

**Church History**  
**Lesson 8 - Early Teachers of the Church**

**1. Introduction - A Time of Transition**

- 1.1. As we have seen, the early history of the church was a time of great expansion and persecution.
- 1.2. During this early phase, many of the writings of the early Christians were written to address specific problems and issues arising in the life of local congregations. This includes much of the New Testament.
  - 1.2.1. There are a few exceptions - the Gospels, Acts, Romans and possibly Ephesians for example.
  - 1.2.2. However, as a rule, most of the writings in the New Testament and most of the writings of other early leaders tended to be narrowly focused to address specific issues.
  - 1.2.3. In summary, all the writings of the so-called apostolic fathers deal with a single issue, and none of them seeks to expound the totality of Christian doctrine. The same is true of the apologists who wrote in the second half of the second century. Most of their writings deal with the issue of persecution. And none of them looks at the totality of Christian doctrine. (Gonzales, Location 1617)
- 1.3. With the rise of the early heretics, Christians began to have to address new challenges.
  - 1.3.1. As we have seen, the development of the canon of Scripture, the rule of faith, and the growth of an ecclesiastical hierarchy happened partially as a result of these challenges.
  - 1.3.2. During this same time, the church began to have leaders writing, not to address single problems or issues, but rather to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith. These writings were addressed to believers and unbelievers, and taught Christian doctrine and refuted the ideas of heretics and unbelievers.
    - 1.3.2.1. The beginnings of Christian theology may be found in the Apologists of the second century, who sought to explain Christian teachings to non-Christians by using the philosophy of the day. (Ferguson, location 2403)
    - 1.3.2.2. At the turn from the second to the third century the Church Fathers furthered the process of philosophical reflection on Christian doctrines. Only now, in addition to addressing outsiders (they continued to write apologetic works), they wrote for those inside the church with a twofold purpose: to refute false teachers and to strengthen believers in their faith. (Ferguson, Location 2404)



## **2. Irenaeus of Lyons**

**2.1.** Irenaeus was a native of Asia Minor (Turkey) and is an important link between the sub-apostolic age (the age just after the apostles) and the development of the concept of the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

**2.1.1.** Irenaeus was a native of Asia Minor—probably Smyrna—where he was born around A.D. 130. There he was a disciple of Polycarp, of whose martyrdom we have already told in an earlier chapter. (Gonzales, location 1626)

**2.1.2.** He was also an important bridge figure between the sub-apostolic age and the development of the old catholic church, for as a youth in Smyrna he had listened to teaching by Polycarp, a reputed follower of the apostle John. (Ferguson, location 2421)

**2.1.3.** [After moving to Lyons] he became a presbyter, and as such was sent to Rome with a message for the bishop of that city. While he was in Rome, persecution broke out in Lyons and nearby Vienne—these are the events discussed in chapter 5—and bishop Photinus perished. Upon his return to Lyons, Irenaeus was elected bishop of the church in that city. (Gonzales, location 1629)

**2.2.** The writings of Irenaeus

**2.2.1.** Only two of his works survive: the Demonstration of Apostolic Faith, and the Refutation of the So-called Gnosis—also known as Against Heresies (Gonzales, location 1634)

**2.2.2.** Still belonging to the Greek period of the church in the West, Irenaeus's works survive mainly in translation. (Ferguson, location 2433)

**2.3.** The theological contributions of Irenaeus

**2.3.1.** A pastoral, practical theology

**2.3.1.1.** Irenaeus was above all a pastor. He was not particularly interested in philosophical speculation nor in delving into mysteries hitherto unsolved, but rather in leading his flock in Christian life and faith. (Gonzales, location 1632)

**2.3.1.2.** Irenaeus, who sees himself as a shepherd, also sees God as above all a shepherd. God is a loving being who creates the world and humankind, not out of necessity nor by mistake—as Gnostics claimed—but out of a desire to have a creation to love and to lead, like the shepherd loves and leads the flock.... The crown of creation is the human creature, made from the beginning as a free and therefore responsible being.... Like a true shepherd, God placed the first couple in Eden. They were not mature beings, but were rather “like children,” with their own perfection as such. This means that God's purpose was that human beings would grow in communion with the divine, eventually surpassing even the angels. (Gonzales, location 1639-1645)

### **2.3.2. A theology of unity**

**2.3.2.1.** Irenaeus's theology is based on unity. Against Gnostic and Marcionite dualism, he stresses the one God, who is Creator and Redeemer; the one Lord Jesus Christ, the same pre-existent being who became incarnate; and the one history of salvation that is the plan of the one God centering in the one Christ. (Ferguson, location 2439)

**2.3.2.2.** He is the first major author known to us to argue from Scripture as a whole, witnessing to the emerging New Testament canon and insisting on the harmony of the Old and New Testaments as successive covenants in God's plan of salvation. (Ferguson, location 2441)

### **2.3.3. A theology of "recapitulation"**

**2.3.3.1.** At the proper time, when humankind had received the necessary preparation, the Word was incarnate in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the "second Adam" because in his life, death, and resurrection a new humanity has been created, and in all his actions Jesus has corrected what was twisted because of sin. (Gonzales, location 1672)

**2.3.3.2.** One of Irenaeus's key theological ideas is that of "recapitulation" - that Christ is the one who sums up and brings to a head or climax all of God's saving plan and of the Scripture. As the 2nd Adam, Jesus is the head of a new humanity and has reversed the steps of the old Adam. Jesus is not a new plan, but the fulfillment of all God had planned from the beginning (see Ferguson, location 2444).

