



Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 1

Alexander Roberts (Editor) , James Donaldson (Editor) , Philip Schaff (Editor) , Irenaeus , Polycarp , Clement of Rome , Mathetes , Ignatius of Antioch , more... Barnabas , Papias , Justin Martyr ...less

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This edition of the Early Church Fathers series has been optimized for use on the Kindle with a hierarchical Table of Contents that minimizes the number of page turns required to locate a section of the volume. This edition is among the most accurate electronic editions available, but Hebrew characters do not display on the Kindle.

This volume includes the writings of Clement of Rome, Mathetes, Polycarp, Ignatius, Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus.

This edition features an artistic cover, a new promotional introduction, and a hierarchical table of contents which makes it possible to navigate to any part of the book with a minimum of page turns.

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Alexander Roberts (Editor) , James Donaldson (Editor) , Philip Schaff (Editor) , Irenaeus ,
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From Reader Review Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 1 for online ebook

Erik Graff says

This is the first volume of a set comprising such writings of the patristics prior to the convocation of the Nicene Council as were extant in the late nineteenth century. As such, the translations and notes are at once pious and quaint. Thanks to Eerdmans, the publishers, these books, hefty but well-bound, have been kept available at a reasonable price--reasonable enough for me to purchase them all on a work-study income while attending seminary in New York.

Obtaining the Ante-Nicene Fathers fortuitously allowed me to produce what I thought of a "Child's Golden Book of the Heresiarchs of Gnosis" while taking a course with the popular scholar of gnosticism, Elaine Pagels. I read all of them, seeking all references to those these Church Fathers, or later commentators and critics, regarded as gnostic schismatics, producing something of a thorough encyclopaedia, the heretics and their schools being arranged alphabetically. If I hadn't had this purpose forcing me to attend to the various texts I don't think I could have managed to get through them all, most of the Fathers being, in my opinion, bizarre and, ultimately, boring (exception might be made for Clement of Alexandria and Origen).

Later, continuing my studies of early gnosticism, I reread Ireneaus' Against Heresies (c. 180s) with close attention, a book contained in this volume.

Jeni Enjaian says

This is a collection of documents written by the church fathers, seven (or eight) volumes in total. I'm reading these books as part of a challenge (7 years long!) to read through all of the writings of the church fathers.

Since these documents are compilations, some of which are fragments, the book does not have a coherent focus. This makes nearly impossible to review. Since I'm not an expert on church history (or in this case ancient church history) I will not attempt to review the content itself.

However, I will state that this book is available as a PDF online (I cannot remember the original link). Technology is wonderful. I opened the PDF with my Kindle app and it read like a book.

Richard Pütz says

If you desire to understand the patristics and the theology thereof, this is a must read

David says

I loved reading these ancient church fathers. Highly recommended for any student of historical christian theology.

The best here is Irenaeus' Against Heresies (especially books 3-5). But Justin Martyr's First and Second Apology and the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp are all great also.

Benjamin says

For the content alone, this "book" would receive four stars. It's a fascinating look at early Christian thought on a number of topics, even if some works/sections do tend to drag on in areas that are of little relevance (e.g., the intricacies of various gnostic systems of thought). And even in those sections, there is much to be learned in the authors approaches to the the challenges and how they answered rooted in the Word of God. The reason this is getting 3 stars is only because of my own attempt to read it straight through like a book. It is not a book but a collection of works, many of which are books in themselves. When I set out to read the whole thing straight through, since it was a PDF, I didn't at first realize the sheer length: 1600 pages! Unless you are an extraordinarily fast reader or have a LOT of patience, I would suggest reading the works contained in this volume and others separately and looking at the volume more as a library, lest discouragement settle in. That said, I am definitely glad I took this on and will continue to read the church fathers (because the church was not just born in the mid-20th century). However, I will be doing so in more manageable chunks, though still from this series/library by Schaff.

Coyle says

I'm not going to read every word of this volume, since I've got bits an pieces of it in other sets. I will, however, use this as a place to complie my reviews of the different bits and pieces...

The Apostolic Fathers in this edition: The Apostolic Fathers in English
No review yet.

