

*Portraits*  
*of*  
FAITHFUL  
*Saints*

*by* Herman Hanko



*Reformed Free Publishing Association*  
*Jenison, Michigan*

©1999 Reformed Free Publishing Association  
Second Printing 2018  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America

*Book design by Jeff Steenholdt*

No part of this book may be used or reprinted in any form without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations used in a critical article or review

Individual essays originally copyrighted by Reformed Free Publishing Association in series entitled “Cloud of Witnesses” in the *Standard Bearer* magazine from October 15, 1989, to July 1, 1997

Illustrations from public domain courtesy of the Hekman Library of Calvin College and Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich., and of the library at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, MI

*Reformed Free Publishing Association  
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.  
Jenison, MI 49428  
616-457-5970  
rfpa.org  
mail@rfpa.org*

*Dedicated to my children and grandchildren, concerning whom it is my earnest prayer that they may hold fast to the faith of their fathers*

ISBN 978-1-944555-24-5  
LCCN. 98-066842

# Contents

Foreword .....	vi
Preface .....	x

## **PART ONE: Ancient Period (100–750)**

1. Polycarp: Martyr of Christ.....	3
2. Justin Martyr: Convert from Heathendom .....	9
3. Tertullian: Theologian of the Trinity.....	16
4. Anthony: Ascetic among Ascetics .....	22
5. Athanasius against the World .....	27
6. John Chrysostom: Golden-Tongued Preacher .....	34
7. Augustine: Theologian of Sovereign Grace .....	40
8. Patrick: Missionary to Ireland.....	46
9. Columba: Missionary to Scotland.....	51
10. Boniface: Apostle to the Germans .....	56

## **PART TWO: Medieval Period (750–1517)**

11. Alcuin: Educator .....	63
12. Gottschalk: Martyr for Predestination .....	68
13. Anselm: Archbishop of Canterbury.....	73
14. Bernard of Clairvaux: Monastic Reformer and Preacher .....	79
15. Francis of Assisi: Medieval Saint .....	84
16. Catherine of Siena: Mystic.....	90
17. The Waldensians: Medieval Protestants.....	96
18. John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation.....	101
19. John Hus: Bohemian Reformer .....	111

## **PART THREE: Reformation Period on the Continent (1517–1600)**

20. Martin Luther: German Reformer .....	121
21. Ulrich Zwingli: Reformer of Zurich .....	133
22. John Calvin: Genevan Reformer .....	143
23. William Farel: Fiery Evangelist of the Reformation .....	153
24. Martin Bucer: Ecumenist of the Reformation.....	162
25. Peter Martyr Vermigli: Italian Reformer .....	168
26. Heinrich Bullinger: Covenant Theologian .....	174
27. Theodore Beza: Calvin’s Successor .....	179

## **PART THREE (continued)**

28. The Story of Two Fredericks (Frederick the Wise; Frederick the Pious) ...	186
29. Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus: Authors of the Heidelberg Catechism.....	201
30. Guido de Brès: Author of the Belgic Confession .....	216
31. Peter Datheen: Father of Reformed Liturgy .....	222
32. William the Silent: Father of the Netherlands .....	239

## **PART FOUR: Reformation in Britain (1525–1600)**

33. William Tyndale: Father of the English Bible.....	249
34. John Knox: The Reformer of Scotland .....	255
35. Hugh Latimer: English Reformer and Martyr.....	261
36. Thomas Cranmer: Sinning Reformer .....	267
37. Andrew Melville: Father of Presbyterianism .....	274

## **PART FIVE: Post-Reformation Period in Britain (1600–1700)**

38. Alexander Henderson: Covenanter .....	281
39. Samuel Rutherford: Westminster Divine.....	286
40. The Story of the Two Margarets: The Wigtown Martyrs .....	295
41. John Bunyan: Author of <i>The Pilgrim’s Progress</i> .....	301

## **PART SIX: Post-Reformation Period in the Netherlands (1600–1920)**

42. William Ames: Puritan in the Netherlands .....	309
43. Franciscus Gomarus: Stubborn Champion of God’s Glory.....	314
44. Johannes Maccovius: Supralapsarian .....	322
45. Gijsbert Voetius: Defender of Orthodoxy .....	328
46. Johannes Cocceius: Biblical Theologian.....	335
47. William III of Orange: Warrior of the Faith.....	341
48. Hendrik De Cock: Reformed Reformer.....	348
49. Abraham Kuyper: Dutch Calvinist .....	358

## **PART SEVEN: 20th Century Reformers in the U.S. (1920-1965)**

50. J. Gresham Machen: Presbyterian Reformer .....	377
51. Herman Hoeksema: Theologian and Reformer.....	393
52. George Martin Ophoff: Humble Servant of the Truth.....	406

Suggested Reading .....	422
Index of Selected People, Places, and Religious Terms .....	428
About the Author.....	450

# Foreword

“We believe that the same God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment . . .”

