

2.16

After the New Testament: Writings of Early Christianity

These writings shed light on the nature of Christianity just after the New Testament era:

THE DIDACHE (ca. 100 CE). The author of this writing is unknown, but it presents a summary of Christian teaching from a time period shortly after the principal writings of the New Testament. It includes instruction on basic morality, how to conduct baptisms, which days should be set aside for fasting, how to pray, how to celebrate the Eucharist, how to show hospitality to missionaries, how to distinguish true prophets from false ones, and how to appoint leaders within the community. Some early Christians (Clement of Alexandria and Origen) treated it as Scripture.

CLEMENT OF ROME (d. ca. 100 CE). Clement was bishop of Rome for the last ten to fifteen years of his life, during the time of the emperor Domitian. Traditionally, he is identified as the author of a letter to the church in Corinth (called 1 Clement) that appears to have been written around 96 CE, which may make it earlier than some New Testament books. The letter was read as Scripture in some parts of the early church, and it continues to be valued by

scholars as an authentic witness to Christian thought at the end of the first century.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (ca. 35–110 CE). Ignatius became the bishop of the church in Antioch, where both Paul and Peter had been active a generation earlier, and where the Gospel of Matthew is thought to have been written just twenty to thirty years prior to Ignatius's own works. Ignatius was arrested and taken to Rome, where he was martyred in the arena (apparently killed by lions). On the way to his death, he wrote seven letters to various churches; they are revealing of Christian thought and life in the early second century.

EUSEBIUS (ca. 260–340 CE). Eusebius served as bishop of Caesarea in the days after the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine. He wrote *Ecclesiastical History*, the first definitive history of the Christian church up to that point. It records the current traditions of the church regarding the lives of the apostles and other early leaders, along with stories of Roman persecutions of the church. Eusebius does not always distinguish between reliable tradition and legendary material, but he does preserve lengthy quotations from earlier authors whose works would otherwise be lost to us.