Justin Martyr read in this volume, except: Dialogue with Trypho
A Rather Boring Note on the Edition: The version of the Works of Justin Martyr I read is that found in the 19th century collection: Ante-Nicene Fathers 1: Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus (recently reprinted by Hendrickson), except Dialogue with Trypho, which I read in this edition put out by Catholic University Press. Consequently, my review of the Dialogue will be of the other edition, while my reviews of Justin's other works will be of the Ante-Nicene Fathers edition. A totally uninteresting note to any but the academics out there, no doubt...

The edition of the works of Justin Martyr I read (see above) included the following:

- The First Apology*
- The Second Apology*
- Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*
- The Discourse to the Greeks*
- Hortatory Address to the Greeks*
- On the Sole Government of God*
- On the Resurrection, Fragments*
- Other Fragments*
- Martyrdom*

As the editor points out, it is very likely that only the first three are genuinely the writings of Justin Martyr,

so I'll keep the bulk of my reviews focused on those.

The First Apology

There are really two streams of argument that run parallel (and occasionally cross each other) in this discourse. The first is that Christians are not the lawbreaking atheists that they are often called by the government, and consequently they should not be executed. Christians, after all, regularly encourage each other to obey the civil law ("whence to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men", 168) and refuse kill children (172). In fact, if the Roman government was really honest, it would see that Christians in fact are quite law-abiding and virtuous, and that their persecution is at heart deeply irrational.

This leads into the second point of the Apology: that Christianity is the true religion because it alone embodies true Reason. Justin defends this in two ways. First, he points to Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Thus, Jesus is the summation of the Jewish religion, the promised Messiah and Saviour. Second, Jesus is the fulfillment of all that is true in Greek philosophy (which was really lifted from the Jews in any case).

Justin ends with a description of the Christian worship service (reading of Scripture, the sermon, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and the offering), including the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper).

Justin's conclusion:

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. (186)

The Second Apology

In this Apology, Justin again notes the injustice of persecuting Christians, specifically the persecution in the city of Rome itself. This time, he argues that it is wrong to persecute Christians not only because they are obedient to the law, but because they cling to Christ, who is Reason embodied.

Our doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul. (191)

Everyone agrees that it was wrong to kill Socrates (who had a little bit of the truth), how wrong then must it have been to kill Jesus, who was Truth itself? And further how wrong must it be to kill Christians, who bear the word of this Truth within themselves?

Not that Christians are afraid of death- quite the contrary. Christians are so unafraid of death that the threat of it cannot force them to give up their allegiance to the Word of God.

Justin's conclusion:

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! (193)

Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew

This work is written in the Platonic style (which is appropriate, given that Justin started out as a Platonist) as a letter to a friend of his relating a dialogue he had with a Jew named Trypho. In the course of the dialogue, we see

- 1) Justin's conversion narrative (which is one of the best from the ancient world).
- 2) Justin's thoughts on philosophy and the relationship between faith and reason.
- 3) The early church's apologetic attempt to reach out to the Jews.
- 4) The early church's doctrine of Scripture.
- 5) The early church's Christology.
- 6) And probably several other things that I'm missing, since I read it fairly quickly.

Most important, however, is the theme that runs through the dialogue: Christianity is truth. That is why philosophy provides the context for the dialogue, then, as well as now, philosophy has been the primary place of the search for truth. As Justin says (echoing Plato)

But what greater deed... could one perform than to prove that reason rules all, and that one who rules reason and is sustained by it can look down upon the errors and undertakings of others, and see that they do nothing reasonable or pleasing to God. Man cannot have prudence without philosophy and straight thinking. Thus, every man should be devoted to philosophy and should consider it the greatest and most noble pursuit; all other pursuits are only of second- or third-rate value, unless they are connected with philosophy. Then they are of some value and should be approved; if they are devoid of philosophy and not connected with it in any way, they then become base and coarse pursuits to those who practice them."

Dialogue with Trypho is Justin's attempt to prove to the Jews that Christ is the truth, just as his Apologies are his attempts to prove the same to the Greeks. Thus, Justin concludes the dialogue

I can wish you no greater blessing than this, gentlemen, that, realizing that wisdom is given to every man through this way [the Gospel], you also may one day come to believe entirely as we do that Jesus is the Christ of God.