### **2.3.4. A theology of the incarnation and "divinization"**

**2.3.4.1.** "The Word of God became man; he who is Son of God was made Son of Man in order that humanity, by being taken into the Word and receiving adoption, might become the child of God" (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.19.1). (Ferguson, location 2450)

**2.3.4.2.** Humankind is to be instructed, not only by the angels, but also by the "two hands" of God: the Word and the Holy Spirit... Led by those two hands, humans are to receive instruction and growth, always with a view to an increasingly close communion with God. The goal of this process is what Irenaeus calls "divinization"—God's purpose is to make us ever more like the divine. (Gonzales, location 1653-1654)

**2.3.4.3.** Even at the end, when the Kingdom of God is established, God's task as shepherd will not be finished. On the contrary, redeemed humanity will continue growing into greater communion with the divine, and the process of divinization will go on eternally, taking us ever closer to God. (Gonzales, location 1678)

- 2.3.4.4.** This does not mean, however, that we are somehow to be lost in the divine, nor that we shall ever be the same as God. On the contrary, God is so far above us that no matter how much we grow in our likeness to the divine we shall always have a long way to go. (Gonzales, location 1656)
- 2.3.4.5.** This stress on the incarnation and the purpose of God continues in much of Eastern Orthodoxy today, who tend to stress Incarnation more than the crucifixion of Christ.
  - 2.3.4.5.1.** From this perspective, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is not the result of sin. On the contrary, God's initial purpose included being united with humankind. In fact, the future incarnate Word was the model that God followed in making humans after the divine image. (Gonzales, location 1662)
  - 2.3.4.5.2.** What has happened because of sin is that the incarnation has taken on the added purpose of offering a remedy for sin, and a means for defeating Satan. (Gonzales, location 1665)
  - 2.3.4.5.3.** The focal point of that history is the incarnation, not only because through it God's word has straightened the twisted history of humankind, but also because from the very beginning the union of the human with the divine was the goal of history. God's purpose is to be joined to the human creature, and this has taken place in a unique way in Jesus Christ. (Gonzales, location 1682)
- 2.3.5.** A theology of the church and her authority
  - 2.3.5.1.** Irenaeus's argument from apostolic succession for the validity of the church's teachings, and his appeal to the canon of truth as the proper standard for the interpretation of Scripture, were lasting contributions to the catholic understanding of the ministry of the church and tradition. (Ferguson, location 2448)
  - 2.3.5.2.** He was typical of the old catholic church in anticipating doctrines that were to assume greater importance in the future: the apostolic succession of bishops, the rule of faith [apostolic tradition] as the standard for interpreting the Bible, the appeal to the material elements of the eucharist as embodying spiritual realities, and a place for Mary (the new Eve) in his theology of recapitulation. (Ferguson, location 2461)

**2.3.5.3.** Almost every key word is controverted, but it seems that Irenaeus is presenting the Roman church as a mirror of the universal church; representatives from churches all over the empire came to Rome as the capital city, and so there was found in the Roman church witness to the common apostolic tradition. (Ferguson, location 2456)

**2.4.** Irenaeus' importance and influence

**2.4.1.** Irenaeus' pastoral teaching reminds us that Christian teaching should always have a pastoral purpose. It is not merely speculation, but must have practical implications for life.

**2.4.2.** Irenaeus' writings against the Gnostics helped protect the church from heresy.

**2.4.3.** Irenaeus' teaching on recapitulation has led to a rich history of teaching on Christ as the 2nd Adam.

**2.4.4.** Irenaeus' teaching on the incarnation has had the effect of recognizing the importance of creation. It takes our humanity, our material nature very seriously. This has had an especially great influence in the Eastern Orthodox church, where the incarnation is at least as important (if not more important) than the crucifixion.

**2.4.5.** Irenaeus' teaching on "divinization" continued to be developed in the East, and is a central point of theology and understanding God's purpose to this day.

**2.4.6.** Irenaeus' teaching on the church and her authority (and also the special place of the church at Rome) later gave rise to the ideas of ecclesiastical authority, apostolic succession, and papal authority. They are not necessarily in Irenaeus' teaching itself, but it provided the seeds from which these ideas matured.

**3. Tertullian of Carthage**

**3.1.** Tertullian's life

**3.1.1.** Tertullian, who we have discussed earlier in looking at early heresies, was an influential Christian thinker and writer in the early 3rd century.

