

- I. Intro
  - A. What is an apology?
    1. A defence of the faith
  - B. How do early apologies differ from modern ones
    1. Modern: Defence of Christian truth, often revolving around individual doctrinal/philosophical claims
    2. Ancient: Defence of Christian truth *and existence*
      - a) Do Christians even have a right to live? The thrust of many ancient apologies (see Justin, Tertullian) often reduces to: here is why you shouldn't be killing us.
  - C. Why did the early church feel the need to write apologies?
    1. General Roman attitudes toward Christianity
      - a) Not an established religion, but a *superstitio*, also not quite Judaism, which was seen as strange but accepted
      - b) Charges of atheism
        - (1) Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him),<sup>9</sup> and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught. (1Apol 7)
      - c) Charges of immorality (Thyestian banquets, post-eucharistic orgies, etc.)
      - d) Romans generally thought Christians were weird, stubborn, fideistic, and anti-social
        - (1) Esp. in their willingness to die
          - (a) **Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (c. 170s)** 11.3: 'The right sort of soul is the one which is ready if necessary to be released straight away from the body, whether that soul is to be extinguished or scattered or to abide. But this readiness must come from a specific decision, not out of sheer opposition as is the case with the Christians, but in a manner that is thought out, and grave and – in order to persuade others – without song and dance.'
    2. All this manifested in the Roman execution of Christians
      - a) A frequent Christian claim (both in Justin and in Tertullian) is that the way Christians are tried is unjust. All the Romans asked for was whether a person called themselves a Christian, and if they said yes, they were condemned. In no other case (Justin and Tertullian asserted) was judgment given on the basis of what the person called themselves instead of what they *did*.
      - b) At most times, the government did not *actively* seek Christians, but if they were charged with Christianity, it was a capital offence
        - (1) Pliny's letter to Trajan (c. 112 AD; governor of Pontus/Bythinia 111-113AD)
          - (a) Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time,

threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome....They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

#### D. Who were the early apologists

1. Anonymous Ep. to Diognetus; Quadratus (frags.) and Aristides (frags. in Arm., ent. in Syr.d) (c.125); Justin; Athenagoras (); Tertullian, Origen
2. We will be focusing on the short Ep. to Diognetus and Justin Martyr's two apologies
  - a) Ep. to Diogn. Intro matters
    - (1) We know nothing about who wrote it or really to whom
    - (2) Sometime in the second century probably
    - (3) "The noblest of early Christian writings" acc. to Lightfoot
  - b) Justin
    - (1) From Flavia Neapolis in Syria Palestina
    - (2) Executed after being tried by Quintus Iunius Rusticus (prefect of Rome between 163-168)
    - (3) Started as a philosophical student, moved from school to school, while a Platonist encountered a Christian (prob. in Caesarea) and converted
      - i) Continued on wearing the distinctive clothing of a philosopher
    - (4) Wrote his apologies addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161), and his adopted son Marcus Aurelius (became emperor in 161), Antoninus' son Lucius.

#### II. How did the early apologists defend Christianity's existence?

##### A. Appeal to Christian behaviour and practice

1. Nothing shameful happens in our meetings, rather only good things
  - a) But, over everything of which we partake, we bless the Creator of all through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. **And on the day called Sunday there is an assembly of those who dwell in the cities of the countryside, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, for as long as there is time. Then, when the reader has stopped, the president, in an address, makes admonition and invitation of the imitation of their good things. Then we all stand up together and send prayers. And, as we said before, when we have stopped praying, bread and**

wine and water are brought, and the president sends up prayers and thanksgivings in similar fashion, to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent, saying 'Amen.' And there is a distribution and partaking of the eucharistized elements [the things for which thanks has been given] to each one, and it is sent to those who are not present by means of the deacons. Our behaviour is better, not worse, than that of others. (1Apol. 67.1-5)

2. Our behaviour is not worse, but better than that of the rest of society
  - a) For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. 2 For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric way of life. 3 This teaching of theirs has not been discovered by the thought and reflection of ingenious people, nor do they promote any human doctrine, as some do. 4 But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. 5 They live in their own countries, but only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. 6 They marry like everyone else, and have children, but they do not expose their offspring. 7 They share their food but not their wives. 8 They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the flesh. 9 They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. 10 They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws. 11 They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted. 12 They are unknown, yet they are condemned; they are put to death, yet they are brought to life. 13 They are poor, yet they make many rich; they are in need of everything, yet they abound in everything. 14 They are dishonored, yet they are glorified in their dishonor; they are slandered, yet they are vindicated. 15 They are cursed, yet they bless; they are insulted, yet they offer respect. 16 When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when they are punished, they rejoice as though brought to life. 17 By the Jews they are assaulted as foreigners, and by the Greeks they are persecuted, yet those who hate them are unable to give a reason for their hostility. In a word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. 2 The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians throughout the cities of the world. 3 The soul dwells in the body, but is not of the body; likewise Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. 4 The soul, which is invisible, is confined in the body, which is visible; in the same way, Christians are recognized as being in the world, and yet their religion remains invisible. 5 The flesh hates the soul and wages war against it, even though it has suffered no wrong, because it is hindered from indulging in its pleasures; so also the world hates the Christians, even though it has suffered no wrong, because they set themselves against its pleasures. 6 The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and its members, and Christians love those who hate them. 7 The soul is locked up in the body, but it holds the body together; and though Christians are detained in the world as if in a prison, they in fact hold the world together. 8 The soul, which is immortal, lives in a