So run the wise affirmations of Article 13 (“Of Divine Providence”) in the Belgic Confession. Founded firmly on Holy Scripture, the Confession gives no room for any notion that the events of human history take place by chance. It affirms that God is totally in control, not only of human history in general, but especially of the history of the Christian church. Church history is the most important part of any historical study because it describes God’s activities, both supernatural and ordinary, among His redeemed people.

By contrast, the wicked, who “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him” (I Cor. 2:14), are predisposed to interpret all the phenomena of life—past, present, and future—as being under the direction of some grand cosmic lottery of Fortune and Chance. They describe these vain notions in their philosophy, evolutionary science, relativistic ethics, and in their very religion. Fortune, Chance, and Free Will figure prominently in the Pantheon of their gods. So pervasive is this attitude toward history in the modern mind that even those scholars who specialize in historical research express skepticism as to whether final and complete understanding of the past can ever be achieved. The idea that history has a meaning, a purpose, and a goal is a truth foreign to the halls of modern academia.

Sad to say, this same attitude has permeated many of today’s churches. Worship has become, in a thousand sanctuaries, an orgy of self-enjoyment; doctrinal teaching has been forsaken; and the history of Christianity is largely forgotten or misinterpreted. Modern evangelicals consider the Reformation at best a shadowy thing of the past and, at worst, an outright mistake. Nominal Christians give the distinct

impression that since the death of the apostle John, nothing of worth has happened. Ask them “Who was Augustine?” or “Who was John Calvin?” or “What happened at the Reformation?” or “What are the Canons of Dordt?” and one finds they do not know and really care less.

John Calvin was right: “We must look . . . at God’s more especial care of the human race, which is such that the life and death of men, the public destinies of kingdoms and of nations, and the private cases of individuals, and whatsoever men usually ascribe to fortune, are under His heavenly rule and disposal. And . . . we must contemplate that peculiar protection by which God defends His Church, in which protection He more expressly manifests His presence and His power” (“The Secret Providence of God” in *Calvin’s Calvinism*, p. 227 of Henry Cole translation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1987).

To study history is not to do research in a thicket of meaningless chance; it is to study the works of God in His providential government of the world. More particularly, to study the history of the church of God is to behold that realm where, as Calvin says, God “manifests His presence by clearer and brighter proofs; He there shows Himself as the Father of His family, and condescends to grant a nearer view of Himself” (“The Secret Providence of God,” p. 226).

To study church history is to come to know the work of God in Christ among His people. It is a work covering the centuries; it is a work continuing to the present. To slight church history is to slight God and to treat His most wonderful works of redemption through the ages as not worthy of serious contemplation.

Strife and heresy have lunged with vicious blades at the heart of the church, all under the inscrutable hand of God’s providence. The godliest of men stumbled and fell. It is part of the necessary education of Christians in all ages that they learn the past. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime,” said Paul, “were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). What Paul wrote is applicable as well to our study of the works of God in subsequent church history.

One cannot understand an oak tree without understanding how such a living thing has developed from a little acorn. The whole tree is a testimony of growth. The giant trunk and the sturdy limbs tell of the tree’s health and history. Without all that, it could not bear leaves in the present. Every “present” has a past. So it is with the church.

The disparities between denominations, between creeds, between individuals, all have a start in human history. There we find the records of how the majestic truths of the Scriptures were drawn forth in crises and controversies. We see how the faithful suffered for their adherence to truth, yet we also see how those truths triumphed.

When the present leaves of the great oak are detached from their age-old parent, then they are adrift on the wind. Modern churches are blown about by the icy winds of today's spiritual winter. They are "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14). They are easy prey to the charismatic phenomenon, dispensationalism, ritualism, new ageism, feminism, ecumenism: one fad after another, and often all together.

Even in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches—long bastions of biblical orthodoxy—multitudes have forsaken the heritage of their Christian forebears. The creeds and confessions of their churches are held lightly by hosts of their officebearers, whose backs are turned on the past. The uncertain light of a new age illuminates the shrine where they worship. "Strange fire" punctuates their liturgy. They have turned away from the Reformation, and justification by faith has been perverted by some of their learned theologians into what seems better termed as "justification by doubt."

To keep before Christians their precious heritage, Professor Herman Hanko has collected the history of the struggles and ultimate triumphs of those who lived out their faith from the time of early church history onward. The author has drawn for us "portraits" whereby we can gain close-up views of God's works in the lives and times of the faithful who lived before us. Facts about their lives are the fruit of the author's years of research and teaching church history at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

This series of short biographies, first published in the *Standard Bearer*, is now brought together in one volume. Between its covers, history comes alive. The reader's imagination is captured, his spirit engaged, his mind and heart enlightened, and his spirit edified in a simple yet meaningful way. The relatively short chapters are what is needed by those pressed for time by the frantic pace of modern life. *Portraits of Faithful Saints* is a book to read to the youth of the church and is not too difficult for them to read for themselves. In a family library, this book should become a standard reference, one

worth rereading through the years and passing down through the generations.

