deal with today. (All of the translations are by J.B. Lightfoot.)

“But if any one propound Judaism unto you, here him not: for it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from one uncircumcised. But if either the one or the other speak not concerning Jesus Christ, I look on them as tombstones and graves of the dead, whereon are inscribed only the names of men. Shun ye therefore the wicked arts and plottings of the prince of this world, lest haply ye be crushed by his devices, and wax weak in your love. But assemble yourselves all together with undivided heart.” Philadelphians 6:1-2

“But if it were as certain persons who are godless, that is unbelievers, say, that He suffered only in semblance, being themselves mere semblance, why am I in bonds? And why also do I desire to fight with wild beasts? So I die in vain. Truly then I lie against the Lord.” Trallians 10:1

“Be not seduced by strange doctrines nor by antiquated fables, which are profitless. For if even unto this day we live after the manner of Judaism, we avow that we have not received grace: for the divine prophets lived after Christ Jesus. For this cause also they were persecuted, being inspired by His grace to the end that they which are disobedient might be fully persuaded that there is one God who manifested Himself through Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word that proceeded from silence, who in all things was well-pleasing unto Him that sent Him. If then those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto newness of hope, no longer observing sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord’s day, on which our life also arose through Him and through His death which some men deny — a mystery whereby we attained unto belief, and for this cause we endure patiently, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ our only teacher — if this be so, how shall we be able to live apart from Him? seeing that even the prophets, being His disciples, were expecting Him as their teacher through the Spirit. And for this cause He whom they rightly awaited, when He came, raised them from the dead.” Magnesians 8:1 – 9:2

“For He suffered all these things for our sakes [that we might be saved]; and He suffered truly, as also He raised Himself truly; not as certain unbelievers say, that He suffered in semblance, being themselves mere semblance. And according as their opinions are, so shall it happen to them, for they are without body and demon-like.” Smyrnaeans 2:1

“For I know and believe that He was in the flesh even after the resurrection; and when He came to Peter and his company, He said to them, Lay hold and handle me, and see that I am not a demon without body. And straightway they touched Him, and they believed, being joined unto His flesh and His blood. Wherefore also they despised death, nay they were found superior to death. And after His resurrection He [both] ate with them and drank with them as one in the flesh, though spiritually He was united with the Father.” Smyrnaeans 3:1-3

Ignatius of Antioch also wrote a letter to Polycarp, a fellow bishop and a disciple of the Apostle John. It is fascinating to read this very personal letter written by an elderly Christian bishop on his way to martyrdom to a younger Christian bishop still fighting the battles for God with fellow believers in Smyrna. I recommend this letter to today’s Christian apologists for the many reminders important to our service to Christ and His Church.

“I exhort thee in the grace wherewith thou art clothed to press forward in thy course and to exhort all men that they may be saved. Vindicate thine office in all diligence of flesh and of spirit. Have a care for union, than which there is nothing better. Bear all men, as the Lord also beareth thee. Suffer all men in love, as also thou doest. Give thyself to unceasing prayers. Ask for larger wisdom than thou hast. Be watchful, and keep thy spirit from slumbering. Speak to each man severally after the manner of God. Bear the maladies of all, as a perfect athlete. Where there is more toil, there is much gain.” Polycarp 1:2-3

“Let not those that seem to be plausible and yet teach strange doctrine dismay thee. Stand thou firm, as an anvil when it is smitten. It is the part of a great athlete to receive blows and be victorious. But especially must we for God’s sake endure all things, that He also may endure us.” Polycarp 3:1

“A Christian hath no authority over himself, but giveth his time to God. This is God’s work, and yours also, when ye shall complete it: for I trust in the Divine grace, that ye are ready for an act of well- doing which is meet for God. Knowing the fervour of your sincerity, I have exhorted you in a short letter.” Polycarp 7:3

Polycarp of Symrna

Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and served as Bishop of Symrna during the first part of the 2nd century AD. Here are some of the relevant early writings that describe Polycarp's life and ministry.

