

to exposition of key passages from the OT, the Gospels and the Epistles. In opposition to the arbitrary use which the Gnostics make of the Bible, he lays down the principle that each passage must be interpreted in harmony with all the remainder of Scripture. He also urges people to interpret the obscure parts of Scripture in the light of those which are clear and unambiguous, rather than follow the contrary procedure.

Third, Irenaeus puts great emphasis on the authority of the Church as the interpreter of Scripture. In contrast to the endless diversity to be found among the Gnostics, Irenaeus points to the uniform confession of the Church, citing an early form of the Apostles Creed.

Irenaeus' refutation of Gnosticism presents a mature and competent exposition of the Xn faith. In fact, it may be viewed as the earliest work of systematic theology.

9. Apology for Christianity by Tertullian (197)

Tertullian was born in Carthage, North Africa, about 150-155, son of a Roman centurion. Tertullian practiced law in Rome before his conversion at age 40, then returned to Carthage.

His Apology was written to convince Romans of the injustice of state persecution of Xy (the emperor then was Septimius Severus, 193-211). He, too, responds to the standard charges of atheism and immorality.

Xns are charged with not believing in the gods of the Romans. This is true. But there are many tribes throughout the Empire who do not believe in the Roman gods, and they are not persecuted, tortured, or put to death!

Xns are charged with secretly gathering for immoral and criminal purposes, such as incest and child sacrifice. But these charges are simple misunderstandings of the Love Feast (in which no incest is committed) and of the Lord's Supper (in which no child is sacrificed and no flesh or blood eaten).

On the other hand, Tertullian notes that those who put Xns to death are guilty of gross impiety and immorality. The Romans openly and brazenly practice temple prostitution, orgies of feasting, adultery and drunkenness, and the abandonment of unwanted children to death. In view of such a double standard, Tertullian argues for the complete secularization of the political order, and for complete religious toleration.

10. Address to Diognetus (about 175-200)

The author is unknown. The recipient, Diognetus, may have been the tutor to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Diognetus is very concerned to learn about the religion of the Xns. He has been impressed with the way Xns disregard the world, despise death, and particularly that they do not accept the Greek gods.

The Address shows first that the Xn religion is superior to either Judaism or paganism. The author shows the absurdity of