**3.1.2.** Tertullian was from Carthage in North Africa, and was the most prolific and important Christian writer in Latin prior to the 4th century (see Ferguson, location 2466).

**3.1.3.** Tertullian was apparently formally trained in either rhetoric, law, or both, and his writings bear the stamp of this training.

**3.1.3.1.** for the best appreciation of Tertullian's intellectual formation one must see him as a Latin rhetorician. He was converted to Christianity as an adult in the late second century; (Ferguson, location 2473)

**3.1.3.2.** He either was a lawyer or had been trained in rhetoric, and his entire literary output bears the stamp of a legal mind. (Gonzales, location 1738)

**3.1.4.** Tertullian eventually joined the Montanists, a schismatic group we discussed earlier.

### **3.2. The writings of Tertullian**

**3.2.1.** Tertullian wrote in sharp, brilliant prose, and had a great ability to create memorable phrases and to coin technical terms which were often later adopted by the Church at large.

**3.2.1.1.** Tertullian's literary fame rests on his ability to coin sharp, original, technical phrases. (Ferguson, location 2479)

**3.2.1.2.** He set the language of the Western church on such key concepts as original sin, person and nature in the Trinity, sacrament, merit, and others. (Ferguson, location 2480)

**3.2.1.3.** "The more we are cut down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed" (Apology 50), often paraphrased as "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. (Ferguson, location 2484)

**3.2.1.4.** "It is credible because it is unlikely" (On the Flesh of Christ 5.4), often misquoted as, "I believe because it is absurd. (Ferguson, location 2485)

**3.2.1.4.1.** Tertullian's statement is not a declaration of Christian irrationalism, but an argument that the sheer improbability of the key Christian claims means they were not invented by men. (Ferguson, location 2486)

**3.2.1.4.2.** However, this and other memorable, terse phrases are open to abuse - and have often been abused in the history of the Church!

**3.2.1.5.** "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the church?" (Prescription against Heretics 7). (Ferguson, location 2488)

### **3.2.2. Writings against heretics**

**3.2.2.1.** Tertullian wrote many treatises against various heretics, which provide a wealth of information of heretical groups at this time.

**3.2.2.2.** One of his key arguments, using a Roman legal principle, was that only the Church has the right to Scripture and to its interpretation. The "rule of faith" held by the orthodox churches is the key to interpreting the Scripture, and all who reject that rule have no right to the Scriptures whatsoever.

**3.2.2.2.1.** His Prescription Against Heretics attempts to preempt the heretics' case by arguing from a Roman legal principle in order to claim that the Scriptures belong to the church, and so only catholic Christians have the right to use them. The rule of faith preserved in the tradition of the church is the right key to understanding them. (Ferguson, location 2502)

**3.2.2.2.2.** For a lengthy explanation of this principle, see Gonzales, location 1743-1762)

### **3.2.3. Tertullian and Philosophy**

**3.2.3.1.** Tertullian is famous for opposing philosophy, stating that Christians did not need anything other than Christianity.

**3.2.3.2.** In fact, Tertullian not only believed Christians did not need philosophy but that it was positively harmful.

**3.2.3.2.1.** But Tertullian's legalism goes beyond arguments such as this. His legal mind leads him to affirm that, once one has found the truth of Christianity, one should abandon any further search for truth. As Tertullian sees the matter, a Christian who is still searching for further truth lacks faith. (Gonzales, location 1766).

**3.2.3.2.2.** This means that the accepted body of Christian doctrine suffices, and that any quest for truth that goes beyond that body of doctrine is dangerous.... But anything that goes beyond it, as well as anything coming from other sources, must be rejected. This is particularly true of pagan philosophy, which is the source of all heresy, and is nothing but idle speculation. (Gonzales, location 1772-1773).

**3.2.3.2.3.** In the third century the most violent opponent of Christian reconciliation with Hellenic philosophy was Tertullian. Heresies, he shouted, are prompted by philosophy. "What do Athens and Jerusalem have in common? Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We have no need of curiosity reaching beyond Christ Jesus. When we believe, we need nothing further than to believe. Search that you may believe; then stop! (Shelley, location 1566-1567)

**3.2.3.3.** As we will see below, this is a view quite distinct from that of Cyprian and Origen. However, this fundamentalist view has always had adherents within Christianity, right down to our present day.

### **3.2.4. Tertullian and Roman religion and society**

**3.2.4.1.** Tertullian argued that the persecution of the State against Christians was not only wrong because Christianity was true and the State religion false, but also because all religion must be voluntary, so any coercion was wrong.

**3.2.4.1.1.** He argues, in opposition to the State's persecution, that the essence of religion is voluntary acceptance. (Ferguson, location 2494).

