

# Christian Apologists



The term comes from the Greek word *apologeomai*, which means “to speak in defense of.”

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christian writers defended the teachings of the Bible against criticisms by pagan, Jewish, and atheist writers:

- Against the *Gnostics*, the Apologists held, in the language of the Council of Chalcedon, that Jesus was both “truly God and truly man,” that He was not one or the other. They also taught that His human body was real, and not an illusion. Finally, they insisted that Jesus’ divine and human natures were united, and not separate.
- Against the *pagans*, the Apologists insisted that Christians made good citizens, because they were chaste, honest, and prayed for their rulers.
- Against the *Jews*, they insisted that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament millennial prophecies (see esp. Isaiah 53), and that they still respected the books of the Old Testament as being God’s Word, although the ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament were no longer binding.

## **Augustine** (354-430 AD)

Perhaps the most famous apologist was Augustine. One of his most famous works was the *City of God*, written to defend Christianity in the light of pagans blaming Christianity for the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 AD.

- Augustine said that worship of pagan deities did not stop the Gauls from sacking Rome in 390 BC, nor Hannibal from sacking Italy after the Battle of Cannae (216 BC). And so Augustine stated that if you aren’t going to blame pagan deities for Rome’s disasters before the Romans became Christian, you couldn’t blame the God of the Bible for the sack of Rome in 410.
- The basic theme of the *City of God* was that there were two human communities in history—those who serve their own fleshly desires (the city of man), and those who serve others in humility and forgiveness (the city of God).
- Augustine held that there could never be any peace inside the city of man, because it was full of people who would battle each other for power and wealth, and that conflict was inherent in this city—whether through quarrels, litigation, or foreign or domestic wars. Only within the city of God, could people have tranquility. And so Augustine turned the pagans’ charges against themselves, saying that Rome could have no peace unless it acted according to Christian principles.
- Finally, by divorcing the Romans’ view of history from the glory of Rome itself, he helped give the people a new vision to strive for, instead of to complain that their empire had fallen.