“But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time,-a man who was of much greater weight, and a more stedfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles,-that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.” And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said,

“Dost thou know me? “I do know thee, the first-born of Satan.” Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth; as Paul also says, “A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” There is also a very powerful Epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians, from which those who choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth. Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.”
Irenaeus, Book III 3:4

“The church of God which sojourneth at Smyrna to the Church of God which sojourneth in Philomelium and to all the brotherhoods of the holy and universal Church sojourning in every place; mercy and peace and love from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be multiplied. We write unto you, brethren, an account of what befell those that suffered martyrdom and especially the blessed Polycarp, who stayed the persecution, having as it were set his seal upon it by his martyrdom. For nearly all the foregoing events came to pass that the Lord might show us once more an example of martyrdom which is conformable to the Gospel. For he lingered that he might be delivered up, even as the Lord did, to the end that we too might be imitators of him, not looking only to that which concerneth ourselves, but also to that which concerneth our neighbors. For it is the office of true and steadfast love, not only to

desire that oneself be saved, but all the brethren also.” The Letter of the Smyrnaeans, Prologue – 1:2

“And these things are borne witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book; for there were five books compiled (suntetagme/na) by him.” Irenaeus V 33:4

“These opinions, O Florinus, that I may speak sparingly, do not belong to sound doctrine. These opinions are inconsistent with the church, and bring those who believe in them into the greatest impiety. These opinions not even the heretics outside the church ever dared to proclaim. These opinions those who were presbyters before us, who accompanied the apostles, did not hand on to you. For while I was still a boy I knew you in lower Asia in Polycarp’s house when you were a man of rank in the royal hall and endeavoring to stand well with him. I remember the events of those days more clearly than those which happened recently, for what we learn as children grows up with the soul and is united to it, so that I can speak even of the place in which the blessed Polycarp sat and disputed, how he came in and went out, the character of his life, the appearance of his body, the discourses which he made to people, how he reported his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord, how he remembered their words, and what were the things concerning the Lord which he had heard from them, and about their miracles, and about their teaching, and how Polycarp had received them from the eyewitnesses of the word of life, and reported all things in agreement with the Scriptures. I listened eagerly even then to these things through the mercy of God which was

given me, and made notes of them, not on paper but in my heart, and ever by the grace of God do I truly ruminate on them, and I can bear witness before God that if that blessed and apostolic presbyter had heard anything of this kind he would have cried out, and shut his ears, and said according to his custom, ‘O good God, to what time hast thou preserved me that I should endure this?’ He would have fled even from the place in which he was seated or standing when he heard such words. And from his letters which he sent either to the neighboring churches, strengthening them, or to some of the brethren, exhorting and warning them, this can be made plain.” Irenaus of Lyon to Florinus

“At this time, when the greatest persecutions were exciting Asia, Polycarp ended his life by martyrdom. But I consider it most important that his death, a written account of which is still extant, should be recorded in this history. There is a letter, written in the name of the church over which he himself presided, to the parishes in Pontus, which relates the events that befell him, in the following words: ‘The church of God which dwelleth in Philomelium, and to all the parishes of the holy catholic Church in every place; mercy and peace and love from God the Father be multiplied. We write unto you, brethren, an account of what happened to those that suffered martyrdom and to the blessed Polycarp, who put an end to the persecution, having, as it were, sealed it by his martyrdom.’ Eusebius Pamphilius: Church History, 15:1-3

The Epistle of Polycarp

Polycarp's letter to the Philippians is important for Christian apologists to read. Polycarp quoted from several New Testament writings (e.g. Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 John) which goes to the acceptance of canonical Writings by Church leaders as early as the end of the 1st century and early 2nd century AD.

“Polycarp and the presbyters that are with him unto the Church of God which sojourneth at Philippi; mercy unto you and peace from God Almighty and Jesus Christ our Savior be multiplied.” The Epistle of Polycarp, Prologue, Translated by J.B. Lightfoot

“I rejoiced with you greatly in our Lord Jesus Christ, for that ye received the followers of the true Love and escorted them on their way, as befitted you—those men encircled in saintly bonds which are the diadems of them that be truly chosen of God and our Lord; and that the steadfast root of your faith which was famed from primitive times abideth until now and beareth fruit unto our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured to face even death for our sins, whom God raised, having loosed the pangs of Hades; on whom, though ye saw Him not, ye believe with joy unutterable and full of glory; unto which joy many desire to enter in; forasmuch as ye know that it is by grace ye are saved, not of works, but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.” The Epistle of Polycarp, 1:1-3