The Discourse to the Greeks/Hortatory Address to the Greeks/On the Sole Government of God

Since these three works are probably spurious (maybe even post-Nicene documents), I'll quickly summarize them and move on:

In the *Discourse* and *Address*, Justin highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the pagan writers. Their strengths are that they have bits and pieces of the truth (probably mostly stolen from Moses, when Homer and Plato visited Egypt and met with Jews living there). In pagan writings, Justin argues, you can see shadows and glimmers of the truth of the coming Messiah.

The weaknesses of pagan writings are that 1) they are contradictory and inconsistent, including by mixing monotheism and polytheism; 2) they encourage wickedness and idolatry.

So, the long and the short of it is that the pagan writers have some truth and some value, but only a limited amount of each. They work best as signposts pointing to Jesus, which, once used, are left behind (my example, not Justin's).

In *On the Sole Government of God*, Justin argues that once all men were monotheists, until through forgetfulness and the trickery of the demons men have become polytheists. The bulk of the short work is spent citing pagan writers as evidence that there are echos of monotheism in man's past. Justin ends with a challenge to return to the worship of the one true God.

Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection/Other Fragments

Most of these are probably not really by Justin, which is unfortunate since there's some good material here.

On The Resurrection is especially interesting, as it hints that Justin included the following topics in the whole treatise:

- 1) The power of Truth as its own evidence ("The word of truth is free, and carries its own authority... it would be believed for its own nobility, and for the confidence due to Him who sends it." 294);
- 2) Challenges to the doctrine of resurrection;
- 3) The nature of the resurrection body (will it eat, sleep, have sex, etc?);
- 4) What about people with physical deformities? (To this challenge, Justin replies: "How truly blinded are they [who deny the resurrection] in the eyes of their hearts! For they have not seen on the earth the blind men seeing again, and the lame walking by His word... For if on earth He healed the sicknesses of the flesh, and made the body whole, much more will He do this in the resurrection", 295);
- 5) The value of the physical body to God;
- 6) The physical flesh is not the source of sin;
- 7) The resurrection of Christ is the evidence of the coming general resurrection.

It's very sad that we've missed the rest of this treatise.

The *Other Fragments* are mostly bits and pieces drawn from either other ancient writers or marginalia (notes by ancient editors left in the margins of editions of Justin's works). They cover a variety of topics, and it's impossible to tell which is truly Justin's and which is spurious. The best of them, in my opinion: "We shall not injure God by remaining ignorant of Him, but shall deprive ourselves of His friendship." (300)

Martyrdom of Justin Martyr

The selection of writings ends with an anonymous account of the execution of Justin Martyr following his besting of the Cynic philosopher Crescens in a public debate. While some of the details are historically suspect, overall it's a wonderful (and brief!) picture of both martyrdom in the ancient world and the legal process by which Christians were subjected to the law. What we see in this document is the repeated offer of amnesty if only the Christians will renounce Christ and make a token sacrifice to "the gods" (the Romans didn't really care which gods you sacrificed to, nor did they care if you actually believed when you did so). The Christians refused and were put to death. Left out of this account is the appendix that suggests that while the other Christians present were beheaded, Justin was forced to drink hemlock (in the good philosophical tradition).

Overall, these readings are a fascinating look at the early church, and how it really is a preview of the coming debates within Christianity. What is the relationship between reason and conversion? Can people be argued into faith? What is the relationship between "pagan" (today we'd say "secular") thought and Christian thought? Can we as Christians read Plato with good conscience, pulling what is good out of it and attributing it to common grace? Or is this a spiritually fruitless endeavor?

Through all these questions, I was repeatedly impressed by the depth of Justin's faith. He relentlessly pursued Christ in his scholarship, bending all the tools of his philosophical training for the service of God. He had such a God-entranced vision of the world (to steal a Piper phrase) that he saw the hand of Divinity at work in all things, and called on us all to see the world through Christ-colored glasses. Whether discussing nature, philosophy, or Scripture, Christ was the center of Justin's worldview. Consequently, these writings are worth

the effort and attention necessary to getting through the dense prose.

