

The Polemicists

3. The Polemicists

In a very general way, as noted earlier in this syllabus, the apologists address their messages to the outward world while the polemicists seek to solve the problem within. This is general and should be regarded as a working guide, not a final answer.

Irenaeus

a. Irenaeus (115-202) One of our favorite fathers, his major work Against Heresies was a forceful thrust at the gnostic movements into which a number of Christians were led. He shows profound knowledge of the Old Testament and most of the New Testament canon. His method is largely exegetical although he is quite competent to blend this with precise and developed reasoning. You will find many elemental theological thoughts in Irenaeus and you will be impressed with the thoroughness of his knowledge although, as with other fathers, he does not always say things the way we say them.

Hippolytus

b. Hippolytus (d. 235) prepared a giant work entitled the "Refutation of All Heresies" in which he tackled gnosticism, Sabellianism, and various other innovative teachings in the early church. Various aspects of Monarchian teaching get a lot of his attention. His work Apostolic Tradition purportedly sets the teaching of the Apostles beyond the canonical books.

Tertullian

c. Tertullian (d. 220ca) An extremely prolific writer who was, for a time, a Montanist, and was always (I think) sympathetic to their end and teaching. With the other polemicists, he labors for correct order in the church and touches on almost every issue imaginable.

You will find some other materials in this line under figure D, just a few pages from now. But you will note that the Apologists and Polemicists follow the apostolic fathers in an application of the Scripture to the solving of the problems that confronted the church. This will bring us to the largest single matter of contention in the early church and set the grounds on which many other items will be studied.

The Leading
Question: The
Matter of
Authority

C. The Leading Question: What is the proper authority?

This is not the sort of question that is met and discussed by a large body in the early centuries. It is a question that is met implicitly again and again and its eventual answer will give the basis for dealing with all later questions. Without a