“For every one who shall not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is antichrist: and whosoever shall not confess the testimony of the Cross, is of the devil; and whosoever shall pervert the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts and say that there is neither resurrection nor judgment, that man is the firstborn of Satan. Wherefore let us forsake the vain doing of the many and their false teachings, and turn unto the word which was delivered unto us from the beginning, being sober unto prayer and constant in fastings, entreating the all-seeing God with supplications that He bring us not into temptation, according as the Lord said, The Spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.” The Epistle of Polycarp, 7:1-2

“I exhort you all therefore to be obedient unto the word of righteousness and to practice all endurance, which also ye saw with your own eyes in the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus, yea and in others also who came from among yourselves, as well as in Paul himself and the rest of the Apostles; being persuaded that all these ran not in vain but in faith and righteousness, and that they are in their due place in the presence of the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they loved not the present world, but Him that died for our sakes and was raised by God for us.” The Epistle of Polycarp, 9:1-2

Polycarp's letter also confirms a close relationship with Ignatius of Antioch.

“Ye wrote to me, both ye yourselves and Ignatius, asking that if any one should go to Syria he might carry thither the letters from you. And this I will do, if I get a fit opportunity, either I myself, or he whom I shall send to be ambassador on your behalf also. The letters of Ignatius which were sent to us by him, and others as many as we had by us, we send unto you, according as ye gave charge; the which are subjoined to this letter; from which ye will be able to gain great advantage. For they comprise faith and endurance and every kind of edification, which pertaineth unto our Lord. Moreover concerning Ignatius himself and those that were with him, if ye have any sure tidings, certify us.” Epistle of Polycarp, 13:1-2

It is important for the modern Christian apologist to have a working knowledge of the Apostolic Fathers because they demonstrate a transition from the leadership of the apostles to the men the apostles selected to lead the Church after they departed.

Justin Martyr

Justin was born about 100 AD in Samaria and died a martyr's death in Rome about 165 AD (thus the name, Justin Martyr). It has been said of Justin that he "is perhaps the most significant Greek-speaking apologist of the second century" (New Dictionary of Theology, IVP, Second Edition, 2016, p. 483).

Justin was born at Flavia Neapolois (near Shechem) to pagan parents. He demonstrated an interest in philosophy at a young age and described his conversion to Christianity in [Dialogue With Trypho](#) –

“When he had spoken these and many other things, which there is no time for mentioning at present, he went away, bidding me attend to them; and I have not seen him since. But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me; and whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus, and for this reason, I am a philosopher. Moreover, I would wish that all, making a resolution similar to my own, do not keep themselves away from the words of the Saviour. For they possess a terrible power in themselves, and are sufficient to inspire those who turn aside from the path of rectitude with awe; while the sweetest rest is afforded those who make a diligent practice of them. If, then, you have any concern for yourself, and if you are eagerly looking for salvation, and if you believe in God, you may—since you are not indifferent to the matter — become

acquainted with the Christ of God, and, after being initiated, live a happy life.” Roberts-Donaldson English Translation: Dialogue with Trypho, 1867 AD

Dialogue with Trypho addresses the relationship between Christian and Jewish beliefs. It is helpful to Christian apologists today to see how Justin addressed the Jewish worldview –

[Trypho] “I approve of your other remarks, and admire the eagerness with which you study divine things; but it were better for you still to abide in the philosophy of Plato, or of some other man, cultivating endurance, self-control, and moderation, rather than be deceived by false words, and follow the opinions of men of no reputation. For if you remain in that mode of philosophy, and live blamelessly, a hope of a better destiny were left to you; but when you have forsaken God, and reposed confidence in man, what safety still awaits you? If, then, you are willing to listen to me (for I have already considered you a friend), first be circumcised, then observe what ordinances have been enacted with respect to the Sabbath, and the feasts, and the new moons of God; and, in a word, do all things which have been written in the law: and then perhaps you shall obtain mercy from God. But Christ—if He has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown, and does not even know Himself, and has no power until Elias come to anoint Him, and make Him manifest to all. And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves, and for his sake are inconsiderately perishing.” *ibid*, Chapter VIII

