

His-Story

Church history and why it matters to me

WHEN IN ROME, PART I 120-220 AD

Apologists, Heresies, and Martyrs

I. Introduction

- A. The Roman Empire
- B. The story of Polycarp

II. Major characters and events (www.church-timeline.com)

130 d. Papias

130 Conversion of **Justin Martyr**. Justin loved philosophy, and had studied many philosophies and pagan religions in his search for truth. He was an apologist, and taught that the seeds of truth (logos) could be found in all religions, but that only Christianity taught the whole truth.

144 **Marcion** excommunicated for rejecting the Old Testament, rejecting most of the New Testament, and teaching that Christ only appeared to be human (Docetism). His challenge helped the church realize the necessity of formally recognizing the canon.

150 b. **Clement of Alexandria**. He was an apologist who used Plato to support Christianity, and tried to reach gnostics by showing that only the Christian had real "gnosis." He helped establish the allegorical method of interpreting scripture.

155 **Polycarp** was martyred in Smyrna by being burned to death. Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" The only known writings to survive are parts of letters he wrote to the Philippians.

156 Possibly the beginning of the **Montanist** movement. They were an ascetic movement with apocalyptic visions. They claimed the Spirit spoke directly through their prophets and prophetesses

160 b. **Tertullian**. He objected to Justin's use of philosophy to defend Christianity, saying "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Late in life he became a Montanist and wrote *Against Praxeas*, which helped the church understand the Trinity

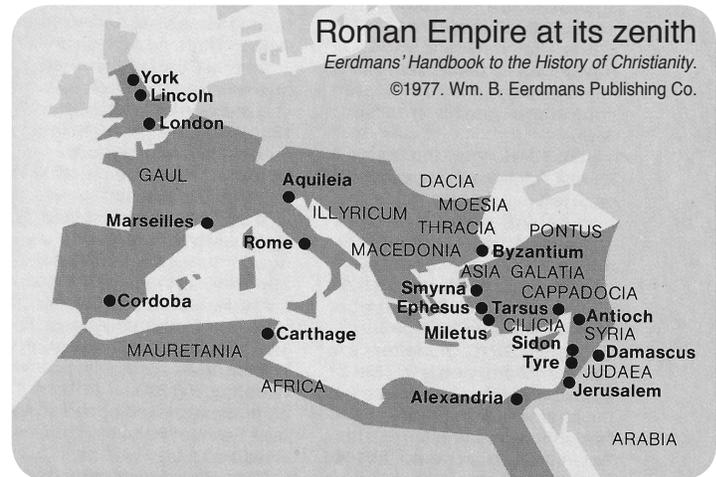
161 **Marcus Aurelius** becomes emperor. He abandoned Trajan's passive approach and actively sought Christians to persecute them throughout the empire

165 **Justin Martyr** is martyred

180 The end of Aurelius's reign

185 b. **Origen**. Pupil of Clement of Alexandria, he further developed the allegorical method. This and his desire to relate to the Neoplatonists in Alexandria led him away from orthodoxy in some matters. But he is still important to the church. *On First Principles* is the first systematic theology.

202 **Septimus Severus** tries to unite the empire under one religion, the worship of the Unconquered Sun. Both Jews and Christians refuse and are vehemently persecuted



