

Introduction to Early Church History

Grant us, Lord, to hope on your name, which is the primal source of all creation, and open the eyes of our hearts that we may know you, who alone are highest among the high; you are holy, abiding among the holy. You humble the pride of the proud; you destroy the plans of nations; you exalt the humble and humble the exalted; you make rich and make poor; you kill and make alive. You alone are the benefactor of spirits and the God of all flesh, looking into the depths, scanning the works of humans; the helper of those who are in peril, the savior of those in despair; the creator and guardian of every spirit. You multiply the nations upon the earth, and from among all of them you have chosen those who love you through Jesus Christ, your beloved servant, through whom you instructed us, sanctified us, honored us. We ask you, Master, to be our helper and protector. Save those among us who are in distress; have mercy on the humble; raise up the fallen; show yourself to those in need; heal the sick; turn back those of your people who wander; feed the hungry; ransom our prisoners; raise up the weak; comfort the discouraged. Let all the nations know that you are the only God, that Jesus Christ is your servant, and that we are your people and the sheep of your pasture. Clement of Rome

Why Study?

1. They are part of the body of those whom Christ died for, and who followed Him sacrificially.
2. Helpful to study what those who had no church history to study thought and did.
3. We can learn both positive and negative lessons from them.
4. We are obtuse, narrow, and myopic in our sense of history.

Background and Influences to Early Church History

Roman Influences -

Greek Influences -

Jewish Influences -

A General Outline of the Early Church Period: 90-460 (Dr. Ed Oliver's Course on Church History)

1. Apostolic Fathers - 90-150 Mainly concerned with edifying the church. Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Papias.
2. Apologists - 130-180 Mainly concerned with defending the faith. Justin Martyr, Athenagorus, Tertullian.
3. Polemicists - 180-225 Mainly concerned with opposing heresy. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origin.
4. Scientific Theologians - 225-460 Seeking to construct a Christian worldview. Cyprian of Carthage, Athanasius, Jerome, Augustine.

Early Opposition to Christianity – Political, Religious, Economic and Social

Political –

Religious –

Economic – “If the Tiber rises, if the Nile does not rise, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is, ‘Christianos ad leonem.’” Tertullian

Social –

Some Ins and Outs of the Early Church

- Her monumental task –
- Her early simplicity –
- Her attachment to the Bible – resisting Marcion; canon outline from Intro to the Bible
- Her interpretive chaos – handout from Virkler
- Her light in darkness – very pious:
 - o Clement of Rome:
 - o Ignatius – “I am God’s wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my sepulcher and may leave no part of my body behind, so that I may not, when I am asleep, be burdensome to anyone.”
 - o Polycarp – When pressed by the Caesar to swear the oath and find release; revile the Christ, he replied, “Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

From the pen of Diognetus: “They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all. They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are endued with life. They are in beggary, and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things, and yet they abound in all things. They are dishonored, and yet they are glorified in their dishonor. They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated. They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect. Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life. War is waged against them as aliens by the Jews, and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks, and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason of their hostility.”