[Justin] “I excuse and forgive you, my friend,” I said. “For you know not what you say, but have been persuaded by teachers who do not understand the Scriptures; and you speak, like a diviner whatever comes into your mind. But if you are willing to listen to an account of Him, how we have not been deceived, and shall not cease to confess Him,—although men’s reproaches be heaped upon us, although the most terrible tyrant compel us to deny Him,—I shall prove to you as you stand here that we have not believed empty fables, or words without any foundation but words filled with the Spirit of God, and big with power, and flourishing with grace.” *ibid*, Chapter IX

Justin spent much of the rest of Dialogue with Trypho comparing Christianity to Judaism and demonstrating that Christ is the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. Justin also addressed Jewish concerns about Christ coming from Greek fables (e.g. Bacchus, Hercules, Sculapias, Mithras).

Justin also wrote First Apology and Second Apology, but some scholars believe other works attributed to him – Discourse to the Greeks, On the Resurrection, On the Sole Government of God, Hortatory Address to the Greeks, and The Psalmist – cannot be assigned to him with strong confidence.

First Apology

Justin moved to Rome and founded a Christian school. He wrote his famous First Apology to Emperor Antonius Pius, the emperor's sons, and members of the Roman Senate to address injustices against Christians within the Roman Empire –

“To the Emperor Titus Elius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Caesar, and to his son Verissimus the Philosopher, and to Lucius the Philosopher, the natural son of Caesar, and the adopted son of Pius, a lover of learning, and to the sacred Senate, with the whole People of the Romans, I, Justin, the son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, natives of Flavia Neapolis in Palestine, present this address and petition in behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them.” Roberts-Donaldson English Translation: First Apology, Chapter I

Justin appealed for justice for Christians –

“Reason directs those who are truly pious and philosophical to honour and love only what is true, declining to follow traditional opinions, if these be worthless. For not only does sound reason direct us to refuse the guidance of those who did or taught anything wrong, but it is incumbent on the lover of truth, by all means, and if death be threatened, even before his own life, to choose to do and say what is right. Do you, then, since ye are called pious and philosophers, guardians of justice and

lovers of learning, give good heed, and hearken to my address; and if ye are indeed such, it will be manifested. For we have come, not to flatter you by this writing, nor please you by our address, but to beg that you pass judgment, after an accurate and searching investigation, not flattered by prejudice or by a desire of pleasing superstitious men, nor induced by irrational impulse or evil rumours which have long been prevalent, to give a decision which will prove to be against yourselves. For as for us, we reckon that no evil can be done us, unless we be convicted as evil-doers or be proved to be wicked men; and you, you can kill, but not hurt us.” *ibid*, Chapter II

“But lest any one think that this is an unreasonable and reckless utterance, we demand that the charges against the Christians be investigated, and that, if these be substantiated, they be punished as they deserve; [or rather, indeed, we ourselves will punish them.] But if no one can convict us of anything, true reason forbids you, for the sake of a wicked rumour, to wrong blameless men, and indeed rather yourselves, who think fit to direct affairs, not by judgment, but by passion. And every sober-minded person will declare this to be the only fair and equitable adjustment, namely, that the subjects render an unexceptional account of their own life and doctrine; and that, on the other hand, the rulers should give their decision in obedience, not to violence and tyranny, but to piety and philosophy. For thus would both rulers and ruled reap benefit. For even one of the ancients somewhere said, “Unless both rulers and ruled philosophize, it is impossible to make states blessed.” It is our task, therefore, to afford to all an opportunity of inspecting our life and teachings, lest, on account of those who are accustomed to be

ignorant of our affairs, we should incur the penalty due to them for mental blindness; and it is your business, when you hear us, to be found, as reason demands, good judges. For if, when ye have learned the truth, you do not what is just, you will be before God without excuse.”

ibid, Chapter III

“By the mere application of a name, nothing is decided, either good or evil, apart from the actions implied in the name; and indeed, so far at least as one may judge from the name we are accused of, we are most excellent people. But as we do not think it just to beg to be acquitted on account of the name, if we be convicted as evildoers, so, on the other hand, if we be found to have committed no offence, either in the matter of thus naming ourselves, or of our conduct as citizens, it is your part very earnestly to guard against incurring just punishment, by unjustly punishing those who are not convicted. For from a name neither praise nor punishment could reasonably spring, unless something excellent or base in action be proved. And those among yourselves who are accused you do not punish before they are convicted; but in our case you receive the name as proof against us, and this although, so far as the name goes, you ought rather to punish our accusers. For we are accused of being Christians, and to hate what is excellent (Christian) is unjust. Again, if any of the accused deny the name, and say that he is not a Christian, you acquit him, as having no evidence against him as a wrong-doer; but if any one acknowledge that he is a Christian, you punish him on account of this acknowledgment. Justice requires that you inquire into the life both of him who confesses and of him who denies, that by his deeds it may be apparent what kind of man each is. For as

