

# APOLOGETICS and the STATE

by Pastor Matt Trewhella

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A popularly held belief amongst Christians in America is that the early church had nothing to do with politics. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even a brief perusal of the writings of early churchmen known as apologists, reveals that almost all of their writings were directed towards the State. They were written to Roman government officials; to the rulers of that day.

The apologists are referred to as the apologists because they used the literary form of the dialogue and the legal form of their day known as the *apologia*. The apologetic writings were written in the second and third centuries and were designed to legitimize and defend the faith. The apologists wrote to explain Christianity to their pagan rulers and neighbors.

Their writings made a rational appeal to the pagan leaders and aimed to create an intelligent understanding of Christianity. They did not just rely on reason and nature, however. Rather, they looked to the Scriptures and declared their reasonableness to a pagan world in hopes that they might understand the Scriptures. Their writings were loaded with Scripture!

The earliest apologetic writing that we have, written about 140 A.D by Aristides, was addressed to Emperor Antoinus Pius, his sons, the Roman Senate, and the entire Roman populace. The foremost apologist of the second century was Justin Martyr. He lived between 100-165 A.D. His first apologetic, written in 150 A.D., entitled *First Apology*, was addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius. Athenagoras, whose apology, *A Plea for the Christians*, was written in 177 A.D., was addressed and presented to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Commodus. Well-known church father, Tertullian, addressed his *Apology* to the Roman governor of the province in which he resided.

Again, all this flies in the face of the popularly held belief that the early church had nothing to do with politics. The truth is they wrote to the civil magistrates of their day to convince them of the legitimacy of the Christian faith; to refute the false charges that pagan neighbors and writers leveled against Christians; declare God's Law and Gospel; and to show that in contrast to Christianity - pagan religions and state worship were foolish and sinful.

What prompted the writings of the apologists? Persecution. The early church was at first viewed by the Roman government as being a Jewish sect. Therefore the church was regarded as *religio licita* – a legal sect. Persecution was sporadic and isolated. By the beginning of the second century however, the authorities had come to see that the church was separate from Judaism and therefore was officially labeled *religio illicita* – an illegal sect. The writings of the apologists began soon after.

Given the fact that we clearly live in a post-Christian culture, I cannot stress strongly enough

how important it is for us to begin to write and think like the apologists. As the laws of the State more and more reflect an anti-Christian bias, it is important for Christians to write to the civil rulers of our day in defense of the faith. We must not ignore civil magistrates as so many in American Christendom are wont to do under the guise and false belief that – "the early church never had anything to do with politics." The early church *did* have something to do with politics. The early church did *not* ignore the civil magistrates. They wrote in order to effect public-policy, and so must we.

I can assure you the universities in America are routinely and systematically filling the minds of young people with anti-Christian dogma, creating strong anti-Christian bias in their minds. The growing anti-Christian demeanor which is prevalent in our culture today will only be bolstered by the young people graduating from America's universities in the years ahead.

The writings of the apologists not only had a profound impact upon the civil rulers and their governance, but their writings were also instrumental in seeing civil rulers and others won to Christ; attitudes towards Christianity changed; and minds made more palatable to the Law of God and the preaching of the Gospel.

It is time for Christians in America to pick up their pens – and begin to write.

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NOTE: Apologist Justin Martyr established a school in Rome for young men who were interested in winning men to Christ and defending the Christian faith.

This September Faithful Soldier School of Evangelism will conduct a 90-day training camp wherein classes and studies in Christian Apologetics are part of the curriculum and training. To learn more about this school, go to <http://www.faithfulsoldier.com>