

THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS

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It is a mistake to think that after the stirring events recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, nothing more happened in the history of the Christian Church until Constantine became the first Christian Emperor. In between came a period of about three hundred years of active, energetic spreading of the Gospel. This, however, was not simply a period of steady progress. There were advances and regressions. There were great persecutions to be met, and times of peace and ease in which the Church grew luxury-loving and slothful and had to be purged again and again by the fire of renewed persecution.

The earliest Christian writings, aside from those contained in the Bible, are called "the Apostolic Fathers" to indicate that they were written by men who may have known the Apostles. Most of these writers are to us little known, and several of their books are anonymous. There is not a great deal of material of this sort that has been preserved, and so most of it is contained in one volume of the series of the Ante-Nicene Fathers.

The volume begins with the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthian church. Clement writes on behalf of the church of Rome to the church of Corinth. His letter shows that many of the faults for which Paul criticized the Corinthians in his epistles were being repeated at this time, about fifty years later, and needed similar admonition. According to tradition, Clement was a bishop of the church at Rome, but very little else is known about him. There have been various conflicting legends as to his early history. From his letter we can see that he was a man of deep