some who have been taught by the Master, Christ, not to deny Him, give encouragement to others when they are put to the question, so in all probability do those who lead wicked lives give occasion to those who, without consideration, take upon them to accuse all the Christians of impiety and wickedness. And this also is not right. For of philosophy, too, some assume the name and the garb who do nothing worthy of their profession; and you are well aware, that those of the ancients whose opinions and teachings were quite diverse, are yet all called by the one name of philosophers. And of these some taught atheism; and the poets who have flourished among you raise a laugh out of the uncleanness of Jupiter with his own children. And those who now adopt such instruction are not restrained by you; but, on the contrary, you bestow prizes and honours upon those who euphoniously insult the gods.” *ibid*, Chapter IV

We learn from the writings of the early apologists that pagans viewed Christians as atheists. Justin responded to that –

“Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught.” *ibid*, Chapter VI

Justin, ever the philosopher, argued that Christians serve God “rationally” –

“What sober-minded man, then, will not acknowledge that we are not atheists, worshipping as we do the Maker of this universe, and declaring, as we have been taught, that He has no need of streams of blood and libations and incense; whom we praise to the utmost of our power by the exercise of prayer and thanksgiving for all things wherewith we are supplied, as we have been taught that the only honour that is worthy of Him is not to consume by fire what He has brought into being for our sustenance, but to use it for ourselves and those who need, and with gratitude to Him to offer thanks by invocations and hymns for our creation, and for all the means of health, and for the various qualities of the different kinds of things, and for the changes of the seasons; and to present before Him petitions for our existing again in incorruption through faith in Him. Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea, in the times of Tiberius Caesar; and that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third, we will prove. For they proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of all; for they do not discern the mystery that is herein, to which, as we make it plain to you, we pray you to give heed.” *ibid*, Chapter XIII

Justin also explained why Christians had abandoned false gods and argued for the Sonship of Christ, immortality and the resurrection. He also addressed how demons had misrepresented Christ's teachings and the truth of what Jesus taught. Justin also raised the importance of Jesus fulfilling many prophecies in the ancient Hebrew Scripture –

“Moses then, who was the first of the prophets, spoke in these very words: ‘The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until He come for whom it is reserved; and He shall be the desire of the nations, binding His foal to the vine, washing His robe in the blood of the grape.’” It is yours to make accurate inquiry, and ascertain up to whose time the Jews had a lawgiver and king of their own. Up to the time of Jesus Christ, who taught us, and interpreted the prophecies which were not yet understood, [they had a lawgiver] as was foretold by the holy and divine Spirit of prophecy through Moses, “that a ruler would not fail the Jews until He should come for whom the kingdom was reserved” (for Judah was the forefather of the Jews, from whom also they have their name of Jews); and after He (i.e., Christ) appeared, you began to rule the Jews, and gained possession of all their territory. And the prophecy, “He shall be the expectation of the nations,” signified that there would be some of all nations who should look for Him to come again. And this indeed you can see for yourselves, and be convinced of by fact. For of all races of men there are some who look for Him who was crucified in Judaea, and after whose crucifixion the land was straightway surrendered to you as spoil of war. And the prophecy, “binding His foal to the vine, and washing His robe in the blood of the