mortal dwelling; similarly Christians live as strangers amid perishable things, while waiting for the imperishable in heaven. 9 The soul, when poorly treated with respect to food and drink, becomes all the better; and so Christians when punished daily increase more and more. 10 Such is the important position to which God has appointed them, and it is not right for them to decline it. (Diog 5:1-6:10)

- b) **For not only he who in act commits adultery is rejected by Him, but also he who desires to commit adultery: since not only our works, but also our thoughts, are open before God. And many, both men and women, who have been Christ's disciples from childhood, remain pure at the age of sixty or seventy years; and I boast that I could produce such from every race of men. For what shall I say, too, of the countless multitude of those who have reformed intemperate habits, and learned these things? For Christ called not the just nor the chaste to repentance, but the ungodly, and the licentious, and the unjust; His words being, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."**22 For the heavenly Father desires rather the repentance than the punishment of the sinner. And of our love to all, He taught thus: "If ye love them that love you, what new thing do ye? for even fornicators do this. But I say unto you, Pray for your enemies, and love them that hate you, and bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you." (1 Apol 15)
  - c) For we ought not to strive; neither has He desired us to be imitators of wicked men, but He has exhorted us to lead all men, by patience and gentleness, from shame and the love of evil. And this indeed is proved in the case of many who once were of your way of thinking, but have changed their violent and tyrannical disposition, being overcome either by the constancy which they have witnessed in their neighbours' lives,<sup>28</sup> or by the extraordinary forbearance they have observed in their fellow-travellers when defrauded, or by the honesty of those with whom they have transacted business. (1 Apol 16)
3. Our willingness to die shows that our hearts are on God, not earthly things
    - a) [Give context] And her former husband, since he was now no longer able to prosecute her, directed his assaults against a man, Ptolemaeus, whom Urbicus punished, and who had been her teacher in the Christian doctrines. And this he did in the following way. He persuaded a centurion — who had cast Ptolemaeus into prison, and who was friendly to himself — to take Ptolemaeus and interrogate him on this sole point: whether he were a Christian? And Ptolemaeus, being a lover of truth, and not of a deceitful or false disposition, when he confessed himself to be a Christian, was bound by the centurion, and for a long time punished in the prison And, at last, when the man<sup>7</sup> came to Urbicus, he was asked this one question only: whether he was a Christian? And again, being conscious of his duty, and the nobility of it through the teaching of Christ, he confessed his discipleship in the divine virtue. For he who denies anything either denies it because he condemns the thing itself, or he shrinks from confession because he is conscious of his own unworthiness or alienation from it, neither of which cases is that of the true Christian. And when Urbicus ordered him to be led away to punishment, one Lucius, who was also himself a Christian, seeing the unreasonable judgment that had thus been given, said to Urbicus: "What is the ground

of this judgment? Why have you punished this man, not as an adulterer, nor fornicator, nor murderer, nor thief, nor robber, nor convicted of any crime at all, but who has only confessed that he is called by the name of Christian? This judgment of yours, O Urbicus, does not become the Emperor Pius, nor the philosopher, the son of Caesar, nor the sacred senate.”<sup>8</sup> And he said nothing else in answer to Lucius than this: “You also seem to me to be such an one.” And when Lucius answered, “Most certainly I am,” he again ordered him also to be led away. And he professed his thanks, knowing that he was delivered from such wicked rulers, and was going to the Father and King of the heavens. And still a third having come forward, was condemned to be punished. (2 Apol 2)

