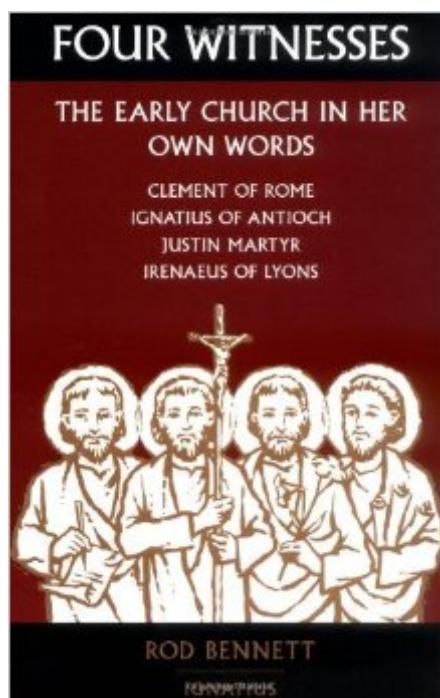


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Four Witnesses: The Early Church In Her Own Words



Synopsis

What was the early Church like? Contrary to popular belief, Rod Bennett shows there is a reliable way to know. Four ancient Christian writers--four witnesses to early Christianity --left us an extensive body of documentation on this vital subject, and this book brings their fascinating testimony to life for modern believers. With all the power and drama of a gripping novel, this book is a journey of discovery of ancient and beautiful truths through the lives of four great saints of the early Church--Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons.

Book Information

Paperback: 343 pages

Publisher: Ignatius Press (March 1, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0898708478

ISBN-13: 978-0898708479

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (102 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #58,942 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 inÂ Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Biographies > Saints #71 inÂ Books > History > World > Religious > General #117 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > History

Customer Reviews

I have been meaning for several years now to delve into the writings of the early church fathers -- those Christian pastors from the first few centuries after Christ, some of whom learned the Christian faith directly from one or more of Jesus's apostles. However, I have been somewhat daunted by most of the existing collections of the early church fathers, in that their writings can often make for slow reading, and that many of the existing collections are quite large. But I found "Four Witnesses" by Rod Bennett to be a terrific introduction to these writings. As its name implies, "Four Witnesses" focuses mainly on the lives and writings of four particular church fathers, all of whom lived prior to 200 A.D.: Clement, the fourth bishop of Rome; Ignatius, bishop of Antioch who was martyred in Rome in the early second century; Justin Martyr, a Christian philosopher who was one of the first apologists for the Christian faith; and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul (modern France) who wrote extensively in refutation of Gnosticism. Bennett blends his own narrative text with numerous excerpts from the writings of these four men (plus excerpts from some other patristic

writings) to tell a story of the Christian church throughout much of its first two centuries of existence. Central to this story are the persecutions which were ordered by various Roman emperors, and the constant struggle against other competing quasi-Christian belief systems. By quoting these "four witnesses" extensively, Bennett allows us to see first-hand what these early Christians believed, the challenges they faced, and how they responded to those challenges. The result is something that is difficult to achieve: a historical account that is compelling and interesting to read, while still containing numerous lengthy quotes from primary sources. There are some places in the narrative text where Bennett takes artistic license, such as when he gives a detailed account of Irenaeus receiving the news of Polycarp's martyrdom, even though such details have been lost to history. However, such instances involve only minor details. Bennett has done extensive research with the goal of portraying all of the major events in his narrative as accurately as possible. In fact, I heard a radio interview with the author in which he said that he spent an entire year doing little else besides reading the writings of the early church fathers, and that "Four Witnesses" tells the story that gradually coalesced in his mind as he read more and more of these eyewitness accounts of the early church. "Four Witnesses" also contains an afterword which consists of an abbreviated account of the author's conversion from Protestant Christianity to Catholic Christianity, which came as a result of his research into the early church fathers. The book also has an appendix which gives additional quotes from the church fathers in support of various Catholic beliefs, in order to demonstrate that these beliefs date back to the earliest centuries of Christianity. Though I agree with the points that Bennett makes in these additional sections, I almost wish that he had left them out, because I am afraid that they could turn off some non-Catholic Christians who otherwise might find this book both enjoyable and informative. However, these sections do contain some valuable information, and the reader is free to skip them, so it is a tough call. In conclusion, I would recommend this book to anyone who is looking for an entertaining and readable introduction to the writings of the early church fathers.

This book is an awesome story! I finished this book in a short time, finding the story very compelling. It felt more like I was reading a novel than some dry history book. Rod Bennett does a wonderful job setting the historical stage for each character, revealing the conflicts and emotions that they must have faced. Bennett reveals what early Christians believed and how they endured despite persecution, leading to the growth of the Church. "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians" wrote Tertullian. Every Christian will find the story of these witnesses inspiring, and I highly recommend this book to anyone.

The best intro to the early church available. This former Protestant author takes the writings of four of the early church fathers and builds an engaging narrative out of them. Even for those familiar with some early church writings, this book fills in the contemporary context which is very useful. For those unfamiliar with the early church fathers, this book would be truly eye-opening. The author also includes a chapter on his own journey from Protestantism to Catholicism. In fact the book almost seems to be written with Protestants in mind. I would suggest this book to everyone from those who never heard of the early church fathers to those who recognize all the writings cited in the book.

I've only recently rediscovered the Catholic part of me that was lost 25 years ago. One can buy the individual books of the early Church Fathers and go through them and learn much. Or, if one does not have the time or the hundreds of dollars one might spend, they can purchase this excellent book. It is different in that Mr. Bennett weaves in much of the high points of what these four fathers wrote in a way that provides background and tells a story. Will I keep buying the books of the individual church fathers, yes. But, I whole heartedly recommend this book. There is also an excellent little section in the back that quotes the early fathers on various topics that are talked about and still debated by the protestants in this day.

This is undoubtedly one of the coolest books on Church history available anywhere - it's so far away from the deadly dry, impenetrable historical prose of modern university scholars. It's obvious this guy has done his homework (copious footnotes everywhere and careful, aesthetically-pleasing structure of the narrative), but what sets it apart is the fact that you can actually enjoy reading it - enjoy the stories of these interesting historical figures as they unfold. Hear them speak in their own voices; see them travel through the countries they lived in; feel their pain and joy as they delight in the struggle to help the baby Church thrive. Highly recommended - especially to anyone curious about what the early Church taught and believed, but didn't think it was possible to really know for sure...

This book is wonderful for people of all faiths. Being a new Catholic convert, and previous Lutheran, I found the writings of the four Fathers to be very helpful in explaining many tenets of the faith. Why does the Church believe such and such, where does that belief fit in with the Bible, how the Bible was developed from early beliefs, why does the Church hold such staunch opinions on certain topics - these questions and more are all answered in the early writings of the Church. In

studying these early writings, one comes to question many of our modern interpretations as not being truly apostolic and therefore, not truly teachings from Jesus. This book reads like a novel, but is not fluffy. I highly recommend this book to any one looking for answers to what the early Chruch taught and believed. Inspiring and occasionally unsettling, this book has taught me much.

A look at four of the earliest Christian Fathers through the eyes of a terrific writer, a great storyteller, and a good researcher! I can't recommend it highly enough!

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