- 3.2.4.2. Tertullian was against military service for Christians - a position advocated by many at that time.
  - 3.2.4.2.1. Tertullian's tracts against Roman customs, such as *On Idolatry* and *On the Crown*, include a rejection of military service by Christians, a position he shared with other leading Christian thinkers such as Hippolytus, Origen, and Lactantius. (Ferguson, location 2496).
- 3.2.5. Tertullian's theological terms regarding the Trinity which later are very important
  - 3.2.5.1. For one who argued against philosophy, Tertullian wrote much about the nature of the Godhead and what we refer to as the Trinity.
  - 3.2.5.2. Many of the terms coined by Tertullian have become the accepted way of referring to the Trinitarian nature of God.
  - 3.2.5.3. These terms include such things God being "three persons" and "one substance."
    - 3.2.5.3.1. Probably the most significant of the works that he wrote during this period is his brief treatise *Against Praxeas*, where he coined formulas that would be of great importance in later Trinitarian and Christological debates. (Gonzales, location 1810).
    - 3.2.5.3.2. According to *Praxeas*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost were simply three modes in which God appeared, so that God was sometimes Father, sometimes Son, and sometimes Holy Ghost—at least, this is what may be inferred from Tertullian's treatise. This is what has been called "patripassianism" (the doctrine that the Father suffered the passion) or "modalism" (the doctrine that the various persons of the Trinity are "modes" in which God appears). (Gonzales, location 1815).
    - 3.2.5.3.3. Tertullian's argument *Against Praxeas* employed the terminology of "three persons" (*tres personae*) and "one substance" (*una substantia*) that, when combined into one formula, became the accepted way in Latin to express the doctrine of the Trinity. (Ferguson, location 2505).

**3.2.5.3.4.** But he then moves on to explain how the Trinity is to be understood. It is in this context that he proposes the formula “one substance and three persons.” Likewise, when discussing how Jesus Christ can be both human and divine, he speaks of “one person” and “two substances” or “natures,” the divine and the human.... The manner in which he explains the meaning of the terms “person” and “substance” is drawn mostly from their legal use. Later theologians would explicate the same words in metaphysical terms. In any case, it is significant that, in both the Trinitarian and the Christological questions, Tertullian coined the formulas that would eventually become the hallmark of orthodoxy. (Gonzales, location 1822-1824).

**3.3.** Tertullian's importance and influence

**3.3.1.** Tertullian is a monumental figure in the development of Western theology.

**3.3.2.** Tertullian was a great champion of orthodoxy, and many of his refutations of heresy have continued to be influential even today.

**3.3.3.** Tertullian was the first major teacher to write in Latin, the language of the Western Empire, thus laying a groundwork for theology in the language of the people.

**3.3.4.** As noted above, Tertullian coined many of the terms which were later used to define an orthodox understanding of Christ and the Trinity.[]

**3.3.5.** His use of Roman legal framework to understand, explain, and defend Christianity gave a legal framework to the development of Christianity in the West (which is largely lacking in the East.) This had good results, but it also led to a struggle with legalism in the West, and the development of an entire theology of merits. At its worst, this tendency led to the loss of the Gospel and salvation by works.

**3.3.5.1.** The tendency to legalism in the Western church, as exemplified in Tertullian, was a wedding of Rome’s legal traditions with the Mosaic law read as applying directly to the church’s institutions. The result of Christianizing the law was to lead to understanding salvation through meritorious conduct as now possible—through Jesus Christ. (Ferguson, location 2510)

**3.3.6.** Tertullian’s rigidity in thought and practice has led to a long history of this strain within the Western church. At its worst this strain led to an anti-intellectual, ascetic, and Christ against culture model that greatly reduce the Church’s effectiveness in fulfilling Christ’s command to be “in the world but not of it.”

## **4. Clement of Alexandria**

### **4.1. Clement's life**

- 4.1.1.** Clement was probably born in Athen's - the ancient center of philosophy - to pagan parents.
- 4.1.2.** Clement was converted and then began to search for a teacher to give him deeper instruction in the faith.
- 4.1.3.** This led Clement to Alexandria, where he eventually was appointed over a school to teach Christians there.
- 4.1.4.** He left Alexandria in 202–3 during a persecution under Septimius Severus and spent his later years in Cappadocia, dying about 215. (Ferguson, location 2556).

### **4.2. Understanding Alexandria**

- 4.2.1.** Alexandria, founded in the fourth century BC by Alexander the Great, was the second city of the Roman Empire. It was the home of Hellenism, where Greece and the Middle East met. (Ferguson, location 2523).
- 4.2.2.** Alexandria was the intellectual center of the world at this time.
- 4.2.3.** The city was also home to the largest Jewish community in the Greco-Roman world. (Ferguson, location 2524).
- 4.2.4.** Alexandria was the home of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.
- 4.2.5.** There too Philo, the Jewish philosopher, in the early first century had attempted the harmonization of revelation and philosophy. (Ferguson, location 2525).
- 4.2.6.** This task of accommodating Scripture to Greek philosophy was inherited by the Alexandrian Christian philosophers, who—in contrast to Tertullian's question—sought to show that Jerusalem was Athens. (Ferguson, location 2526).
- 4.2.7.** The polity of the church differed from that developing in the church elsewhere, or at least maintained an older pattern longer than other churches did. The twelve presbyters elected and appointed one of their number as bishop. Teachers maintained an independence in Alexandria longer than elsewhere, perhaps because the bishop was not so strong a figure as he became in most churches. (Ferguson, location 2540).
- 4.2.8.** As we will see, Alexandria will become one of the most important centers of Christianity, theology, and hermeneutics in the first few centuries of Christianity.

