

Why the Need for Apologetics Arose

- A. Misunderstanding of Christian religious practices
 1. Custom of calling each other brother/sister led outsiders to believe they were involved in incestuous relationships
 2. Custom of receiving communion (Eucharist) and of referring to Jesus as a child caused outsiders to believe Christian initiation rites involved eating babies (Thyestean feasts)
 3. Some said Christians worshiped an ass. (Possibly related to Apuleius' Golden Ass, a Greek play which mocked mystery religions).

- B. Intellectual Objections
 1. Christians were viewed as uneducated and uncultured
 2. Celsus, an educated Roman, attacked Christians whose lack of culture was proved by their allowing women and craftsmen to lead them.
 3. Class prejudice – Romans viewed Christians/Jews as barbarians and their arrogance rejected that they could discover a true wisdom which was not first perceived by the Greeks or Romans. Celsus said Jesus was illegitimate son of Mary with a Roman soldier.
 4. Certain Christian doctrines seemed foolish to the Romans:
 - a. Viewing Christ's crucifixion as the will of God
 - b. Resurrection
 - c. Incarnation – Neoplatonism made it seem foolish that God would choose to come in human form.

- C. The Changing Demographic Makeup of the Church
 1. Leadership of the church shifted from Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to Gentile Christians through empire after the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD.
 2. Christianity had to be made intelligible to Greco-Roman culture/worldview since many new believers came from Gentile backgrounds.
 3. The primitive church (1st century) had expected Jesus to return quickly (parousia). When he didn't it became necessary to make their faith reasonable to the world around them.

Apologetics – “a considered legal and intellectual defense of the faith”

- Most apologists used methods of Greek rhetoric and philosophy to argue for the reasonableness of Christian faith (exceptions – Tatian and Tertullian).

- Goal of the apologists:
 - To refute accusations against Christians' morality by proving Christianity held highest ideal of ethical conduct.
 - To demonstrate Christianity was highest embodiment of principles of Greek philosophy.

- To show rationality of Christianity consistent with Greek reason.
- To communicate gospel in manner that would make sense to Roman worldview.

Early Christian Apologists

1. Earliest apologetic writing – *The Epistle to Diognetus* (c. 117-225 AD) – describes Christianity as “truest and most reasonable of all forms of philosophy.” Its argument – Christianity achieves what other philosophies only suggest.
2. Justin Martyr (c. 165 AD) – argued that Christ was the Logos, the reason which existed before creation and caused the world to come into being. He used Greek philosophy to prove Christ was fulfillment of Greek thought. He used apologetics to explain the Christian faith using concepts already familiar to the Romans.
3. Tertullian – did not agree with using Greek philosophy to defend the Christian faith; however, he was a lawyer and used legal strategies to argue for the faith.
4. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD) – taught philosophy and presented Christianity as highest fulfillment of all philosophies of ancient world. One of earliest systematic theologians in Christianity.
5. Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-254 AD) – student of Clement. Argued that the Bible had three levels of teaching:
 - a. To teach historical realities about God’s existence and plan of salvation;
 - b. To reveal moral truth about how people should act
 - c. To disclose the higher mysteries of the divine life.
 - d. This led to interpreting the Bible allegorically to obtain the deeper meanings.
 - e. Origen is sometimes viewed as the father of Christian mysticism since he applied his allegorical method to his personal relationship with Christ.