Notes

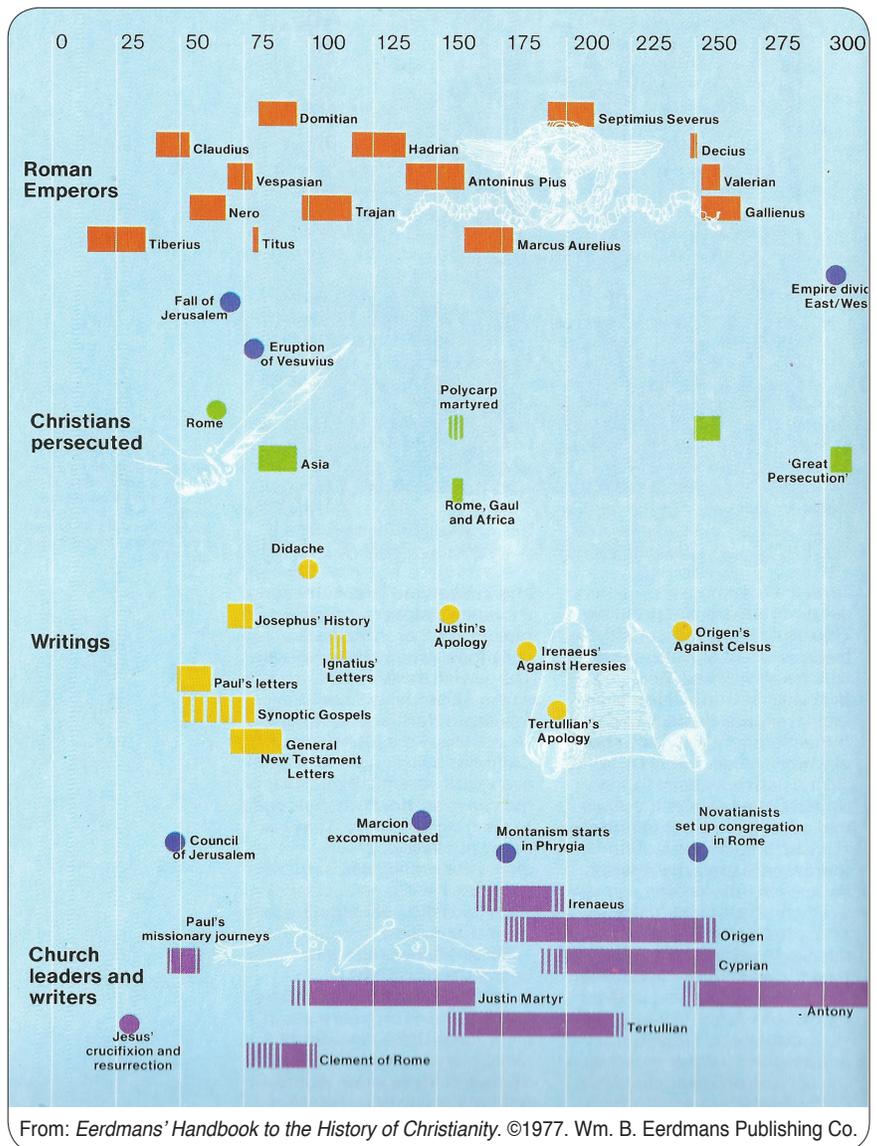
- c. 202 d. **Irenaeus**, possibly martyred
- 202 **Clement of Alexandria** flees to Syria until his death in 215
- 216 b. **Mani**, founder of Manichaeism. He fused Persian, Christian, and Buddhist elements into a major new heresy.

III. In defense of the Faith

Throughout the second century, and well into the third, there was no systematic persecution of Christians. It was illegal to be a Christian; but those who followed the new faith were not sought out by authorities. Persecution and martyrdom depended on local circumstances, and particularly on the goodwill of neighbors. If for any reason someone wished to harm a Christian, all that had to be done was to present an accusation. Such may well have been the case with Justin, who seems to have been accused by his rival, Crescentius. At other times, as in Lyons and Vienna, it was the mob, fired by all sorts of rumors about Christians, that demanded that they be arrested and punished.

Given such circumstances, Christians felt the need to refute rumors and misconceptions regarding their beliefs and practices. Even if their arguments did not convince others of the truth of Christianity, something very tangible would be gained if false reports were dispelled. Such was the task of some of the ablest Christian thinkers and writers, known as the “apologists”— that is, defenders. Some of their arguments have had continued usage through the centuries.

—Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1*



From: *Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity*. ©1977. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

IV. The main misunderstandings of Christianity

- A. “**Christianeese**” (language used regularly of Christians but often misunderstood by culture)

Christian term	Culture's rumors
Weekly agape meals	Drinking parties (and drunkenness)
“Brothers and Sisters”	Promiscuity and incest
Private ceremonies for baptized Christians	Orgies in the dark
“nourished by the body of Christ”	Infant cannibalism
No temple or sacrifices	a non-religion that doesn't make sense

- B. **Christians attacked by the intellectuals**

1. Philosophers who took the time to study Christianity often wrote it off as “intellectually inferior”
2. Christians were seen as an ignorant people who claimed to have wisdom, but whose doctrines were foolish and contradictory

Notes

C. Christians attacked by the Aristocracy

The cultured and sophisticated could not conceive the possibility that the Christian rabble could know a truth hidden to them. Their main objection was that Christianity was a religion of barbarians who derived their teaching, not from Greeks and Romans, but from Jews, a primitive people whose best teachers never rose to the level of Greek philosophers. If anything good is to be found in Jewish Scripture—they said—that is because the Jews copied it from the Greeks...

As to Jesus, it should suffice to remember that he was a criminal condemned by Roman authorities... If he was truly son of God, why did he allow himself to be crucified? Why did he not destroy all his enemies?...

Such arguments, and many others like them, cannot be set aside by a mere denial. It was necessary to offer solid reputation. This was the task of the apologist.

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V. The Work of the Apologists (small group exercise)

A. The movement

- 1. Montanists
- 2. Gnostics
- 3. Docetism (and Marcion)

B. Assignment

- 1. As a group read through the description of your particular movement so that everyone has a clear idea of what your movement stands for. Feel free, too, to Google your movement to get additional information about it.
- 2. Once your group has a good handle on the movement, create “commercial” to “sell” your movement (think low budget car commercials):
- 3. Present your “commercial” to the rest of the class.
- 4. After a group presents its movement, the rest of the class will answer will refute it, criticize it, or praise it, etc.