Irenaeus

Against Heresies is the sole surviving work of Irenaeus of Lyons, and our first major look into the early church in the Western part of the Roman Empire. And, what we find is... a Christian community clearly concerned with good doctrine, the affairs of other churches, and solid Biblical exposition.

The work is composed of five books, the first ones laying out what the heretics claim about Jesus and the last ones (sadly, there's not a clear division or structure to the work) laying out true Christian doctrine as found in Scripture. This is too long a work for me to lay out a full outline here, instead I'll just raise some general themes:

1) In order to argue against heresy, we have to understand what the heretics themselves believe:

The man, however, who would undertake their conversion, must possess an accurate knowledge of their systems or schemes of doctrine. For it is impossible for any one to heal the sick, if he has no knowledge of the disease of the patients. (462)

This is probably what will put most people off about *Against Heresies*, the bulk of the first two books and significant portions of the last three are all dedicated to outlining exactly what the heretics believe. And man, is it weird. Granted, it probably wasn't weird to them, but Gnosticism (the heresy in question) is just a complicated belief system with multiple levels of "powers" (not really "gods") seen at work behind the universe. So Jesus and Christ, for example, were two different emanations of the creative power (called "Bythus", I think), rather than actual "people." We must understand what they think about God before we try to explain the truth.

2) The antidote to heresy is a proper understanding of the Incarnation and the Resurrection. While Irenaeus does mention the Crucifixion, it gets only a quick nod while the bulk of his time is spent on the other two cornerstones of Christian doctrine. Which shows you where his own weaknesses come in- without a good understanding of the Crucifixion, his own claims about orthodox doctrine are skewed (not actually heresy- just... skewed). So he ends up believing some weird things about Jesus (that he lived on earth for fifty years before being crucified, for example), free will, and the end of the world, all resulting from a lack of understanding of the atonement.

Having said that, Irenaeus' thoughts on the Incarnation and Resurrection are both utterly worthwhile, and the main reason to pick up this difficult book in the first place.

3) The foundation of the church's doctrine and the source from which any response to heresy should be drawn is Scripture. Irenaeus' primary objective in this book is to exposit the Bible as it stands against the teachings of those who claim the name of "Christian" but really teach a false gospel. Irenaeus walks through both Testaments, showing equal familiarity with the Old and New, and drawing his arguments from each.

An endnote: Irenaeus has a great sense of humor that occasionally surfaces. For example, at one point he describes the difficulties that heretics run into as a result of having made themselves (rather than Scripture) the final arbiter of doctrine:

[When Scripture is read] they all begin to purse up their eyebrows, and to shake their heads, and they say that they might indeed utter a discourse transcendently lofty, but that all cannot comprehend the greatness of that thought which is implied in it; and that, therefore, among the wise the chief thing is silence.(514)

Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* probably isn't the place to start reading the church fathers, but it might very well be something to work towards.

There are also some "Fragments" of Irenaeus. These are... adequate. Nothing terrible, nothing special.

Overall, the volume is excellent, but challenging (hence three stars). It's excellent in that it draws together most of the 1st and 2nd century Christian documents (all of them, in fact, that were available in the 19th century) and presents them in an affordable (~\$3/hardback volume, if you catch the sale) hardback set. Having said that, it's a public domain 19th century translation in double columns with small-ish print. And, well, the 19th century prose can be a bit much sometimes. Having said that, I've loved the material and look forward to reading through the series. I suspect that the translations will get better as the series gets into texts that we have better editions of. Recommended for those who are interested in theology, church history, apologetics, and the early church.

Jonathan says

This was a fantastic resource when it came out, and really brings together the available Christian writings of the 2nd (and potentially late 1st) century. However, both the translation and the attendant author/date notes are now quite dated. Much better translations of all the writings in this text can now be found in other publications, and our knowledge of the original authors has grown so much in the last century as to make these notes obsolete.

Still, I highly recommend hunting down all of the writings in this book in some form if you have the slightest interest in early Christian history. There is a lot of really good stuff in here.