For a believer to read of these saints, of his dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is to read of the one family of the elect of God, of which he is, by grace, a member. Above all, *Portraits of Faithful Saints* is a book that should lead one to worship the Most High, by whose power, by whose sovereign purpose, the saints were born again and upheld in the course of their lives as an on-going testimony to the truth of the work of Christ in redemption.

HUGH L. WILLIAMS, Editor  
*British Reformed Journal*

# *Preface*

In writing the biographies of saints from bygone years and centuries, two dangers must be avoided.

It is possible, and in fact increasingly common in our day, to write about saints of the past in such a way that while the story of their lives is interesting and entertaining, there is no significance in what they did and said for us who face the complexities of our modern twentieth-century life. Entertainment? Yes. Instruction and edification? No. The times in which these people lived were different; the faith they held is different; the calling they attempted to fulfill is totally irrelevant to our day.

Such an attitude is born out of a serious error. It fails to recognize that God so works in history in the gathering of His church that the church of all ages is one, united by the one great truth of God, revealed in Christ, and made known to the church by the Spirit of Christ. Such an attitude finds the truth confessed in past centuries a mere opinion of the church which, while perhaps useful at the time, is of no value today to a church facing the towering problems of our modern technological age. And in turning its back on that truth, it turns its back on those who fought for it and sometimes died for it.

The opposite danger is to consider those whom God has used in the past in the defense of the faith to be such noble men that we are not only to worship them, but also to worship the ground on which they walked, the stakes at which they were burned, the prisons in which they suffered the cruel tortures of their oppressors. The danger of a kind of hero-worship that rises in the church is that our present-day religion consists of very little more than a veneration of saints from the past—as if we fulfill our calling in the world as God’s church by paying homage to faithful people of God in long ago centuries.

The danger is real. Some seem to do little else than “garnish the graves of the prophets.” But if one were to look for the truth for which these saints fought and died, one would need a lantern to find it.

Does this mean that a book dedicated to past saints can be of no value for the church today? No, that cannot be. Scripture itself points us in a different direction. As an introduction to the sad book of Judges, Scripture informs us that upon the death of Joshua and the elders that outlived Joshua, “there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10). Israel’s subsequent apostasy and oppression at the hand of heathen nations was the result.

Two things are brought to our attention. One is that it is what the Lord does for Israel that is important. That is, not what man does counts, but a memory of what the Lord does is what saves the church from apostasy. The second is (and one need only read what the Lord did for Israel) that the Lord does His mighty deeds through men whom He raises up: an Abraham, a Joseph, a Moses, a Joshua. We cannot know the Lord’s mighty deeds without knowing about these men.

The important thing, then, is the Lord’s mighty deeds. They have continued in the church until the present. We wish to know them. To know those mighty deeds we must know the men through whom the Lord worked them. That will keep us from apostasy.

Hebrews 11 reminds us of the heroes of faith and recounts their stirring deeds of faith. The purpose is not that we may be reminded of some significant biographical detail, but “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1, 2).

We run a race in this life. It is a marathon that requires endurance; but it is the race of faith. The saints of bygone years, heroes of faith, are, so to speak, standing alongside the race course which has been laid out, cheering us on. They have run the race before us and are now entered into their reward. Their lives of faith encourage us and spur us on in our own difficult and exhausting race when the course seems all but impossible.

If the faith God gave them enabled them to perform such mighty exploits, their voices echoing from the past down the corridors of time will give us courage—us whose course in the race is usually not as difficult as was theirs.

But it is the faith that counts. And Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith—as He was the Author and Finisher of the faith of those who have run the course before us. We hear their encouraging shouts that faith will overcome, and so are strengthened; but we look to Jesus for that faith which we need to run without dropping of exhaustion in our own race from here to glory.

We speak of the saints who have been before us, therefore, only that we may learn of their faith and its power in their lives. Because Christ is the Author and Finisher of that faith (the term “Finisher” is also extremely important), that faith which enabled them to do what they did can only enable us to do what we are called to do.

Jaroslav Pelikan put it well in his book, *The Christian Tradition*: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”

These chapters first appeared in a series of articles written for the *Standard Bearer*. The choice of what saints to include in that series and subsequently in this book has been, necessarily, somewhat arbitrary. Undoubtedly our readers will wonder why some whom they expected to find between these covers were omitted, while others will wonder why the ones included were deemed worthy of this special attention.