grape,” was a significant symbol of the things that were to happen to Christ, and of what He was to do. For the foal of an ass stood bound to a vine at the entrance of a village, and He ordered His acquaintances to bring it to Him then; and when it was brought, He mounted and sat upon it, and entered Jerusalem, where was the vast temple of the Jews which was afterwards destroyed by you. And after this He was crucified, that the rest of the prophecy might be fulfilled. For this “washing His robe in the blood of the grape” was predictive of the passion He was to endure, cleansing by His blood those who believe on Him. For what is called by the Divine Spirit through the prophet “His robe,” are those men who believe in Him in whom abideth the seed of God, the Word. And what is spoken of as “the blood of the grape,” signifies that He who should appear would have blood, though not of the seed of man, but of the power of God. And the first power after God the Father and Lord of all is the Word, who is also the Son; and of Him we will, in what follows, relate how He took flesh and became man. For as man did not make the blood of the vine, but God, so it was hereby intimated that the blood should not be of human seed, but of divine power, as we have said above. And Isaiah, another prophet, foretelling the same things in other words, spoke thus: “A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a flower shall spring from the root of Jesse; and His arm shall the nations trust.” And a star of light has arisen, and a flower has sprung from the root of Jesse—this Christ. For by the power of God He was conceived by a virgin of the seed of Jacob, who was the father of Judah, who, as we have shown, was the father of the Jews; and Jesse was His forefather according to the oracle, and He was the son of Jacob and Judah according to lineal descent.”
ibid, Chapter XXXII

Justin's final appeal invoked the name of the emperor's father, Adrian –

“And if these things seem to you to be reasonable and true, honour them; but if they seem nonsensical, despise them as nonsense, and do not decree death against those who have done no wrong, as you would against enemies. For we forewarn you, that you shall not escape the coming judgment of God, if you continue in your injustice; and we ourselves will invite you to do that which is pleasing to God. And though from the letter of the greatest and most illustrious Emperor Adrian, your father, we could demand that you order judgment to be given as we have desired, yet we have made this appeal and explanation, not on the ground of Adrian's decision, but because we know that what we ask is just. And we have subjoined the copy of Adrian's epistle, that you may know that we are speaking truly about this. And the following is the copy:– EPISTLE OF ADRIAN IN BEHALF OF THE CHRISTIANS.” *ibid*, Chapter LXVIII

Justin's First Apology is lengthy and filled with insight into how early Christian apologists presented their arguments to Roman rulers.

Resources

Justin Martyr

First Apology

Second Apology

Dialogue with Trypho

Discourse to the Greeks

On the Resurrection

On the Sole Government of God

Hortatory Address to the Greeks

Second Apology

We turn now to Justin's Second Apology which he addressed to the Roman Senate for the purpose of exposing what was really behind persecution of Christians under Urbicus and the irrationality of the allegations being leveled against Christ's followers.

Quintus Lollius Urbicus was Governor of Roman Britain during the reign of Emperor Antonius Pius, who was the emperor Justin addressed in his First Apology. Urbicus had served as a commander in the Roman Army before becoming a member of the Senate and a governor. He later returned to Rome and became praefectus urbi (city administrator). Urbicus presided at the trial of Ptolemaeus, a woman accused by her husband of being a Christian. She admitted being a Christian and was sentenced to die. Justin wrote his Second Apology to address the government's "evil" treatment of Christians –

"ROMANS, the things which have recently happened in your city under Urbicus, and the things which are likewise being everywhere unreasonably done by the governors, have compelled me to frame this composition for your sakes, who are men of like passions, and brethren, though ye know it not, and though ye be unwilling to acknowledge it on account of your glorying in what you esteem dignities. For everywhere, whoever is corrected by father, or neighbour, or child, or friend, or brother, or husband, or wife, for a fault, for being hard to move, for loving pleasure and being hard to urge to what is right (except those who have

been persuaded that the unjust and intemperate shall be punished in eternal fire, but that the virtuous and those who lived like Christ shall dwell with God in a state that is free from suffering,—we mean, those who have become Christians), and the evil demons, who hate us, and who keep such men as these subject to themselves, and serving them in the capacity of judges, incite them, as rulers actuated by evil spirits, to put us to death. But that the cause of all that has taken place under Urbicus may become quite plain to you, I will relate what has been done.” Roberts-Donaldson English Translation: Second Apology, Chapter I

Justin’s Second Apology also introduces us to Crescens, a Cynic philosopher known to attack Christians as being “atheists and impious” –

