

During the second century a great many heresies developed in the Christian Church. Some of these were so near to Christianity that it was hard to recognize their divergence. Others were so distant from it that almost the only thing they had in common was use of the name of Christ. Most of these groups we link together under the term "Gnostic," from the Greek "gnosis" (knowledge), because they claimed to have a superior knowledge or a deeper understanding than could be possessed by simple Christians who merely followed the Bible. For a time it looked as if the Gnostic movements would completely overwhelm orthodox Christianity but in the end all the various shades and types of Gnosticism disappeared and orthodox Christianity remained.

Great writers like Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian wrote extensive works against Gnostic heresy, and it is from these works that we learn the many variations in the often grotesque and mythological views of the Gnostics. Yet we find in them the germ of many of the philosophical systems and theories that today have been raised up in opposition to historic Christianity. The way the Gnostic movement completely disappeared in the end, should give us some hope that many of the far-flung types of opposition to Christianity today will similarly disappear, if our Lord tarries.

One of the writers that is found to thrill the Christian reader is Tertullian. He was a Latin-speaking lawyer in North Africa who was converted to the Lord. His writings show careful analytical thought regarding Christian doctrine. Many of the Latin terms that he invented or selected to express the ideas of Christian doctrine have become the official terms of all subsequent theology. Yet, Tertullian combined with his careful analytic thought a passionate emotion of utterance and a deep, stirring feeling about the great issues of the Faith. Such expressions as "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,"