

The Early Church Fathers Writings

Writings of some of the early Church Fathers. They gave special witness to the faith by spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some died in martyrdom. They defended the church, first christian apologists, and fought many heresies.

Ignatius of Antioch

35 - 107 AD; a disciple of John; bishop of Antioch; suffered martyrdom in Rome

*See that you all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is administered either by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude of the people also be; even as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. — **Letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ch 8***

*But inasmuch as love suffers me not to be silent in regard to you, I have therefore taken upon me first to exhort you that you would all run together in accordance with the will of God. For even Jesus Christ, our inseparable life is the manifested will of the Father; as also bishops, settled everywhere to the utmost bounds of the earth, are so by the will of Jesus Christ... Let us be careful, then, not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop, in order that we may be subject to God. — **Letter to the Ephesians, Ch 3,5***

*Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the Church that has found mercy in the greatness of the Highest Father and in Jesus Christ, his only son; to the Church beloved and enlightened after the love of Jesus Christ, our God, by the will of him that has willed everything which is; to the Church which also holds the presidency in the place of the country of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and because you hold the presidency of love, named after Christ and named after the Father; here, therefore, do I salute in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. — **Letter to the Romans, Intro***

*You have envied no one, but others you have taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instruction may remain in force." — **Letter to the Romans, Ch 3***

*Not as Peter and Paul did, do I command you. They were apostles and I am a convict. They were free, and I even to the present time am a slave. — **Letter to the Romans, Ch 4***

*Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God... They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, Flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes. — **Letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ch 6***

Irenaeus of Lyons

115 AD + ; a priest in the Church of Lyons; seen and heard Polycarp of Smyrna (155 AD - a disciple of John); wrote against Gnosticism

It is possible, then, for everyone in every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles, and their successors to our own times; men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics [being Gnostics] rave about.

*[speaking about the church in Rome:] The blessed Apostles [Peter and Paul], having founded and built up the Church [of Rome], they handed over the office of the episcopate to Linus. Paul makes mention of this Linus in the Epistle to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the Apostles, Clement was chosen... In this order, and by the teaching of the Apostles handed down in the Church, the preaching of the truth has come down to us." — **Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses 3.3.1-3 (written around 180 AD)***

But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles.

*With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition. — **St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3:3:2 (A.D. 189)**.*

*If the Lord were from other than the Father, how could he rightly take bread, which is of the same creation as our own, and confess it to be his body and affirm that the mixture in the cup is his blood? — **Irenaeus, Against Heresies 4:33-32 (A.D. 189)***

He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies.

When, therefore, the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receives the Word of God and becomes the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life—flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and is, in fact, a member of him? (ibid., 5:2).

The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only

one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the churches in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions [Palestine] of the world. –

Irenaeus, Against Heresies

Augustine of Hippo

354-386 AD; a converted Christian; a bishop of Hippo; became one of the greatest saints of all time

In the Catholic Church, there are many other things which most justly keep me in her bosom. The consent of peoples and nations keeps me in the Church; so does her authority, inaugurated by miracles, nourished by hope, enlarged by love, established by age. The succession of priests keeps me, beginning from the very seat of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after His resurrection, gave it in charge to feed His sheep (Jn 21:15-19), down to the present episcopate.

And so, lastly, does the very name of Catholic, which, not without reason, amid so many heresies, the Church has thus retained; so that, though all heretics wish to be called Catholics, yet when a stranger asks where the Catholic Church meets, no heretic will venture to point to his own chapel or house.

*Such then in number and importance are the precious ties belonging to the Christian name which keep a believer in the Catholic Church, as it is right they should... With you, where there are none of these things to attract or keep me... No one shall move me from the faith which binds my mind with ties so many and so strong to the Christian religion...For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church. — **Augustine (AD 354-430) Against the Epistle of Manichaeus AD 397***

Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that; for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the body and blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by the faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the body and blood of Christ...

[Since you are] fully convinced that the apparent bread is not bread, even though it is sensible to the taste, but the body of Christ, and that the apparent wine is not wine, even though the taste would have it so... partake of that bread as something spiritual, and put a cheerful face on your soul." – (ibid., 22:6, 9)

Christ was carried in his own hands when referring to his own body, he said, 'This is my body' [Matt. 26:26]. For he carried that body in his hands. (Explanations of the Psalms 33:1:10 [A.D. 405]).

I promised you [new Christians], who have now been baptized, a sermon in which I would explain the sacrament of the Lord's Table.

Clement of Rome

1st Century AD; the 4th Pope; tradition says that he was ordained by Peter the apostle

*The Apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was sent from God. Christ, therefore, is from God, and the Apostles from Christ. ... Through countryside and city, they preached; and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. — **Clement, Letter to the Corinthians 42.1-4 (written around 96 AD in an effort to restore peace at the Church at Corinth)***

Cyprian of Carthage

200-253 AD; a bishop and a martyr; defended the Church in apologetic writing

The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' He says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you, I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven.' And again He says to him after His resurrection: 'Feed my sheep.' On him, He builds the Church, and to him, He gives the command to feed the sheep; and although He assigns a like power to all the Apostles, yet He founded a single chair, and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity.

*Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was; but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there are, but one Church and one chair. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the Apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he deserts the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church? — **St. Cyprian, AD 251 The Unity of the Catholic Church***

*There is one God and one Christ, and one Church, and one Chair founded on Peter by the word of the Lord. It is not possible to set up another altar or for there to be another priesthood besides that one altar and that one priesthood. Whoever has gathered elsewhere is scattering." — **St. Cyprian of Carthage, Letter to his Clergy and to All His People (246 AD)***

He [Paul] threatens, moreover, the stubborn and forward, and denounces them, saying, 'Whosoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord' [1 Cor. 11:27]. All these warnings being scorned and contemned—[lapsed Christians will often take Communion] before their sin is expiated, before confession has been made of their crime, before their conscience has been purged by sacrifice and by the hand of the priest, before the offense of an angry and threatening Lord has been appeased, [and so] violence is done to his body and blood, and they sin

now against their Lord more with their hand and mouth than when they denied their Lord. – **Cyprian of Carthage, The Lapsed 15–16 [A.D. 251]**

Ambrose of Milan

333-397 A.D.; bishop of Milan; his works De Fide and De Spiritu Sancto are among the best of ancient works in the mystery of the Holy Trinity

[38, 25] We saw the Prince of Priests coming to us, we saw and heard Him offering His blood for us. We follow, inasmuch as we are able, being priests; and we offer the sacrifice on behalf of our people. And even if we are of but little merit, still, in the sacrifice, we are honorable. For even if Christ is not now seen as the one who offers the sacrifice, nevertheless it is He Himself that is offered in sacrifice here on earth when the Body of Christ [the Eucharist] is offered. Indeed, to offer Himself He is made visible in us, He whose word makes holy the sacrifice that is offered [on the altar at Mass].

[40, 30] It is to Peter himself that He says, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church [Mt 16: 18]." Where Peter is, there is the Church. And where the Church, no death is there, but life eternal. — **St. Ambrose of Milan Commentaries on Twelve of David's Psalms**

Justin Martyr

105-165 A.D.; an evangelist; suffered martyrdom in Rome for his bold preaching

After we have thus washed the one who has believed and has assented, we lead him to where those who are called brethren are gathered, offering prayers in common and heartily for ourselves and for the one who has been illuminated, and for all others everywhere, so that we may be accounted worthy, now even that we have learned the truth, to be found keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an eternal salvation. Having concluded the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. Then there is brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of water and of watered wine [the text followed by two other two genitive case terms indicating that both the water and watered wine are in the same cup], and taking them, he gives praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; and he himself gives thanks at some length in order that these things may be deemed worthy.

When the prayers and thanksgiving are completed, all the people present call out their consent, saying 'Amen!' 'Amen' in the Hebrew language signifies 'so be it.' After the president has given thanks, and all the people have shouted their assent, those whom we call deacons give to each one present to partake of the Eucharistic bread and wine and water; and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [i.e., has received baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus. — **Justin Martyr, First Apology 66 [A.D. 151]**

Tertullian

155-245 AD; converted to Christianity and later became a Catholic apologist

*There is not a soul that can at all procure salvation, except it believe whilst it is in the flesh, so true is it that the flesh is the very condition on which salvation hinges. And since the soul is, in consequence of its salvation, chosen to the service of God, it is the flesh which actually renders it capable of such service. The flesh, indeed, is washed [in baptism], in order that the soul may be cleansed . . . the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands [in confirmation], that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds [in the Eucharist] on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may be filled with God. — Tertullian, *The Resurrection of the Dead* 8 [A.D. 210]*

[21,1] From this then, we draw up our demurrer: If the the Lord Jesus Christ sent the Apostles to preach, no others ought to be received except those appointed by Christ. For none knows the Father except the Son, and to him whom the Son gives a revelation. Nor does it seem that the Son has given revelation to any others than the Apostles, whom He sent forth to preach what He revealed to them. But what they preached, that is, what Christ revealed to them--can be proved in no other way except through the same Churches which the Apostles founded, preaching in them themselves "viva voice" as they say, and afterwards by their Epistles. If these things are so then it follows that all doctrine that agrees with the apostolic Churches, those nurseries and original depositories of faith, must be regarded as truth . . . And indeed, every doctrine must be prejudged as false, if it smells of anything contrary to the truth of the Churches and of the Apostles of Christ and God. . . . We communicate with the apostolic Churches because there is no diversity of doctrine: this is the witness of truth [John 17: 11, 17].

*[32,1] Moreover, if there be any [heresies] bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, so that they might seem to have been handed down by the Apostles because they were from the time of the Apostles, we can say to them: let them show the origins of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their bishops, running down in succession from the beginning, so that their first bishop shall have for author and predecessor some one of the Apostles [Titus 1: 7; 1 Tim 3: 1-2] or the apostolic men who continued steadfast with the Apostles. For this is the way the apostolic Churches transmit their lists: like the Church of the Symrnaeans, which records that Polycarp was placed there by John; like the Church of the Romans, where Clement was ordained by Peter. In just this same way the other Churches display those whom they have as sprouts from the apostolic seed, having been established in the episcopate by the Apostles. — **Tertullian, *The Prescription [Demurrer] Against the Heretics (200A.D.)****

Cyril of Jerusalem

*313-386 A.D.; bishop of
Jerusalem*

*The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ" — **Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures 19:7 [A.D. 350]***

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