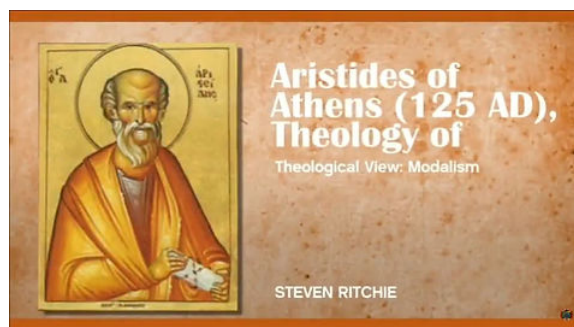




GLOBAL IMPACT MINISTRIES

A Defense of the Apostolic
Christian Faith

ARISTEDES OF ATHENS (125 AD), THEOLOGY OF



ARISTEDES OF ATHENS (125 AD), THEOLOGY OF Theological view: Modalism

STEVEN RITCHIE

Aristides of Athens was an early Christian writer who wrote a letter called "The Apology of Aristides" to the Roman Emperor Hadrian in about 125 AD in defense of the beliefs and practices of the early second century Christians. There is valid historical evidence to prove that we have the actual Apology written by Aristides to the Roman Emperor Hadrian. Robert M. Grant commented on the attestation to Aristides in "The Anchor Bible Dictionary," vol. 1, p. 382):

"According to Eusebius, both Quadratus and Aristides presented Christian apologies to the Emperor Hadrian at Athens, probably in 124 C.E. Aristides was unknown to scholars for many years, though his work survived in at least two 4th-century papyri (POxy. 15: 1778). The Mechitarists of Venice published an Armenian fragment in 1878, and in 1889 J. R. Harris discovered the Artwork said to resemble Aristides of Athens. Sculpture of the Roman Emperor Hadrian whole apology in a 7th-century Syriac manuscript at St. Catherine's on Sinai. J. A. Robinson immediately found that the Greek apology had been used for a lengthy section of the Greek novel Barlaam and Josaphat, ascribed to John of Damascus. The text can be reconstructed from the last two witnesses and confirmed by the fragmentary papyri." All we know about Aristides is from his brief written Apology to the Roman Emperor Hadrian and from the scanty information written about him from Eusebius (who lived about 200 years after Aristides) and Jerome (who lived about 300 years after Aristides).

Jerome seems to merely repeat the words of Eusebius another one hundred years later so we must assume that Eusebius somehow obtained accurate historical information about Aristides from oral tradition.

Eusebius stated that Aristides, like Justin (who wrote his first Apology later), was a Greek philosopher who continued to wear his philosophers garb after becoming a Christian.

However, unlike Justin, there is no internal evidence within the Apology of Aristides to suggest that Aristides promoted Greek Philosophy; nor is there any evidence to suggest that Aristides praised Greek philosophy along with Christianity like Justin did later. In his Apology, Aristides clearly denounced the pagan gods of Greek mythology along with the false gods of the Barbarians while praising the beliefs and practices of the early Christians. Eusebius, Constantine's fourth century historian, alleged that Aristides delivered his letter to the Emperor Hadrian when he visited Athens around 125 AD. Artwork said to resemble Eusebius. THE APOLOGY OF ARISTIDES All-powerful Caesar Titus Hadrianus Antoninus, venerable and merciful, from Marcianus Aristides, an Athenian philosopher.

SECTION 1 (I) I say, then, that God is not born, not made, an ever-abiding nature without beginning and without end, immortal, perfect, and incomprehensible ... Form he has none [Aristides wrote nothing of an alleged God the Son who later Trinitarians say pre-existed in a pre-incarnate "form of God" according to Phil. 2:6] Ignorance and forgetfulness are not in his nature, for He is altogether wisdom and understanding [Aristides links the wisdom and understanding of God Personified in Proverbs 8 as an attribute of God Himself (Job 12:13)]; and in Him stands fast all that exists.