While I indeed confess to a certain arbitrariness in the choices made, nevertheless, certain criteria did dictate the choices. It might be well to mention these criteria briefly.

Without exception, people were included who were truly saints (insofar as we are able to judge them by their lives) and who have now gone to join the company of just men made perfect. They rightly belong to that cloud of witnesses of which the author of the epistle to the Hebrews spoke.

Each one had something unique to contribute to an understanding of God’s work in the salvation of the church of His Son. Other saints may have done equally great deeds and made equally important contributions, but to include them would have been to some extent repetitious. I picked saints whose role in the wonderful works of God in the church can be clearly seen and defined; and the description of each one’s life is to demonstrate the place God gave to him or her in the broader scope of God’s eternal purpose.

If these saints are to speak to us today, they quite obviously had to have something to say. And so, another criterion was the inspiration

which we could derive in our own calling and life from the work they did and the courage of faith they manifested. Each must, in his own way, be a witness to us in our life and calling.

In some instances I have included a sketch of someone with whom I have strong disagreements. These disagreements are spelled out. But this did not dim the strength and power of their witness and testimony, nor did their errors obscure the important role they played in the work of the church and the defense of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

While others may disagree with my assessments, no book can be permitted to become so unwieldy as to include all those who rightfully have a place in the roll call of the heroes of faith. Surely, we freely admit that God’s judgments are different from ours and that only heaven will reveal how God used each saint in the work of the church for the good of His cause and kingdom. But we are not yet in heaven, and earth’s perspectives and judgments shall have to be sufficient for the time being.

Many of the readers of the *Standard Bearer* were kind enough to express appreciation for the articles and to suggest that they be reprinted in book form. The Reformed Free Publishing Association has graciously consented to do this. The necessary editing has now been completed, and this material is presented to the public with the prayer that God will use it to enable the saints today who are called to live in such perilous times to run the race set before them, inspired by the cloud of witnesses who shout their encouragement from the glories of heaven, where they have attained the victory which shall presently be ours.

HERMAN HANKO

*Part One*

---

*Ancient Period*

*100-750*



Part One:

*Ancient Period (100-750)*

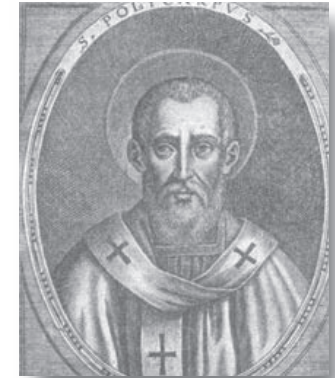
Death of Apostle Paul c. 67	50	
Revelation c. 95-c. 97		Polycarp c.69-c.154
Death of apostle John c.100	100	Justin Martyr c.100-c.165
	150	Tertullian b: c.145-160 d: c.220-240
	200	
	250	Anthony 251-356
		Athanasius 296-373
Reign of Constantine over Roman Empire 324-337....	300	
Council of Nicea 325 .....		John Chrysostom 347-407
	350	Augustine 354-430
Council of Constantinople 381.....	400	Patrick b: c.389; d: c.461-493
Council of Chalcedon 451....	500	Columba c.521-597
Fall of Rome 476.....	550	
	600	
	650	
	700	Boniface c.675-754
	750	



Chapter 1

*Polycarp*

*Martyr of Christ*



*Introduction*

*The church of Jesus Christ, while in the world, is always in persecution. It is its lot in this life to suffer for righteousness' sake. We ought not be surprised by this, for the Scriptures speak of it in countless places. What Paul told the churches which he organized on his first missionary journey is true for all time: "We must through much*

tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

This incessant persecution has produced a list of heroes of faith—saints, men, women, and sometimes children—who loved not their lives unto death and who sealed their faith with their blood.

Among all these is the ancient Polycarp, elder and minister in the church of Smyrna. He is not the first of the martyrs. He did not suffer more than many others. His death was not necessarily more illustrious than the death of other saints. But he provides for us an example of faithfulness in martyrdom, a testimony to the power of the grace of Christ in great suffering, and an enduring encouragement for God's saints today who suffer for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*His Early Life*

The date of Polycarp's birth is about A.D. 69, near the date of Paul's martyrdom in Rome. Polycarp was not born in a Christian home. In fact, his birthplace is unknown, for he appeared on the scene of the history of the church in a strange and perplexing way, a way that is an evidence of the mysterious ways of God's providence.

It all started in Smyrna. If you will look at a map, you will find Smyrna less than fifty miles north by northwest of Ephesus on the western coast of the province of Asia in Asia Minor. Smyrna was a city in which a church had been established early, perhaps by the apostle Paul during those years of labor in Ephesus when “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:10). The Lord Himself wrote a letter from heaven to the church of Smyrna. He had nothing about which to reprimand the church; He had only words of encouragement and comfort in its sufferings at the hands of its persecutors (Rev. 2:8–11). It is possible that Polycarp was minister in the church at the time this letter arrived in Smyrna and that he read it to his congregation, little knowing that it spoke of his own martyrdom at the hands of the wicked.