- 4.3.** The thought, writings, and work of Clement
- 4.3.1.** Clement was not a pastor but rather a philosopher-theologian and his work and writing bears that mark
- 4.3.1.1.** It was in that context that Clement studied and taught, and therefore his thought bears the mark of Alexandria. He was not a pastor, like Irenaeus, but rather a thinker and a searcher; and his goal was not so much to expound the traditional faith of the church—although he did hold that faith—as to help those in quest of deeper truth, and to convince pagan intellectuals that Christianity was not the absurd superstition that some claimed it to be. (Gonzales, location 1696).
- 4.3.2.** In complete opposition to Tertullian, Cyprian believes that philosophy is not only not harmful, but is the gift of God to help believers grow and reach their neighbors.
- 4.3.2.1.** Clement’s purpose in the passage is to show his pagan readers that a good part of Christian doctrine can be supported by Plato’s philosophy. Thus, pagans will be able to approach Christianity without taking for granted, as many supposed, that it is a religion for the ignorant and the superstitious. (Gonzales, location 1702).
- 4.3.2.2.** But the reason why Clement calls on Plato is not only that it is convenient for his argument. He is convinced that there is only one truth, and that therefore any truth to be found in Plato can be no other than the truth that has been revealed in Jesus Christ and in Scripture. (Gonzales, location 1707).
- 4.3.2.3.** According to him, philosophy has been given to the Greeks just as the Law has been given to the Jews. Both have the purpose of leading to the ultimate truth, now revealed in Christ.... The classical philosophers were to the Greeks what the prophets were to the Hebrews. With the Jews, God has established the covenant of the Law; with the Greeks, that of philosophy. (Gonzales, location 1709-1710).
- 4.3.2.4.** What truth existed among the Greeks came from God and could be rightly claimed by Christians for their own use. “Plundering the Egyptians” (based on Exodus 12:33, 36) was an idea later popularized to justify Christians taking over whatever was of value from pagan literature and philosophy. (Ferguson, location 2569).
- 4.3.2.5.** Furthermore, Clement saw philosophy as having three uses for the Christian: (1) to unmask philosophers’ errors, (2) to make the content of the faith more precise, and (3) to help one pass from naïve to scientific knowledge. (Ferguson, location 2573).

- 4.3.2.6. Clement's view on the relation of faith and reason has been described as a "double faith" theory. One kind of faith is simple assent to the teaching of Scripture that gives an immediate sort of knowledge; this faith, when demonstrated by reason (rational faith), is gnosis—a knowledge that is not different from faith, but a different sort of faith. Clement affirmed the equality of these two forms of faith against the extremes both of Gnosticism, which gave a higher value to gnosis, and of those believers who rejected philosophy. (Ferguson, location 2575).
- 4.3.2.7. The significance of Clement's position may be seen by contrasting it with the views of Tertullian and Origen. Tertullian had a "single faith" theory that gave preeminence to simple faith (the search for philosophical demonstration reduced faith's merit). Origen's "single faith" was the opposite: rational faith is superior to simple faith and is of more merit. (Ferguson, location 2579).
- 4.3.3. Clement taught that true theology-philosophy must work itself out in a moral life.
  - 4.3.3.1. Unlike the Gnostics, who often divorced knowledge from daily life, Clement taught that true knowledge must lead to Christian morals.
    - 4.3.3.1.1. Clement and Origen differ from the gnostics in another important respect—Christian behavior. Gnostic heretics were not interested in the training of character. But Clement insists that spiritual insight comes to the pure in heart, to those humble enough to walk with God as a child with his father, to those whose motive for ethical behavior goes far beyond fear of punishment or hope of reward to a love of the good for its own sake. (Shelley, location 1624)
    - 4.3.3.1.2. His spirit as a learned and broad-minded man of culture and a conservative moralist has been caught in the phrase "a liberal Puritan." (Ferguson, location 2556).
  - 4.3.3.2. In this way, Clement formed a bridge between Greek wisdom, which at times tended to be more speculative, and Hebrew wisdom, which was always concerned with the formation of character.
- 4.3.4. Clement and the beginnings of allegorical interpretation of Scripture
  - 4.3.4.1. Uniting the Scripture with Greek philosophy was not always easy. Often they seemed to be contradictory. This problem had been faced by Philo earlier, and he had resorted to an allegorical reading of Scripture to align it with Greek philosophy.