“I too, therefore, expect to be plotted against and fired to the stake, by some of those I have named, or perhaps by Crescens, that lover of bravado and boasting; for the man is not worthy of the name of philosopher who publicly bears witness against us in matters which he does not understand, saying that the Christians are atheists and impious, and doing so to win favour with the deluded mob, and to please them. For if he assails us without having read the teachings of Christ, he is thoroughly depraved, and far worse than the illiterate, who often refrain from discussing or bearing false witness about matters they do not understand. Or, if he has read them and does not understand the majesty that is in them, or, understanding it, acts thus that he may not be suspected of being such [a Christian], he is far more base and thoroughly depraved, being conquered by illiberal and unreasonable

opinion and fear. For I would have you to know that I proposed to him certain questions on this subject, and interrogated him, and found most convincingly that he, in truth, knows nothing. And to prove that I speak the truth, I am ready, if these disputations have not been reported to you, to conduct them again in your presence. And this would be an act worthy of a prince. But if my questions and his answers have been made known to you, you are already aware that he is acquainted with none of our matters; or, if he is acquainted with them, but, through fear of those who might hear him, does not dare to speak out, like Socrates, he proves himself, as I said before, no philosopher, but an opinionative man; at least he does not regard that Socratic and most admirable saying: "But a man must in no wise be honoured before the truth." But it is impossible for a Cynic, who makes indifference his end, to know any good but indifference." *ibid*, Chapter III

Christian historian Eusebius wrote years later that Crescens eventually caused Justin's death.

Justin also addressed those who said that Christians should kill themselves and pass on to God –

"I will tell you why we do not so, but why, when examined, we fearlessly confess. We have been taught that God did not make the world aimlessly, but for the sake of the human race; and we have before stated that He takes pleasure in those who imitate His properties, and is displeased with those that embrace what is worthless either in word or deed. If, then, we all kill ourselves, we shall become the cause, as far as

in us lies, why no one should be born, or instructed in the divine doctrines, or even why the human race should not exist; and we shall, if we so act, be ourselves acting in opposition to the will of God. But when we are examined, we make no denial, because we are not conscious of any evil, but count it impious not to speak the truth in all things, which also we know is pleasing to God, and because we are also now very desirous to deliver you from an unjust prejudice.” *ibid*, Chapter IV

Second Apology is shorter than the First Apology, but includes much instruction in Christian theology and apologetics. In addition to what we have already read, Justin addressed the following –

- How the angels transgressed
- The names of God and Christ and their meaning and power
- God preserves the world for the sake of Christians
- Eternal punishment is not a mere threat
- How Christians view death
- Christians proved innocent by their contempt for death

Justin concluded his brief Second Apology this way –

“And I despised the wicked and deceitful doctrine of Simon of my own nation. And if you give this book your authority, we will expose him before all, that, if possible, they may be converted. For this end alone did we compose this treatise. And our doctrines are not shameful, according to a sober judgment, but are indeed more lofty than all human philosophy; and if not so, they are at least unlike the doctrines of the

Sotadists and Philaenidians, and Dancers, and Epicureans and such other teachings of the poets, which all are allowed to acquaint themselves with, both as acted and as written. And henceforth we shall be silent, having done as much as we could, and having added the prayer that all men everywhere may be counted worthy of the truth. And would that you also, in a manner becoming piety and philosophy, would for your own sakes judge justly!" *ibid*, Chapter XV

Insights To Early Christianity

Before we leave the writings of Justin Martyr, it's helpful as modern Christian apologists to learn what we can about early apologetic arguments and how the early apologists lived out their beliefs concerning Christianity. The writings of early apologists often address Christian practices for the purpose of demonstrating the reasonableness of the religion, especially in refutation of spurious allegations made against them –

“But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language to *genoito* [so be it]. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those

who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.” Roberts-Donaldson English Translation: First Apology, Chapter LXV

“And this food is called among us Eukaristia [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, “This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;” and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, “This is My blood;” and gave it to them alone. Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding the same thing to be done. For, that bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn.” *ibid*, Chapter LXVI

“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.” *ibid*, LXVII

The power of early Christianity is both in their orthodoxy and orthopraxy. It is vital we understand that the true Christian apologetic is what we believe and how we live.

Resources

[Justin Martyr](#)

[First Apology](#)

[Second Apology](#)

[Dialogue with Trypho](#)

[Discourse to the Greeks](#)

[On the Resurrection](#)

[On the Sole Government of God](#)

[Hortatory Address to the Greeks](#)

Early Christian Writings is copyright © 2001-2018 Peter Kirby

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

Copyright © 1990-2018 GraceLife Ministries