SECTION 2 (II) The Christians, then, trace the beginning of their religion from Jesus the Messiah; and he is named the Son of God Most High. And it is said (the majority of the Christians said) that God came down from heaven, and from a Hebrew virgin assumed and clothed himself with flesh; and the Son of God lived in a daughter of man. This is taught in the gospel ... and you also if you will read therein, may perceive the power which belongs to it. This Jesus, then, was born of the race of the Hebrews; and he had twelve disciples in order that the purpose of his incarnation might in time be accomplished. But he himself was pierced by the Jews, and he died and was buried; and they say that after three days he rose and ascended to heaven.

Thereupon these twelve disciples went forth throughout the known parts of the world, and kept showing his greatness with all modesty and uprightness. And hence also those of the present day who believe that preaching are called Christians, and they are become famous.

SECTION 13 (XIII) God is one in His nature. A single essence is proper to Him, since He is uniform in His nature and His essence [Origen and other Semi-Arians like him later said that the Son has "an essence of his own" (Origen's Commentary of the Gospel of John, book 1, chapter 23)]

SECTION 15 (XV) But the Christians, O King, while they went about and made search, have found the truth; and as we learned from their writings, they have come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations. For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and of earth, in whom and from whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come.

Wherefore they do not commit adultery nor fornication, nor bear false witness, nor embezzle what is held in pledge, nor covet what is not theirs. They honor father and mother, and show kindness to those near to them; and whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols (made) in the image of man; and whatsoever they would not that others should do unto them, they do not to others; and of the food which is consecrated to idols they do not eat, for they are pure. And their oppressors they appease (lit: comfort) and make them their friends; they do good to their enemies; and their women, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest; and their men keep themselves from every unlawful union and from all uncleanness, in the hope of a recompense to come in the other world.

Further, if one or other of them have bondmen and bondwomen or children, through love towards them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction. They do not worship strange gods, and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God.

And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them. Every morning and every hour they give thanks and praise to God for His loving-kindness toward them; and for their food and their drink they offer thanksgiving to Him. And if any righteous man among them passes from the world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God; and they escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another near. And when a child has been born to one of them, they give thanks to God; and if moreover it happen to die in childhood, they give thanks to God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins [Aristides wrote that the earliest Christians believed that little children were not of an age of accountability for their sins]. And further if they see that any one of them dies in his ungodliness or in his sins, for him they grieve bitterly, and sorrow as for one who goes to meet his doom.

SECTION 16 (XVI) Such, O King, is the commandment of the law of the Christians, and such is their manner of life ... we learned that they alone come near to a knowledge of the truth [Unlike Justin, Aristides said nothing about those who followed Greek philosophy as being "believers" (before Christ) and having "the seed of the implanted word (logos)" like Justin wrote about 20 years later]. And they do not proclaim in the ears of the multitude the kind deeds they do, but are careful that no one should notice them; and they conceal their giving just as he who finds a treasure and conceals it. And they strive to be righteous as those who expect to behold their Messiah, and to receive from Him with great glory the promises made concerning them. And as for their words and their precepts, O King, and their glorying in their worship, and the hope of earning according to the work of each one of them their recompense which they look for in another world,-you may learn about these from their writings. It is enough for us to have shortly informed your Majesty concerning the conduct and the truth of the Christians. For great indeed, and wonderful is their doctrine to him who will search into it and reflect upon it. And verily, this is a new people, and there is something divine (lit: "a divine admixture") in the midst of them.

SECTION 17 (XVII) But the Christians are just and good, and the truth is set before their eyes, and their spirit is longsuffering; and, therefore, though they know the error of these (the Greeks), and are persecuted by them [Aristides wrote nothing about the alleged truth of the Greek philosophers as being worthy for Christians to follow as Justin did], they bear and endure it; and for the most part they have compassion on them, as men who are destitute of knowledge. And on their side, they offer prayer that these may repent of their error; and when it happens that one of them has repented, he is ashamed before the Christians of the works which were done by him; and he makes confession to God, saying, I did these things in ignorance. And he purifies his heart, and his sins are forgiven him, because he committed them in ignorance in the former time, when he used to blaspheme and speak evil of the true knowledge of the Christians. And assuredly the race of the Christians is more blessed than all the men who are upon the face of the earth. ... So shall they appear (all humanity) before the awful judgment which through Jesus the Messiah is destined to come upon the whole human race.

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