At any rate, some years earlier a man named Strataeas, a brother of Timothy, was either elder or minister in the church at Smyrna. A wealthy woman named Callisto, a member of the church and one noted for her works of charity, dreamed that she was to go to the gate of the city called the Ephesian Gate and redeem there a young boy who was a slave of two men. This she did and brought Polycarp to her own house where she gave him a Christian home, taught him the ways of the Lord, provided for his education, and adopted him as her son.

Soon after the boy came into Callisto’s home, he gave evidence of the work of the Spirit of Christ in his heart. He was grave and reserved, kind towards those with whom he associated, much given to the study of Scripture, and diligent in witnessing to others of his faith. An outstanding feature of his conduct was his self-denial, something which undoubtedly was used by the Lord to prepare him for future martyrdom. It is difficult to see how self-indulgent, excessively pampered people, who have much too much of this world’s goods and who always crave more, can face martyrdom if it should be required of them.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of Polycarp’s early manhood was his acquaintance with the apostle John. Twenty years they knew each other, and Polycarp had the privilege of studying at John’s feet. It is easy to envy Polycarp. One can imagine listening to Jesus’ beloved disciple speak of his years with the Lord and teach what Christ had taught him. All this careful training prepared him for work in the church.

### ***His Work in Smyrna***

The work which the Lord called Polycarp to perform in Smyrna was extensive and important. He was, first of all, a deacon in the church laboring for the care of the poor. This was an especially important work in the early church, for persecution was the lot of the saints, and persecution brought much work to deacons. They had to care for women and children whose husbands and fathers were in prison or had been killed. They had to visit the saints in prison to comfort them and encourage them in faithfulness, while at the same time trying as best they could to ease their sufferings by bringing them food and clothing and salves for their lacerated backs. And they had to gather money from a congregation of people who themselves had very little of this earth’s goods.

Because of his learning, however, Polycarp was soon called to be an elder in the church—a presbyter, as Scripture calls those who held this office. Upon the death of the minister (then already called the bishop), Polycarp became pastor and minister in the congregation. An old tradition has it that the apostle John ordained him to the ministry. This tradition, if not true, could at least mean that John was present to witness the event. Polycarp’s fame and influence extended throughout Asia Minor. Not only was he respected because of his close association with the apostle John, but for his own piety he gained a name among the saints in that part of the world.

There were several interesting events in these years of labor in the church. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, the city where Paul had begun his labors in Asia Minor on his first missionary journey, came through Smyrna on his way to Rome and martyrdom there. Ignatius and Polycarp spent a few pleasant days together in Smyrna, recalling their past friendship when Ignatius lived in Smyrna and the times they had both studied under the apostle John.

Somewhat later, Polycarp traveled to Rome. A dispute over the date of the commemoration of our Lord’s death and resurrection had threatened to tear the church apart. The churches in Asia Minor commemorated these events at the same time of the year as they had taken place; in other words, the commemoration began on the 14th of Nisan, the day of the Passover when the Lord ate the last supper with His disciples. This meant, of course, that these events in the Lord’s life were observed each year on a different day of the week, and the resurrection was not celebrated on the first day of the week every year. This tradition, according to Polycarp, was apostolic, for

both Paul and John had taught these churches this practice. But the other churches, led by Rome, wanted the resurrection of the Lord celebrated on the first day of the week. They had instituted the practice of celebrating it on the first Lord's day after the first day of spring. The question was a minor one, of course, but it threatened to split the early church into two factions.

In the interests of settling the matter, Polycarp traveled to Rome to talk with Anicetus, the minister in the congregation there. They discussed the matter at length, but neither could persuade the other. The result was that they decided to allow the churches the liberty of celebrating these events of the Lord's life on the date they chose, without rancor, bitterness, or strife. As a gesture of their friendly parting, Anicetus asked Polycarp to preside at the administration of the Lord's Supper in the church of Rome, which Polycarp did.

### *Polycarp's Martyrdom*

The threat of persecution always hung over the head of the church in those days. There were times of relative peace and surcease from persecution in its most brutal forms, but there were also times when persecution broke out in fury. The church was hated in the Roman Empire, especially by the Jews and pagan Romans. Every natural calamity, whether flood or earthquake or drought, was blamed on the Christians and on their refusal to worship Caesar as God.