- b) But lest some one say to us, “Go then all of you and kill yourselves, and pass even now to God, and do not trouble us,” I will tell you why we do not so, but why, when examined, we fearlessly confess. We have been taught that God did not make the world aimlessly, but for the sake of the human race; and we have before stated that He takes pleasure in those who imitate His properties, and is displeased with those that embrace what is worthless either in word or deed. If, then, we all kill ourselves we shall become the cause, as far as in us lies, why no one should be born, or instructed in the divine doctrines, or even why the human race should not exist; and we shall, if we so act, be ourselves acting in opposition to the will of God. But when we are examined, we make no denial, because we are not conscious of any evil, but count it impious not to speak the truth in all things, which also we know is pleasing to God, and because we are also now very desirous to deliver you from an unjust prejudice. (2 Apol 4)
- c) For I myself, too, when I was delighting in the doctrines of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered, and saw them fearless of death, and of all other-things which are counted fearful, Perceived that It was impossible that they Could be livings in wickedness and pleasure. For what sensual or intemperate man, or who that counts it good to feast on human flesh, could welcome death that he might be deprived of his enjoyments, and would not rather continue always the present life, and attempt to escape the observation of the rulers; and much less would he denounce himself when the consequence would be death? (2 Apol 12)

### III. How did the early apologists defend Christianity's truth?

#### A. Scripturally: The proof from prophecy

1. Key point: Christianity is unique in having many specific prophecies fulfilled hundreds if not thousands of years later. This could only come from God.
2. There were, then, among the Jews certain men who were prophets of God, through whom the prophetic Spirit published beforehand things that were to come to pass, ere ever they happened. And their prophecies, as they were spoken and when they were uttered, the kings who happened to be reigning among the Jews at the several times carefully preserved in their possession, when they had been arranged in books by the prophets themselves in their own Hebrew language...In these books, then, of the prophets we found Jesus our Christ foretold as coming, born of a virgin, growing up to man's estate, and healing every disease and every sickness, and raising the dead, and being hated, and unrecognised, and crucified, and dying, and rising again, and ascending into heaven, and

- being, and being called, the Son of God. We find it also predicted that certain persons should be sent by Him into every nation to publish these things, and that rather among the Gentiles [than among the Jews] men should believe on Him. And He was predicted before He appeared, first 5000 years before, and again 3000, then 2000, then 1000, and yet again 800; for in the succession of generations prophets after prophets arose. (1 Apol 31)
3. Since, then, we prove that all things which have already happened had been predicted by the prophets before they came to pass, we must necessarily believe also that those things which are in like manner predicted, but are yet to come to pass, shall certainly happen. For as the things which have already taken place came to pass when foretold, and even though unknown, so shall the things that remain, even though they be unknown and disbelieved, yet come to pass. For the prophets have proclaimed two advents of His: the one, that which is already past, when He came as a dishonoured and suffering Man; but the second, when, according to prophecy, He shall come from heaven with glory, accompanied by His angelic host, when also He shall raise the bodies of all men who have lived, and shall clothe those of the worthy with immortality, and shall send those of the wicked, endued with eternal sensibility, into everlasting fire with the wicked devils. And that these things also have been foretold as yet to be, we will prove. (1 Apol 52)

B. Rationally: The proof from philosophy

1. Key point: Human rationality should be able to show the falsehood of other religions/ philosophical systems and the truth of Christianity
2. Christianity as *the* true philosophy
  - a) Idols as anti-philosophical
    - (1) Come, then, clear your mind of all its prejudices and cast aside the custom that deceives you, and become a new person, as it were, from the beginning, as if you were about to hear a new message, even as you yourself admit. See not only with your eyes but also with your intellect what substance or what form those happen to have whom you call and regard as gods. 2 Is not one of them stone, like that upon which we walk, and another bronze, no better than the utensils that have been forged for our use, and another wood, already rotted away, and another silver, which needs a watchman to guard it lest it be stolen, and another iron, corroded by rust, and another pottery, not a bit more attractive than that made for the most unmentionable use? 3 Are not all these made of perishable matter? Are they not forged by iron and fire? Did the sculptor not make one of them, and the coppersmith another, the silversmith another, and the potter yet another? Before they were shaped by the skills of these craftsmen into the form they have, was it not possible—indeed, is it not possible even now—for each of them to have been given a different form? Might not the ordinary utensils now formed out of the same material be made similar to such images as these, if the same craftsmen were available? 4 Again, could not these things that are now worshiped by you be made by human hands into utensils like the rest? Are they not all deaf and blind, without souls, without feelings, without movement? Do they not all rot, do they not all decay? 5 These are the things you call gods; you serve them, you worship

them, and in the end you become like them. 6 This is why you hate the Christians: because they do not consider these objects to be gods. (Diog 2.1-6)

