

## ***Authority Over the Demonic in the Early Church (AD 100-400): Examining the Historical Approach of the Early Church Fathers Over and Against the Demonic***

### **Full book**

*Spiritual Warfare in the Early Church: The History of  
Demonic Activity Among the Ante-Nicene Church  
Fathers and Beyond*

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**Thesis:** Many of the early church fathers modeled a biblical understanding of the authority of the individual believer and corporate church over and against Satan and his demons. The approach of the early church fathers is biblically consistent while condemning human-crafted techniques in spiritual warfare.

- Does demonic activity, possession, and exorcism cease with the apostolic age or continue into the early church?
- If it continues into the early church, what is the approach of the early church to authority and is it consistent with the biblical model from the apostolic age?
- What can we learn about biblical ecclesiology with the presence of the office of “exorcist” in the early church?

“numerous accounts of demonization and exorcism as well as descriptions of the deceptive work of demons in pagan religions fill the writings of the church fathers.”  
(Arnold 2008)

The focus of this research is on the main characters, councils, and confessions that reflect and represent the general theological considerations of spiritual warfare during the early church age.

**Clement of Rome** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/clement-of-rome](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/clement-of-rome)

- Clement of Rome, or Pope Clement I, is believed to have been a disciple of Peter and a co-worker with Paul (Phil 4:3; AD 57) and one of the first leaders of the church.
- Clement seemed aware of spiritual warfare and called for Christians to actively engage in the battles they found themselves in.

**Mathetes** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/mathetes](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/mathetes)

- Mathetes “was possibly a catechumen of St. Paul or of one of the apostle's associates” and “is, perhaps, the first of the apologists.”

- The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus (c. AD 130) - In chapter eight, “The Miserable State of Men Before the Coming of the World,” the reader might expect to find a reference to Satan or his demons, but does not.

**Polycarp** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/polycarp](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/polycarp)

- Polycarp (AD 69-155) was a disciple of John and other apostles, in contact with many eyewitnesses of Christ, and an early leader of the Christian church.
- Polycarp mentions very little concerning spiritual warfare, yet reveals that there is significance in understanding that all humanity is allied with either Christ or the devil.

**Ignatius** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/ignatius](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/ignatius)

- Ignatius was an early church father (AD 30-107) linked with the Apostle John, Eusebius, and Polycarp.
- Ignatius reveals his understanding that there are real attacks of Satan at both an individual (believer) and corporate (church) level.

**Barnabas** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/barnabas](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/barnabas)

- The Epistle of Barnabas is a writing whose authorship is circumspect in many ways.
- This letter does possess some early spiritual warfare references however, comparing the pre-salvific state of being a “habitation of demons” compared with how believers become a spiritual temple of God.

**Justin Martyr** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/justin-martyr](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/justin-martyr)

- Justin Martyr (AD 110-65), a Gentile born in Samaria, was a philosopher who came to Christ upon witnessing the “extraordinary fearlessness which the Christians displayed in the presence of death.”
- In the arena of spiritual warfare, Justin Martyr provides the most significant insight into the Christian understanding of spiritual warfare in the early church.

**Irenæus** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/irenaeus](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/irenaeus)

- Irenæus (AD 120-202) was a young leader in the church, a student under Polycarp, who quickly rose against the Gnostic heresies.
- Although Irenæus’ focus is principally on directly addressing the Gnostic heresies, he indicates an understanding that heresies derive from the devil.

**Hermas** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/hermas](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/hermas)

- The Pastor of Hermas (c. AD 160) was “one of the most popular books, if not the most popular book, in the Christian church during the second, third, and fourth centuries.
- Apart from Justin Martyr, the writer of *The Pastor of Hermas* provides the most depth & understanding to seeing the spiritual warfare beliefs & practices of the early church.

**Tatian** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/tatian](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/tatian)

- Tatian (AD 110-72) was an Assyrian believer and a student of Justin Martyr who eventually lived in Antioch
- In his Address of Tatian to the Greeks, he depicts demons in a frenzied attack against mankind, attacking through attempts to pervert their minds.

**Tertullian** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/tertullian](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/tertullian)

- Tertullian (c.AD 145-220) was an early and extensively published author in the church
- Tertullian's description of exorcism is consistent with an emphasis on the power of Christ's name with minimal focus on human power techniques.