When Polycarp was an old man, at least eighty-five years old, a flurry of persecution broke out in Smyrna, brought on by the mobs who were thirsting for the blood of the Christians. Fourteen Christians were seized and dragged to the public arena where they were fed to wild beasts. All but one died gloriously, one even slapping a wild animal that seemed to be too lazy to attack the Christian who was intended to be its dinner.

The crowd was not placated and began to shout for more. Particularly, they began to shout for Polycarp, whom they knew to be minister in the church and who was, at the urging of his flock, in hiding. The police were sent to find him. They finally did find him, after exacting information of his hiding place from a servant, who was subjected to hideous torture.

The crowd and the local magistrate were present in the arena when Polycarp was apprehended. He was brought before the magistrate in the stands of the arena and immediately tried and convicted while the frenzied crowd shouted for his blood. It was a

most unusual and illegal trial that went something like this, the magistrate speaking first:

"Swear by the fortune of Caesar! Repent! Declare: Death to the atheists!"

Turning to the mob, with a lift of his head and a wave of his hand, Polycarp shouted, "Death to the atheists!"

But the magistrate knew what Polycarp meant. "Apostatize! Swear, and I will set you free at once! You have but to insult Christ."

"I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has never done me any wrong. Why then should I blaspheme against my King and my Savior?"

"Swear by Caesar's fortune!"

"You flatter yourself if you hope to persuade me. In all truth I solemnly declare to you: I am a Christian."

"I have the lions here, to use as I think fit."

"Give your orders. As for us Christians, when we change it is not from good to bad: it is splendid to pass through evil into God's justice."

"If you do not repent, I shall have you burned at the stake since you are so contemptuous of the lions."

"You threaten me with a fire that burns for an hour and then dies down. But do you know the eternal fire of the justice that is to come? Do you know the punishment that is to devour the ungodly? Come, don't delay! Do what you want with me."

The condemnation was proclaimed; the mob rushed from the seats to gather sticks and faggots, with the Jews gleefully helping along. Polycarp told the soldiers in charge of the execution that they need not fasten him to the stake, for he had no intention of fleeing. The flames leaped high, while from the flames could be heard this prayer from the lips of Christ's faithful servant:

Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the grace of knowing Thee, God of angels and powers, and the whole creation, and of the whole race of the righteous who live in Thy presence; I bless Thee for deigning me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among Thy martyrs and drink of the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ...I praise Thee for all Thy mercies; I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom to Thyself and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and forever. Amen.

It is an abiding lesson to us that those who died for their faith with prayers and songs of praise on their lips were those who knew what they believed, loved that truth, and were prepared to die for it. Polycarp had made his love for the truth clear in a letter he wrote to the church at Philippi, in which he warned them against heresies already appearing in the church. He said,

Whoever doth not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is antichrist, and whoever doth not confess the mystery of the cross, is of the devil; and he, who wrests the words of the Lord according to his own pleasure, and saith, there is no resurrection and judgment, is the first-born of Satan. Therefore would we forsake the empty babbling of this crowd and their false teachings, and turn to the word which hath been given us from the beginning...

Knowing that persecution soon will be upon the church also today, ought not we take heed to these things?



Chapter 2

*Justin Martyr*

*Convert from Heathendom*



*Introduction*

*When the Son of God gathers His church by His Word and Spirit, He brings individual elect saints to the fellowship of the church in different ways. Some are born and raised within the covenant and drink the truths of the Scriptures with their mother's milk. Some are brought into the fellowship of the church from darkest heathendom through a sudden turning from the darkness of*

idolatry to the light of the gospel. Some live for years on the periphery of the church, attending only infrequently a church where only the faintest glimmerings of the gospel are heard, but who come to conversion and faith gradually, through a long period of time, even though they had some acquaintance with the gospel from childhood. Some walk a long and difficult spiritual pilgrimage as they travel through the strange teachings of some sect; then through rampant Arminianism; only finally to emerge into the light of the truth of sovereign grace. God leads His own to the fellowship of the church in sometimes strange and wonderful ways.

In the early history of the church of Jesus Christ, even during the apostolic period, the same principle was true. The church of that ancient day was composed of Jews who had been brought up in the Old Testament Scriptures but who were brought to faith in Christ by the same wonder of salvation which saved the Gentiles. Some were proselytes, Gentile converts to the Jewish religion, also finally brought into the fellowship of the church through the sovereign work of the Spirit of Christ. Especially in the day when first the gospel

was preached throughout the Mediterranean world, the majority in the church were converts from paganism and heathendom. But even then, the conversion wrought by God was not always the sudden bursting of the light of salvation into the darkness of unbelief; it was sometimes, even in heathendom, a sojourn, a journey long and arduous, that finally brought peace and salvation.

This is the story of one such convert from paganism: the church father Justin Martyr.

### *His Conversion*

Justin's surname was not really "Martyr." He received that name because he died a martyr's death. But this is not quite the point of this story, as important as it is that he sealed his confession with his blood.

