

# Preface

THE CONCERN OF THIS book is the concept of death in second-century Christian thought. It addresses the question of how second-century Christians understood death as evidenced by their writings as well as their attitudes towards the dead. The need for the study is the lack of adequate treatment of the subject of death in this crucial period in the history of Christianity. The discussion focuses on the works of the earliest second-century Fathers (the Apostolic Fathers), the apologists, and the polemicists.

The thesis of this work is that second-century Christians carefully selected, adapted, and utilized existing views on death from the Old Testament, Greco-Roman culture, and the documents that eventually became the New Testament to present a distinctively Christian concept of death commensurate with their level of progressive revelation. This selective adaptation involved rejection of some ideas, modification of others, as well as reinterpretation of others. They reinterpreted Old Testament views of death to reflect the new situation of Jesus' post-resurrection, arguing for a paradoxical view of death that sees it, on the one hand, as a reality to be contended with, and, on the other hand, as a defeated foe whose presence does not stop the believer's fellowship either with Christ or with other believers.

A review of relevant literature reveals two competing views concerning the scholarly understanding of death in second-century Christian thought. On the one hand, conceptions of death in this period are a complete contrast to Greek concepts of death. On the other hand, it is argued that views of death in second-century Christian thought show the evidence of complete Hellenization of the Greek concepts. Although

there is some truth in both of these views, both cannot be entirely true because they are opposites.

An examination of the relevant Old Testament, New Testament, and Greco-Roman data reveals that there are significant conceptual similarities (terms and metaphors) with the second-century understanding of death. However, an examination of the relevant second-century writings and practices reveals significant conceptual differences as well on the subject of death. This study proposes that these similarities and differences can be accounted for on the principle of a critical adaptation, modification, and the utilization of existing views on death to present a Christian view of death in light of the level of revelation held by second-century believers.

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