Megan says

At times, I found the Ante-Nicene Fathers (particularly Justin Martyr and Ignatius) repetitive and circular in their thoughts. I skimmed. I skipped a few passages. I don't regret this.

But I still give the book five stars.

Reading the Fathers has done more than anything else to educate me about my faith (and I graduated from a conservative religious college). I have learned what was then (and often still is) considered crucial doctrines, and I am also better able to identify some of the church's most prevalent heresies. (Gnosticism, anyone?) I disagreed with the Fathers at various points, but they also convinced me that church attendance is important. They reminded me to value virtue in the Christian's life. From them I learned the role of the law in relation to the grace of the New Covenant. I learned to wait not only for Heaven but for the restored material creation and the resurrected material body in times to come.

Not every word is worth reading. Not everything that is written will be something that you agree with, accept without reservation. But the book is highly recommended.

Christopher Hall says

Many thanks to the editors for putting together many of the Church Fathers together in this series. I found the

Fathers themselves to be interesting although at times I did not follow St. Irenaeus' structure in *Against Heresies*.

Galicius says

Careful reading of the Fathers provides moments of insight perhaps greater even than the Epistles of the Apostles however I gave up in about the middle of reading and sampling half of it throughout Volume I. Its was just too abstruse for me. .

Alan says

Early look at Christian thought.

Jacob Aitken says

A collection of the earliest post-Apostolic writings. While not theologically on the level of a later Augustine or Gregory, these writings are immensely valuable in giving a snapshot of the earliest worship and doctrine in the Church.

St Ignatius is the most important in the first part of the book. Having received the doctrine from the apostles, he clarifies the role of Bishop and Eucharist in the Church. This will set the stage for many of St Irenaeus's clinching arguments against the gnostics (e.g., apostolic succession).

Justin Martyr is the next leader examined. Legend has it, and I see no reason to dismiss it, that Apollos of the New Testament converted Justin from Platonic philosophy to Christianity (and of course, a Christianized Platonism). Justin's work is valuable in showing the first major response to learned critics (and perhaps embarrassing Christians today by showing that Judaism has always been a staunch enemy of Christianity, even on Judaism's own terms).

St Irenaeus of Lyons receives the most attention, given that **Adversus Haerisis** is the longest work. St Irenaeus is particularly difficult to read. He is dealing with Gnosticism, which like today's feminism and New Age movement, is painfully dense and laborious. Only the most heroic of readers can wade through this part (Books 1 and 2). I didn't.

Book 3 is a bit more concrete and begin St Irenaeus' actual rebuttal. St Irenaeus uses a number of internal critiques against the Gnostics. They accept the testimony of the Scriptures to some degree, so Irenaeus shows how the implications of their beliefs either contradict the Scriptures or lead to absurdities.

Books 4 and 5 begin and end with a positive presentation of Christian doctrine. Key to his argument has been his assumption of "apostolic succession." Given that anybody can marshal scripture references, the only way to dodge the impasse (Mexican stand off) his for one to show that they have continuity--physical, historically verifiable continuity with the apostles. Irenaeus sets forth an apostolic succession and an apostolic canon (or the beginnings of one, anyway. And for what it's worth, Irenaeus accepts the validity of the deuterocanonical LXX).

The book is dense and makes for difficult reading. His style isn't the smoothest and even with the best of writers, his subject matter is particularly painful (but then again, he is refuting heresy and heresy is always drab and boring). Still, this entire volume is a snapshot into the life of the earliest post-apostolic church.

Tom says

What a treasure to have these writings of the church fathers, some of who were disciples by apostles. In this first volume you can see the progress of thought from heavy quotes and citations of scripture to the development of doctrine and theology. The latter is most evident in Irenaeus as he defends the faith against Gnostic heresies.

Jeff says

Multi-part review:

1st Clement - <http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Epistle to Diognetus -

<http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Polycarp -

<http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Ignatius to the Ephesians and the Magnesians

<http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Ignatius to the Trallians and the Romans

<http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Ignatius to the Philadelphians, the Smyrnaeans, and Polycarp

<http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Martyrdom of Ignatius

<http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Justin's Hortatory Address to the Greeks - <http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>