- 4.3.4.2. In many ways Clement followed the approach of Philo. He - and Alexandria after him - became proponents of Scripture having multiple meanings - the highest of which was an “allegorical” understanding.
  - 4.3.4.2.1. At first sight, there seems to be a great distance between the two. But Clement is convinced that a careful study of Scripture will lead to the same truth that the philosophers have known. The reason for this is that Scripture is written allegorically or, as Clement says, “in parables.” (Gonzales, location 1712).
  - 4.3.4.2.2. The sacred text has more than one meaning. The literal sense ought not to be set aside. But those who are content with it are like children who are content with milk, and never grow to adulthood. Beyond the literal sense of the text there are other meanings that the truly wise must discover. (Gonzales, location 1714).
  - 4.3.4.2.3. Although he sees himself as an interpreter of Scripture, his allegorical exegesis allows him to find in the sacred text ideas and doctrines that are really Platonic in inspiration. (Gonzales, location 1724).
- 4.3.4.3. Clement and the doctrine of the Logos
  - 4.3.4.3.1. Central to Clement’s Christology was the doctrine of Christ as the Logos. As the Logos, Christ was the reason of God incarnate, and was the Teacher of God to humanity.
    - 4.3.4.3.1.1. The special concerns of the Alexandrian school in this sense were maintaining free intellectual inquiry in the church, exploring the relations of faith and reason, the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and the Logos Christology. (Ferguson, location 2545).

- 4.3.4.3.1.2.** Clement's three great works form a trilogy. The Exhortation to the Greeks (Protrepticus) is an apology, drawing intimations of Christianity from Greek philosophy and literature. The Instructor (Paedagogus) is the first Christian work on ethics (chapter 8). **Jesus Christ as the teacher (in his capacity as the divine Logos) instructs in morals and Christian conduct in society.** The Miscellanies (Stromata) is a "patchwork" of reflections on various aspects of Christianity in relation to intellectual concerns of the day. (Ferguson, location 2558).
- 4.3.4.3.1.3.** This Ineffable One is revealed to us in the Word or Logos, from which the philosophers as well as the prophets received whatever truth they knew, and which has become incarnate in Jesus. (Gonzales, location 1727).

#### 4.4. Clement's importance and influence

**4.4.1.** Unlike Tertullian, Clement's primary influence is not specific terms or phrases, but rather his main idea of uniting Christianity with Greek philosophy. It was his approach to understanding and teaching the faith, rather than his specific teachings or doctrines, that continued to have a major influence on Christianity in the coming centuries.

**4.4.1.1.** In any case, Clement's importance does not lie in the manner in which he understands one doctrine or another, but rather in that his thought is characteristic of an entire atmosphere and tradition that developed in Alexandria and that would be of great significance for the subsequent course of theology. Later in this chapter, when discussing Origen, we shall see the next step in the development of that theological tradition. (Gonzales, location 1731).

**4.4.1.2.** Clement's ministry, then, marked an important juncture in the progress of Christian doctrine. After him, Greek thinking united with Christian thought. In the great saints and theologians of later Eastern Christianity this bond was secured. Without it the staggering theological achievements of the first church councils would have been impossible. (Shelley, location 1632)

- 4.4.2. Much of Clement's influence is through his continuation and development of the catechetical school at Alexandria. This school became a major influence in the development of Christian thought and doctrine.
- 4.4.3. Clement is also important because he is a major influence on Origen, one of the most important thinkers and scholars of early Christianity.

## 5. Origen

### 5.1. Origen's life

- 5.1.1. Origen was born into a Christian family around 185AD.
- 5.1.2. The persecution under Septimius Severus (202–3) claimed Leonides as a martyr, and Origen was spared a similar outcome because his mother hid his clothes so the modest youth would not leave the house. He contented himself with writing a letter to his father in prison urging him not to yield to the persecutors out of concern for the family. (Ferguson, location 2597).
- 5.1.3. In contrast with Clement, Origen was the son of Christian parents. His father suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Septimius Severus—the same persecution that forced Clement to leave the city. (Gonzales, location 1834).
- 5.1.4. Origen supported the family by secular teaching, but at the age of eighteen he was entrusted by bishop Demetrius with teaching inquirers, so he devoted himself to studying the Scriptures, sold his secular books, and lived austerely off the proceeds. (Ferguson, location 2600).
- 5.1.5. Shortly thereafter, when Origen was still in his late teens, the bishop of Alexandria, Demetrius, entrusted him with the task of training catechumens—that is, candidates for baptism. This was a very serious responsibility, and young Origen, whose genius was exceptional, soon became famous. (Gonzales, location 1837).
- 5.1.6. Because many women were among his students, Origen, taking Matthew 19:12 literally, “made him self a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” an act successfully kept secret for some time. (Ferguson, location 2602).
- 5.1.7. After teaching catechumens for a number of years, he left that task to some of his best disciples, and devoted himself entirely to running a school of Christian philosophy that was very similar to those founded by the great classical philosophers. (Gonzales, location 1839).
- 5.1.8. For a number of reasons, including jealousy, conflict arose between Demetrius and Origen. The final result was that the latter had to leave his native city and settle at Caesarea, where he continued writing and teaching for another twenty years (Gonzales, location 1842).