**Minucius Felix** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/minucius-felix](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/minucius-felix)

- Minucius Felix was a contemporary of Tertullian who penned Octavius (c.AD 210) as a feigned dialogue between a pagan and a Christian
- In his writing, he describes the work of demons at several points, describing both their possession and mental attacks. He also describes in detail how the demons are connected with idols, statues, mediums, oracles, and predictive signs

**Origen** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/origen](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/origen)

- Origen (AD 185–254) was an early leader of the church at Alexandria, helping to develop many of the foundational doctrines of the early church. Although some of his hypotheses would later be exposed as incorrect and heretical, his writings and teachings are of immense value to understanding the theology of the early church.
- Origen describes a renunciation of the devil in baptism, how Christians of the day powerfully performed exorcisms of both humans and animals, and also directly connects false religions and their worship in idols, altars, and temples to direct demonic worship

**Cyprian** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/cyprian](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/cyprian)

- Cyprian (AD 200-258) was the “spiritual son and pupil of Tertullian” but also known as the “Ignatius of the West
- He argues that as Satan's schemes are thwarted, such as when Christians leave false religions, he attacks in new ways through infiltration and division. Cyprian specifically describes these enemy attacks as occurring through “flattering and deceiving” and by Satan equipping his own ministers to invade the Christian church

**Eusebius** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/eusebius](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/eusebius)

- Eusebius of Cæsarea (c.AD 260-340) was especially known for his historical accounts of the early church.[1] His writings offer early and extensive accounts of the office of exorcist when referencing the existence of “52 exorcists” during the time of a Roman bishop named Cornelius (c.AD 250)
- Novatian's exorcism and baptism. The office of exorcist. Matrydom of exorcists. Demonic sacrifices. Apphianus: Gospel proclamation in face of demonic worship. Demonic immorality and Constantine's fidelity.



**Athanasius** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/athanasius-and-cyрил](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/athanasius-and-cyрил)

**Cyрил** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/athanasius-and-cyрил](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/athanasius-and-cyрил)

- Athanasius of Alexandria (c. AD 298-373) was an early church father especially known for his role in the Arian controversy at the Council of Nicæa (AD 325).[1] He makes particular reference to the symbol of Christ's cross as a form of power against demons.
- Cyрил of Jerusalem (c. AD 313-386) also makes similar references to the power of the sign of the cross. Cyрил mentions "exorcised oil" as "a charm to drive away every trace of hostile influence"

**Ambrose** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/ambrose](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/ambrose)

- Ambrose (AD 340-397) was an archbishop of Milan, referred to by Augustine as "a faithful teacher of the Church, and even at the risk of his life a most strenuous defender of Catholic truth."
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**Augustine** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/augustine](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/augustine)

- Augustine (AD 354-430) "the greatest & most influential of all the Christian Fathers."
- In his message, On the Creed: a Sermon to the Catechumens, he references the ongoing process of exorcism, stating that "even little children undergo exsufflation, exorcism; to drive away from them the power of the devil their enemy, which deceived man that it might possess mankind."

**John Chrysostom** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/john-chrysostom](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/john-chrysostom)

- John Chrysostom (AD 347-404) is argued to be "the greatest pulpit orator and commentator of the Greek Church, and still deservedly enjoys the highest honor in the whole Christian world."
- Chrysostom continues to elaborate on the devil and his demons, explaining that this doctrine because it "is full of security for you. For he is an enemy and a foe, and it is a great security to know clearly, the tactics of your enemies."

**The First Seven Ecumenical Councils** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/the-seven-ecumenical-councils](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/the-seven-ecumenical-councils)

**The Protestant Reformation Forward** - [www.spiritualwarfare.blog/the-protestant-reformation-forward](http://www.spiritualwarfare.blog/the-protestant-reformation-forward)

**CONCLUSION:** This survey of the historical writings, characters, and confessions of the Christian Church reinforces the importance of having an historical understanding of spiritual warfare. Power encounters through exorcism are mentioned throughout this church history. The greatest emphasis of early church writings is not on the power and responsibility of the priest or church leader, but on the power of Christ and the responsibility of the believer. Regardless of the frequency and consistency of spiritual warfare accounts in history, these experiences, teachings, and theologies must always be examined in light of Scripture.