Justin was actually born in Samaria, although for many years he had almost no acquaintance with the Jewish religion or with the Christian faith. He was born of a Greek father by the name of Priscus. Priscus and his wife were sent by the Roman emperor Vespasian, along with a rather large number of Roman citizens, to settle in Flavia Neopolis, a town known in Bible times as Shechem. His birth date is somewhere around the turn of the century—A.D. 100. It seems as if this colony of Roman citizens was a rather close-knit community, and contact with the surrounding people was unusual. A.D. 100 is, however, about thirty years after the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus, and very few Jews were left in the area.

Justin was an unusually brilliant student. At a fairly young age he traveled throughout the empire in search of teachings which would satisfy him. He himself tells us of these years.

Already as a teenager Justin experienced deep longings in his soul which were impossible to satisfy, but which centered in the question of man's relation to God. What is man's relation to God? How is it established? What must one expect from it? The questions would not stay down. They troubled him deeply, and the answers seemed to him more important than anything else. He would spend his life, if necessary, searching for the answers to these questions.

After his conversion, Justin understood that these questions and this deep unsatisfied longing for something he knew not what, were the work of Christ in his soul. It is doubtful that God ever brings anyone to salvation and the knowledge of Christ without creating in

him a deep longing, an unsatisfied thirst, a hunger for something which he does not have. Augustine, three centuries later, put it this way in his *Confessions*: "My soul can find no rest until it rests in Thee." This longing, finally, is born out of the knowledge of sin and the hopelessness and emptiness of one's life brought about by the hopelessness of sin. Salvation is by faith in Christ; but only the empty sinner needs Christ; only the thirsty sinner drinks at the Fountain of Living Waters; only the hungry sinner eats the Bread of Life; only the laboring and heavy-laden come to Christ to find rest for their souls. It is the general rule of the Holy Spirit to bring to faith in Christ by sovereignly showing the sinner the need for Christ. That Justin had this deep longing is not strange. That it was a part of his life for ever so many years before peace came is a remarkable providence of God.

Justin traveled widely throughout the empire in order to find those teachings which would satisfy his soul. The polytheism (worship of many gods) of paganism seemed to him foolish and absurd in the extreme and not something to satisfy the soul. He tells us of these years of wandering—wandering from land to land, but wandering spiritually as well.

Justin went to the Stoics—a school of philosophy concerned mainly with ethics. They told him that questions about a man's relation to God were relatively unimportant and he ought not to be bothered by them, at least not at first. But for Justin they were the only important thing.

He went to the Peripatetics—a school of teachers who traveled about to spread their teachings. After about three days with Justin, one such teacher would not continue his teaching until he had assurance from Justin that he would pay his tuition. It was Justin's position that if the teacher were more interested in money than in teaching, he could have nothing to say which would ease the ache in his soul.

He went to the Pythagoreans—philosophers of an ancient school who told him that they could not help him until he mastered music, astronomy, and geometry, for the truth could be learned only through a mastery of these subjects.

Then he discovered that ancient school of Greek philosophy called Platonism. He tells us about it:

[Here I shall] soon have the intuition of God, for is not this the aim of Platonic philosophy?

Under the influence of this notion it occurred to me that I would withdraw to some solitary place, far from the turmoil of the world, and there, in perfect self-collection, give myself to my own contemplations. I chose a spot by the seaside.

Justin was probably at Ephesus at this time, a city of Asia Minor near the sea, but also near a church of Christ established by Paul. While Justin was giving himself over to his meditations by the seaside, an old man met him and began a conversation with him. The old man was a Christian. Justin argued vehemently with the old man in the defense of his pet philosophy and received very little argument in return. But finally the old man curtly cut him off: “You are a mere dealer in words, but no lover of action and truth; your aim is not to be a practicer of good, but a clever disputant, a cunning sophist.” Finally, Justin put the question to the old man, “Where then is truth?” The old man replied, “Search the Scriptures, and pray that the gates of light may be opened to thee, for none can perceive and comprehend these things except God and His Christ grant them understanding.”

We are sometimes not only ashamed to witness of the truth to others, but we readily excuse our failure to witness by an appeal to the superior knowledge of those with whom we dispute. It remains, however, a striking fact of the church in the immediate post-apostolic years that the rapid spread of the gospel throughout the whole Mediterranean world was through the faithful witness of the people of God. There were few if any missionaries in these days after the great missionary labors of Paul. Only faithful and often uneducated people of God, testifying of the truth and manifesting in their lives the joy of salvation, were the means God used to spread the gospel throughout the known world. Here we have an instance of that: the learned Justin, brought to his knees in sorrow for sin by a humble and childlike old man on the seaside near Ephesus.

