



# Messenger Project Newsletter

## The Messenger

messengerproject.com

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Volume 4, Issue 7

July 2006

A NONPROFIT CORPORATION PROMOTING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE ARTS

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## Messenger Notes

**Lionel De Leon's** performance of *These Words (1 Thessalonians 4:1)* with Huntington Beach's **Community Bible Church** worship team was delayed until July 30<sup>th</sup>. The CBC congregation recently celebrated the church's 100 year anniversary with hymns on piano and organ. Former pastors were invited to share stories about the church. The congregation also hosted a BBQ and a concert by the **Daryl Smith Band**.

The May issue of *The Messenger* (Numbers in the Bible) mistakenly identifies Noah as spending 3 days in the belly of a fish (the correct person was Jonah).

## Early Church Fathers Part Two

**Hermas** (?-?) was an early Christian mentioned in the New Testament (Ro 16:4), credited with writing the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a book of five visions given to a slave. Irenaeus and Tertullian cited his writing as scripture and it was bound with the New Testament in the *Codex Sinaiticus*. It is believed to be written between 88-97 A.D. and there is debate over who wrote the book. Little is known or written about Hermas, the man. *The Shepherd of Hermas* was a valuable book to early Christians with lessons for righteous living: "for the thoughts of a righteous man should be righteous. For by thinking righteously his character is established in the heavens, and he has the Lord merciful to him in every business. But such as entertain wicked thoughts in their minds are bringing upon themselves death and captivity."

**Athenagoras of Athens** (133-190) was a philosopher who wrote *Apology for the Christians* and a *Treatise on the Resurrection*. His *Apology* was a carefully written plea for justice to Christians (on philosophical grounds) to Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus. His *Treatise* defended the doctrine of the resurrection.

**Clement of Alexandria** (150–215) was a Christian Apologist, missionary theologian to the Greek world and a distinguished teacher at the Church of Alexandria. Clement's writings include *Protreptikos* ("Exhortation"), *Paidagogos* ("The Instructor") and *Stromateis* ("Miscellanies"). Clement emphasized the importance of philosophy for the fullness of Christian knowledge and turned church tradition into a scientific dogmatic theology. He was forced to flee Alexandria during the persecution of the Christians by the Roman emperor Severus in 201.

**Tertullian** (155–220) was an early Christian theologian who devoted himself to literary pursuits as an apologist for Christianity, a polemicist against heretics and an essayist on Christian morals, prayer and devotion. Tertullian was the first great writer of Latin Christianity and is known as the "father of the Latin Church." He introduced the word "trinity" into the Christian vocabulary and the terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament." Tertullian left the Church of Rome later in life and joined a heretical sect, the Montanists (a more disciplined form of Christianity). Because the Montanists were not strict enough for him, he later founded his own sect, which lasted until the 5<sup>th</sup> century in Africa.

**Origen** (185-254) was the most influential theologian and biblical scholar of the early Greek church. His writings include *First Principles*, a work on doctrines, and *Contra Celsum*, a vindication of Christianity against pagan attacks. Origen was imprisoned and tortured by the emperor Decius during the persecution of Christians. His writings are important as being among the first serious intellectual attempts to describe Christianity.

**Cyprian** (200-258) was a theologian and the Bishop of Carthage. He went into hiding during the Roman persecution of Christians in 250 and regained his authority in 251 at a council of bishops (which allowed apostate Christians to return to the church). A new persecution under the emperor Valerian in 257 led to his eventual execution and martyrdom. His most important work is *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, where he extols the importance of the church: "He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for

*his mother . . . he who gathereth elsewhere than in the Church scatters the Church of Christ... nor is there any other home to believers but the one Church."*

**Athanasius of Alexandria** (298-373) was a bishop who is counted as one of the four Great Doctors of the Eastern Church. Protestant churches point to him as the father of the canon, because he is the first person to identify the same 27 books of the New Testament that are in use today. He is also cited as being the founder of theological concepts like a "just war" and the Inquisition. Athanasius backed up his theological views with the use of force. Along with the common method of excommunicating, he used beatings, intimidations, kidnappings and imprisonment to silence his theological opponents. He justified his tactics by claiming that he was saving all future Christians from hell. Athanasius wrote several treatises and was the chief defender of the Nicene Creed. In his *Against the Gentiles—On the Incarnation*, he affirms and explains that Jesus was both God and Man.

**Augustine of Hippo** (354-430) was one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. Many Protestants consider him to be one of the fountainheads of Reformation teachings on salvation and grace. Augustine was also a believer in the use of force against heretics and non-believers. He fused the New Testament with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy. His masterpiece is *The City of God*, which promotes a religious philosophy of predestination. In his *Confessions*, he recounts his reckless youth and his conversion to Christianity in 386.

Early church fathers forged the foundation of Christianity in spite of Roman persecution and the proliferation of heretical sects. The Nicene Creed was created in 325 to clearly define Jesus Christ and clarify Christian beliefs in response to Gnosticism and paganism. Likewise, the Bible was officially canonized in 451 as a means to officially identify Holy Scripture (but the gospels and epistles were already being read in the churches).

Next month I will continue my chronological summary of influential Christian theologians and church leaders.