

7 The letter to Diognetus

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7.1 Introduction to 'Diognetus'

7.1.1 Background of the letter

Why was this letter written?

Together read and discuss: Diognetus 1 (Introduction)

7.1.2 History of documents of the letter

The text of this letter was found in *one* manuscript, dating from the 13th or 14th century, called *Codex Argentoratensis Graecus ix*. The Codex contained five treatises ascribed to Justin Martyr, with our



Letter to Diognetus in fifth place; it also contained contemporary material of the 13th or 14th century. Its history is obscure, although it is known, from his own annotation on the back of the codex, that it belonged to the German scholar of the Hebrew language, Johann Reuchlin (picture, died in 1522). Apart from a brief appearance about 1560 at the monastery of Maursmünster in Alsace (France), it vanishes from sight until 1793–1795. At that time it came to the municipal library of the French city Strasbourg (whose ancient name, Argentoratum, gave its title to the manuscript), and remained there until 24 August 1870, when it was burned during the German attack on the city. We are lucky that good scholars had made copies and had the Codex reprinted before it was destroyed! The earliest of those is a copy made by Mr B. Haus (1580).

It seems that the text breaks off at 10:8, and that after this an unrelated text is added.

> **Read together** Diognetus 10:7-8 and 11:1.

> **Note** the break in text.

Maybe the copyist made a mistake and forgot the end of Diognetus and the beginning of another document? If we compare the goals of Diognetus from his first chapter, and what he writes in 2-10, then he seems to have covered most ground, so probably we do not miss much of the original.

7.1.3 Importance of the letter in the early church

Diognetus belongs to the *genre* of Christian Apologists. His focus was not on educating the church, but on educating the world - like Justin Martyr (d. 165), Athenagoras (ca. 170-180), Aristides (ca. 145) and others.

7.1.4 Who wrote the letter? To whom?

We do not know who wrote the letter. People mentioned are Hippolytus of Rome, Theophilus of Antioch, Pantaenus of Alexandria and others but all this is speculation. And who Diognetus was, is also unknown.

7.1.5 Date of the letter

Suggestions range from 117 to 313AD. Between 150 and 225 seems most likely.

7.2 Content of Letter to Diognetus

7.2.1 How does the author argue against pagan idolatry?

> **Read in groups:** Diognetus 2:1-10.

> **Discuss** in your group how Diognetus discredits pagan idolatry. Why did these Roman pagans hate the Christians?

7.2.2 How does the author argue against the Jewish religion?

> **Read together** Diognetus 3:1-4:6 and > **Discuss in class.**

> **Discuss:** Do you think the writer is a Jew or a pagan from birth?

7.2.3 How does the author describe Christians?

- > **Read individually** Diognetus 5:1-6:10 and > **List** the marks of a Christian.
- > **Discuss in class.**

7.2.4 The Gospel according to the letter to Diognetus

> **Read in groups:**

- a. Diognetus 7
- b. Diognetus 8
- c. Diognetus 9

- > **Discuss** how Diognetus views the Gospel.

7.2.5 How the letter invited Diognetus to become a Christian

> **Read together** Diognetus 10 and

> **Together answer** the following questions:

- How does the letter to Diognetus present God?
- How does the letter summarize being a Christian?
- What arguments does the letter use for Diognetus to become a Christian?

7.2.6 The Logos and the Trinity in this letter to Diognetus

Diognetus 11:1-12:9 is most likely not written by the same person who wrote the first 10 chapters of the Letter to Diognetus. The well-developed Logos-theology seems well developed.

> **Read together** Diognetus 11:1-8 and

- > **Note** what this chapter says about the Logos and its relationship to God.