- b) Christianity discernible through reason
  - (1) Why, then, should this be? In our case, who pledge ourselves to do no wickedness, nor to hold these atheistic opinions, you do not examine the charges made against us; but, yielding to unreasoning passion, and to the instigation of evil demons, you punish us without consideration or judgment. For the truth shall be spoken; since of old these evil demons, effecting apparitions of themselves, both defiled women and corrupted boys, and showed such fearful sights to men, that those who did not use their reason in judging of the actions that were done, were struck with terror; and being carried away by fear, and not knowing that these were demons, they called them gods, and gave to each the name which each of the demons chose for himself.<sup>6</sup> And when Socrates endeavoured, by true reason and examination, to bring these things to light, and deliver men from the demons, then the demons themselves, by means of men who rejoiced in iniquity, compassed his death, as an atheist and a profane person, on the charge that “he was introducing new divinities;” and in our case they display a similar activity. For not only among the Greeks did reason (Logos) prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by Reason (or the Word, the Logos) Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ; and in obedience to Him, we not only deny that they who did such things as these are gods,<sup>7</sup> but assert that they are wicked and impious demons,<sup>8</sup> whose actions will not bear comparison with those even of men desirous of virtue. (1 Apol 5)
- 3. Where this goes too far
  - a) Over-valuing of reason in a fallen world
    - (1) But lest some should, without reason, and for the perversion of what we teach, maintain that we say that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago under Cyrenius, and subsequently, in the time of Pontius Pilate, taught what we say He taught; and should cry out against us as though all men who were born before Him were irresponsible-let us anticipate and solve the difficulty. We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably<sup>9</sup> are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others whose actions and names we now decline to recount, because we know it would be tedious (1 Apol 46)
  - b) Under-valuing of revelation, especially the Old Testament Law
    - (1) Note: Early Christian relationships to the law are complicated, and a range of options were available. To deny the law as revelation in *any sense* was part of the core of the Marcionite heresy, and was denounced as being out of the church. But other than that, Christians ranged from saying that the laws were good, and necessary to a time, to that they were given to restrain sin but were not inherently

necessary (Justin's view), to that they were never meant to be understood in physical terms, and were always metaphors (Ep. Barnabas, seemingly also the view of Ep. Diog.)

(a) But with regard to their [the Jewish people's] qualms about meats, and superstition concerning the sabbath, and pride in circumcision, and hypocrisy about fasting and new moons, I doubt that you need to learn from me that they are ridiculous and not worth discussing. 2 For is it not unlawful to accept some of the things created by God for human use as created good but to refuse others as useless and superfluous? 3 And is it not impious to slander God by alleging that he forbids us to do any good thing on the sabbath day? (Diog 4:1-3)

#### IV. What was the goal of the apologies

A. Let Christians live

B. Have the readers (even the emperor!) come to Christ as well

1. But when our unrighteousness was fulfilled, and it had been made perfectly clear that its wages—punishment and death—were to be expected, then the season arrived during which God had decided to reveal at last his goodness and power (oh, the surpassing kindness and love of God!). He did not hate us, or reject us, or bear a grudge against us; instead he was patient and forbearing; in his mercy he took upon himself our sins; he himself gave up his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for the lawless, the guiltless for the guilty, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. 3 For what else but his righteousness could have covered our sins? 4 In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone? 5 O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous person, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners! 6 Having demonstrated, therefore, in the former time the powerlessness of our nature to obtain life, and having now revealed the Savior's power to save even the powerless, he willed that for both these reasons we should believe in his goodness and regard him as nurse, father, teacher, counselor, healer, mind, light, honor, glory, strength, and life, and not be anxious about food and clothing. If this faith is what you too long for, then first of all you must acquire full knowledge of the Father. 2 For God loved humanity, for whose sake he made the world, to whom he subjected everything on earth, to whom he gave reason, to whom he gave mind; them alone he permitted to look up to heaven, them he created in his own image, to them he sent his one and only Son, to them he promised the kingdom in heaven, which he will give to those who have loved him. 3 And when you have acquired this knowledge, with what joy do you think you will be filled, or how will you love the one who so loved you first? (Diog 9:2-10:3)
2. And if these things seem to you to be reasonable and true, honour them; but if they seem nonsensical, despise them as nonsense, and do not decree death against those who have done no wrong, as you would against enemies. For we forewarn you, that you shall not escape the coming judgment of God, if you continue in your injustice; and we ourselves will invite you to do that which is pleasing to God. (1 Apol 68)



V. What benefit do we get from them?

A. Moral benefit

1. Their constant appeals to Christian morality as an evident justification for the existence of Christianity is encouraging and challenging to us
  - a) We should be able to say to a watching and hostile world that they need to give us a hearing, because our actions are so manifestly good, our love for others and strangers so manifestly strong, and our lives so consistent in holiness and integrity
  - b) Further, as part of this, their fearlessness in the face of death puts us to shame, we fear social awkwardness and ostracisation for our Christianity, whereas they were not ashamed to be known as Christians, even when the mere name was enough to get the death penalty

B. Doctrinal benefit

1. Christianity can be defended with reason and with arguments from Scripture. Despite mocking claims (both in the ancient world and modern day) that Christians believe *contrary* to reason, that is not and has *never been* the case
2. Prophecy can be a powerful thing to study, and we would be much benefitted to see how Jesus fulfils so much of what the OT says.