The importance of the influence of Christian witnessing is evident in another aspect of Justin’s conversion. He tells in one of his later writings that some of the unrest that stirred in his soul before his conversion was the unflinching faith of Christians who were tortured for their faith and put to death because they confessed Christ. He had witnessed such public spectacles from time to time and had been deeply impressed by the stalwart courage of young girls and old men. He secretly wondered what kind of strength was theirs to be faithful under such circumstances. This witness too was important.

The power of salvation is not the power of an eloquent defense of the faith; it is the power of God—even when He is pleased to use human means. Justin became a faithful servant of Christ and valiant defender of the faith.

### *His Life As a Christian*

After Justin became a Christian and was joined to the church of Christ, he spent his time traveling around the empire writing and teaching.

Schools in those days were not like schools today. A gifted and learned man (and sometimes an ungifted and stupid man) would stop in a certain town or city and begin teaching. If his instruction was considered worthwhile enough, he would soon gather some students around him who would then study under him. If he was an exceptionally able man, he might even establish a fairly permanent school that would be continued by his pupils beyond his own life.

It was something like this that Justin made his life’s work. He would not, however, attempt to establish any kind of a permanent school. Rather, he was interested in using his knowledge and ability to instruct others in the Christian faith and teach others the truths of God’s Word. Many times, when the opportunity presented itself, he would engage in public debates with defenders of pagan religions and philosophies. It was this practice that finally led to his martyrdom.

In the meantime, he also did a great deal of writing. Some of his writings have survived the ravages of time and are available today. He was one of the very first of the defenders of Christianity who used his writing ability to answer the critics. In fact, so effective were his writings that he became known in later times as an apologist (in other words, one who defended the faith).

A brief survey of Justin’s writings will give you a bit of an idea of what he did. He attacked paganism head-on by showing the utter absurdity and stupidity of worshiping twelve or fifteen gods. He made an emphatic point of it that paganism could not possibly be a religion that was true when it brought forth horrible immoralities: the Roman Empire in those days was dying from a moral rot that was eating at its vitals and that condoned every horrible sin under heaven.

Pagans, growing ever more wary and fearful of Christianity as it spread through the world and gained converts in every walk of life,

began to attack it viciously. Christians were accused of atheism for refusing to worship Caesar. They were accused of treason because they spoke of a King greater than Caesar. Strangely enough, they were accused of cannibalism because they claimed, in their celebration of the Lord's Supper, to be eating the body of the Lord and drinking His blood. They were accused of immorality because they held "love feasts," which were intended to express the communion of the saints and give material help to the poor, but which were interpreted as immoral orgies. All these foolish and wild charges Justin took the time to answer carefully and patiently.

But he also set about proving the truth of the Christian religion. He did this in especially two ways: 1) He pointed to the Old Testament prophets and showed how their prophecies were exactly fulfilled in the work and death of Christ. This was a striking argument and one which our own Belgic Confession uses in Article 5 in defense of the authority of Scripture. 2) Probably chiefly because the New Testament Scriptures, so recently written, were not widely known, he appealed to miracles as being proofs of the authentic character of the Christian faith, a purpose for which the Lord gave the power of miracles to the early church.

I suppose, however, that in one respect Justin would be considered a heretic by today's standards. It is not, I think, right to call him a heretic, for the church knew very little of the truth in the infancy of its New Testament existence. Sometimes mistakes were made through ignorance, which the church in later years would never make—at least one would think so. Justin believed, having come out of paganism himself, that the pagan philosophers possessed the germ of the truth in their hearts, which germ of the truth was Christ Himself, the Logos of John 1. Since these men possessed this germ of the truth, it was possible, Justin believed, that the best of them were saved without faith in Christ. This germ of truth came to expression in their philosophies.

This was wrong, yet there are those in our day who call themselves Reformed who teach the same thing.

### *His Martyrdom*

The time had come for Justin to earn the surname Martyr. This name would be given him by a church who held the memory of his martyrdom in reverence.

In the course of his travels Justin came twice to Rome. The second time he enraged a pagan philosopher, who, since he could not get the best of Justin in debate, determined to have him killed. So he reported to the authorities that Justin was a Christian guilty of all sorts of awful crimes. Justin was summoned before the magistrates and tried. The record of his trial stirs the blood of the child of God. The faithfulness and courage which Justin showed is sometimes overwhelming to us who know not what suffering for Christ's sake is.

But the story, written so long ago, ends like this: "Rusticus the prefect [magistrate] pronounced sentence, saying, 'Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to yield to the command of the emperor be scourged, and led away to suffer the punishment of decapitation, according to the laws.' The holy martyrs having glorified God, and having gone forth to the accustomed place, were beheaded, and perfected their testimony in the confession of the Saviour. And some of the faithful having secretly removed their bodies, laid them in a suitable place, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ having wrought along with them, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."