- 5.1.9.** The bishops in Palestine, criticized for allowing Origen—as a layman—to preach in church, on a later visit laid hands on him. Demetrius now brought up the matter of Origen’s castration, which was considered to disqualify a man from church office, and called him home. The difficulties were so great that Origen in 232 moved to Caesarea, where he continued his teaching. (Ferguson, location 2609).
- 5.1.10.** Finally, during the persecution of Decius (discussed in the next chapter), Origen had the opportunity to show the strength of his faith. Given the nature of that persecution, Origen was not put to death, but was tortured to such a point that he died shortly after having been released. He died at Tyre, when he was about seventy years old. (Gonzales, location 1844).
- 5.2.** Origen’s thought, writings, and work
- 5.2.1.** Origen’s work with the Biblical text
- 5.2.1.1.** Origen created the first text critical Bible, the Hexapala. This was a Bible with six parallel columns to show various versions of the Bible side by side.
- 5.2.1.1.1.** One of Origen’s great scholarly achievements was the Hexapla, six parallel columns comparing line by line the Hebrew Old Testament, a Greek transliteration, and the Greek translations of Aquila (the most literal), Symmachus, the Septuagint, and Theodotion. (Ferguson, location 2619).
- 5.2.1.1.2.** he compiled the Hexapla. This was an edition of the Old Testament in six columns: the Hebrew text, a Greek transliteration from the Hebrew—so that a reader who did not know that ancient language could at least have some idea of its pronunciation—and four different Greek translations. To this was added an entire system of symbols indicating variants, omissions, and additions. (Gonzales, location 1848).
- 5.2.1.2.** This was a very important work, and this type of work is the foundation of all later textual criticism in the church.
- 5.2.2.** Origen’s work as a biblical commentator
- 5.2.2.1.** Origen did an incredible amount of writing on biblical passages.
- 5.2.2.2.** These writings included commentaries, transcriptions of his preaching, notes on difficult passages, etc.

- 5.2.2.2.1. Much of Origen’s study took the form of interpreting the biblical text—scholia or notes on difficult passages, homilies preached on the books of the Bible, and large-scale scientific commentaries on biblical books. (Ferguson, location 2624).
- 5.2.2.2.2. Thanks to the generosity of a wealthy friend, Origen gained the services of seven shorthand writers, to work in relays. Books began to pour from his literary workshop. His fame soared to extraordinary heights. Jerome later asked, “Who could ever read all that Origen wrote? (Shelley, location 1668).
- 5.2.2.2.3. The great Alexandrian addressed a wide range of subjects for Christians and against pagans, but he always considered the exposition of Scripture his primary task. (Shelley, location 1671).
- 5.2.2.3. Origen’s philosophical teaching and writings
  - 5.2.2.3.1. Origen also taught on a wide range of subjects, and was steeped in philosophy.
    - 5.2.2.3.1.1. The wide scope of instruction—dialectics, natural science, geometry, astronomy, philosophy, ethics, theology, and Scripture. Origen encouraged his students to read all the philosophers except those who did not believe in God. (Ferguson, location 2613).
    - 5.2.2.3.2. Like Clement, Origen believed that the Scripture and philosophy were in basic agreement, and so philosophy should be studied as well as Scripture.
      - 5.2.2.3.2.1. The spirit of Origen’s theology is very similar to that of his teacher, Clement. It is an attempt to relate Christian faith to the philosophy that was then current in Alexandria, Neoplatonism. (Gonzales, location 1854).
    - 5.2.2.3.3. Like Clement, Origen believed that philosophy should lead to moral formation, and took Christian character development very seriously.

**5.2.2.3.3.1.** Only those who aim at living an upright life, he taught, can live worthy of reasonable creatures, and seek to know first themselves, and then what is good and what man ought to strive for, what is evil, and what man ought to flee. Ignorance, he said, is a great barrier to godliness. There can be no genuine piety toward God in the man who despises the gift of philosophy. But true philosophy, said Origen, always focuses on the Word, “who attracts all irresistibly to himself by his unutterable beauty. (Shelley, location 1660).

**5.2.2.4.** Origen’s orthodoxy on major points

**5.2.2.4.1.** Origen held to the major points of the Christian faith - the “rule of faith.”

**5.2.2.4.1.1.** This tradition includes first of all the doctrine that there is only one God, creator and ruler of the universe, and therefore the Gnostic speculations regarding the origin of the world are to be rejected. Secondly, the apostles taught that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, begotten before all creation, and that his incarnation is such that, while becoming human, he remained divine. As to the Holy Ghost, Origen declares that apostolic tradition is not entirely clear, except in affirming that the Spirit’s glory is no less than that of the Father and the Son. Finally, the apostles taught that at a future time the soul will be rewarded or punished according to its life in this world, and that there will be a final resurrection of the body, which will rise incorruptible. (Gonzales, location 1857).



