

SUPPLEMENTS TO
VIGILIAE CHRISTIANAE

Formerly Philosophia Patrum

TEXTS AND STUDIES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN LIFE
AND LANGUAGE

EDITORS

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VOLUME LXX



AA-6.-727

THE APOSTOLIC AGE
IN PATRISTIC THOUGHT

EDITED BY

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BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON
2004

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The apostolic age in patristic thought / edited by A. Hilhorst.
p. cm. — (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, ISSN 0920-623X ; v. 70)
English, French and German.
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
ISBN 90-04-12611-2 (alk. paper)
1. Apostolate (Christian theology)—History of doctrines—Early church, ca. 30-600. 2. Theology, Doctrinal—History—Early church, ca. 30-600. 3. Fathers of the church.
I. Hilhorst, A. II. Series.

BV601.2.A665 2003
270.1'072—dc22

2003065308

ISSN 0920-623X
ISBN 90 04 12611 2

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2001, the Dutch Foundation for Early Christian Studies celebrated its fortieth anniversary with a conference entitled *Aetas Apostolica*—Tertullian's term for the founding period of Christianity. As could be expected, the theme proved to be a most rewarding one. Any movement or association will tend to assign a special prestige to its starting time, but in the case of nascent Christianity this prestige was plainly due to the divine stature of its founder, Jesus Christ, who had personally commissioned his Apostles and assured them of the unflinching guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the authority of the Apostolic Age was acknowledged by all who regarded themselves as Christians, no matter whether or not they were accepted as such by a later orthodoxy. It was appealed to in questions of doctrine, of ritual and conduct, and it mirrored itself in literature and art. Thus, the speakers at the conference could choose from a number of important subjects. Their papers, duly revised and footnoted, are collected in this volume. Below is a summary of the contents.

There has been much discussion about the origin of the office of apostle. Korteweg shows that a Jewish precedent is hardly plausible. An *apostolos* is an unspecific term for someone sent. Paul introduces a specific sense for the word—to him, an apostle is a messenger sent by God from heaven. There may be a connection with an ancient oriental concept, as discussed by G. Widengren and W. Schmithals. After Paul, a horizontal dimension becomes prominent: an apostle is sent by the earthly Jesus, from Palestine and Jerusalem. The apostles are identified with the Twelve; the concept of apostolic succession comes into being.

Studying the earliest liturgy of the Eucharist, Ysebaert considers that from Homer onwards a sacrificial meal was normally a full meal. This holds well for the Jewish Passover meal, the Last Supper, and all Christian Eucharistic meals. The consecrated bread and wine were consumed together with other food taken from home. The typical order of blessing the wine first continues a Jewish tradition and is still found in *Didache* 9, 1 Cor. 10.16 and parts of the Syrian tradition. The conflict in Antioch, Gal. 2.11–14, is due to the new situation that Gentile Christians might take unclean food with them.