- 5.2.2.7.2.1. Whereas others would have spoken of the Logos as “emitted,” Origen introduced the term “generation,” from the language of Father and Son, into the Logos speculation. (Ferguson, location 2659).
- 5.2.2.7.2.2. The problem, as others would make explicit, was that human beings think of a father as existing before a son and that would introduce a time element into eternity. For Origen and Platonic thinkers, there was no before and after in eternity, and the language of generation had the advantage of securing the same essence for the Son as the Father. Thus Origen could affirm an eternal generation. (Ferguson, location 2660).
- 5.2.2.7.2.3. Nonetheless, there was an element of subordination in Origen’s thinking, because the Son is derived from the Father. The subordination becomes more explicit in regard to the Holy Spirit, whom he described as the chief of spirits. (Ferguson, location 2663).
- 5.2.2.7.3. However, some of Origen’s thought and terminology was later taken into the orthodox thought and terminology regarding Christ, the Spirit and the Trinity.
  - 5.2.2.7.3.1. Although lacking the exact formulation of later theologians and not using the terms consistently according to the later precision, Origen employed the words that became the orthodox language to discuss the Trinity: Origen used *ousia* and *hypostasis* as interchangeable, but they became the words respectively for the oneness and

the individuality in the Godhead.  
(Ferguson, location 2665).

**5.2.2.8.** Origen's hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture

**5.2.2.8.1.** To read all of these Platonic ideas into Scripture, Origen used and further refined the allegorical method of Philo and Clement.

**5.2.2.8.2.** From Origen's teaching and practice, there later developed a fourfold meaning of Scripture: historical/literal; moral; allegorical/doctrinal; anagogical/eschatological.

**5.2.2.8.2.1.** For Origen, the Scripture, as inspired by the Spirit, always has a non-literal meaning, but may not have a literal meaning (if the latter spoke anthropomorphically about God, legislated irrational laws, or recorded impossibilities in the historical narrative).  
(Ferguson, location 2633).

**5.2.2.8.2.2.** Origen's usage varied, but from his formulations there was later developed a fourfold meaning of Scripture: historical (literal), moral, allegorical (doctrinal), and anagogical (eschatological).  
(Ferguson, location 2636).

**5.2.2.8.3.** This methodology continued to develop throughout the middle ages, and was one of the things rejected by the Reformers, who argued for the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, and predominately a single meaning for the text.

**5.3.** Origen's importance and influence

**5.3.1.** Origen was the most prolific and important writer of his day.

**5.3.1.1.** Origen was the most prolific Christian writer before Augustine. He was a pioneer in the scholarly study and interpretation of the biblical text, a creative thinker with a prodigious memory, who remained a ferment in Christian theology for centuries. (Ferguson, location 2591).

**5.3.1.2.** In evaluating all of this, one has to begin by marveling at the width of Origen's mental scope. For this reason, he has had fervent admirers at various times throughout the history of the church. (Gonzales, location 1887).

**5.3.2.** Origen laid the groundwork for textual criticism, and careful exegesis of the Biblical text.

- 5.3.3. Origen shows both the promise/potential and the danger/pitfalls of trying to understand, teach, explain, and defend the faith using extra-biblical language and ideas.
- 5.3.4. Origen's devotion to Platonic thought helped diminish the importance of creation and the body, leaning to a more Gnostic idea of spirituality that has continued to plague the church to the modern day.
  - 5.3.4.1. Origen rejects the doctrines of Marcion and of the Gnostics, that the world is the creation of an inferior being; but then he comes to the conclusion that the existence of the physical world—as well as of history—is the result of sin. At this point there is a marked difference with Irenaeus, for whom the existence of history was part of the eternal purpose of God. (Gonzales, location 1892).
- 5.3.5. Origen's method of interpretation was taken and developed and dominated the church for centuries - all the way until the time of the Reformation.
- 5.3.6. Initially, Origen's influence was monumental. However, as some of his ideas were deemed unorthodox, his actual writings and teachings waned in influence, although some of them continue to this day - though usually not attributed to Origen.

## 6. Evaluating these teachers today

- 6.1. Remember that these men will not answer to us - God alone is their judge. The point of studying them is not to determine their eternal destiny, but to understand how the faith developed.
- 6.2. We have to remember to evaluate these teachers in terms of their own time and influences.
  - 6.2.1. Virtually all teachers in the history of the church teach things that are later viewed as problematic or even outside the bounds of orthodoxy.
  - 6.2.2. Virtually all teachers advocate things that will later go in unforeseen directions or to unforeseen lengths.
  - 6.2.3. We should extend charity for their blind spots - and hope others will do the same for us!
- 6.3. As always, we need to honor those who have gone before. We do this as we learn from them, but test their teaching according to Scripture, holding on to the good, letting it challenge and correct our own understandings, and then not embracing that which does not adhere to biblical truths.