At first sight there seems little that is original in what the Apostolic Fathers have to say on ethics and on other matters; they are concerned with preserving a tradition and with preventing apostasy. Yet they demand attention, for the whole tone of their writings is ethical, and moral earnestness runs through every page. Clement of Rome writes to Christians at Corinth concerning disorders in their community, and points out that God’s commands are linked to an order of righteousness, a fixed pattern of times and seasons, which must be observed (40). With this concern for order go moral rules which guide the family of faith (21). But the chief way of avoiding error is by following the past examples of good men and especially the example of Christ. ‘It is right for us to give heed to so great and so many examples’ and ‘to take our side with them that are the leaders of our souls’ (63). In this discipleship we must follow the rule which has been handed down and ‘fix our eyes on the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is to the Father’ and also look at ‘all generations in turn and learn how from generation to generation the Master has given a place for repentance to those that desire to turn to him’ (7). These examples are to be followed with the vigour of an athlete who is determined to defeat his antagonists (7). In the fight of faith, endurance is supreme and it is important to continue in that ‘most virtuous and steadfast faith’ for which the Corinthians had been known and to follow Paul who had set a pattern of patient endurance (5). Yet Clement goes further and sees the crown of all things in the love of God which covers a multitude of sins and joins man to God. Without love man cannot please God and love is to be followed because its perfection surpasses all else (49f.).

The so-called ‘second letter’ of Clement is a simple exhortation to fight the good fight to the end (20). A crown awaits those who fight hard and bravely (7). Patient endurance will bring its reward (11) and so repentance is the only way from folly and sin to the pure service of God.

No one has ever exhorted his fellow Christians more fervently to fight the
good fight than did Ignatius of Antioch on his way to martyrdom in Rome. He is, as he says to Polycarp, God’s athlete (Pol.2) and it is part of the contest to receive blows and yet be victorious. Only where there is toil can there be gain for the disciple who has an intimate sense of the nearness of his Master. He bears God within him and imitates the God whose blood has set Ephesian hearts on fire (Eph.1). His martyrdom is his way of reaching God, of becoming God’s wheat, ground by the teeth of wild animals to become pure bread. Only in this sacrifice will he become truly a disciple (Rom.4). In this unity with Christ his discipleship begins, as he is permitted to ‘be an imitator of the passion of my God’ (Rom.6). To the Philadelphians, he writes, ‘Be imitators of Jesus Christ as he himself also was of his Father’ (7); and his only charter is Jesus Christ whose cross and resurrection are the scriptures which he follows (8). There are two coins: one stamped with the likeness of God and the other with that of the world, and only as we accept freely to die the death of Christ is Christ’s life in us and God’s stamp upon us. (Mag.5). So we shall not merely be called Christians but shall really be Christians (Mag.4).

All these things are summed up as the perfection of faith and love towards Christ which are the beginning and end of life: ‘Faith is the beginning and love is the end and the two being found in unity are God’. All else follows from these two things and they are not the work of one moment. It is not a question of present profession but rather of continuing in the power of faith to the very end (Eph.14). So Polycarp should suffer all in love and give himself to prayer which asks for greater wisdom, watching and enduring to the end (Pol.1). Ignatius looks to his own martyrdom as his perfection. Only in his death for Christ will he be free and no longer a slave (Rom.4). The pangs of new birth are on him and in martyrdom he will find life; the things of this world are no longer of importance and only by attaining God in martyrdom will he be truly a man (Rom.6). Imitation of Christ, endurance and perfection all find their fulfilment in martyrdom.

Similar ethical concepts are found in the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp5: ‘For him, being the son of God, we adore; but the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord we cherish, as they deserve, for their matchless affection towards their own king and teacher. May it also be our lot to be found partakers and fellow-disciples with them’. (Mart.Pol.17). The letters of Ignatius were to have a lasting influence on Christian values and the stories of the martyrs confirmed this influence.

3. The most important writer of this group; he gives evidence of theological originality in his development of the idea of salvation-history.
5. This account is given by a letter from the Church of Smyrna.
The Shepherd of Hermas⁶ is a strange mixture of confusion and insight. The Mandates begin significantly from the oneness of God and the need for man to respond to God in obedience and righteousness. "First of all believe that God is one... Believe him therefore and fear him and in this fear be continent. Keep these things and thou shalt cast off all wickedness from thyself" (Herm. mand 1). From obedience to one God comes the need for greater righteousness which dominates all Hermas' work. The Visions begin with a condemnation of sinners who have blasphemed, betrayed their parents and lived in reckless wickedness. The time of repentance has come to an end and the final call to righteousness is now given to the church (Herm. vis 2.2) Hermas is told that he need no longer confess the sins which have overwhelmed him but that he should ask for righteousness to help his family (Herm. vis 3). He writes as one who looks back to better days and one who is conscious of living at the end of things. For us this seems odd as we see him at the beginning of early Christian thought. Yet already Christians believed they had a long past and little time left to do their work and propagate their message.

The Mandates set out commandments which forbid particular sins and commend wider virtues. The twelfth Mandate requires the removal of all evil desire and makes explicit the rigour of the entire work. Twelve mountains and twelve tribes begin with those who are black and belong to the black mountain—these are lawless and without God. Then follow other mountains: the bare mountain where there are teachers of wickedness, the mountain that is covered with the thorns and briars of those who are entangled in this world's affairs. Possibility, variety and probability of sin are set out sharply by Hermas (Herm. sim 9.10-15). The same rigour produces persistent asceticism. Virginity is important, and the virgins who surround Hermas with prayer through the night are holy spirits or holy virtues (Herm. sim 9.10-15). They are linked with the Spirit and son of God as his angels and ministers. An ascetic attitude to pleasure and self-indulgence is clear. When Hermas asks what kinds of self-indulgence are harmful, he is told that everything which gives pleasure is an act of self-indulgence. However some forms of self-indulgence are not harmful but find pleasure in doing good (Herm. sim 6.5) The commandments are offered as a way of gladness and obedience by which the life of the Christian is governed. Legalism runs through the whole of Hermas; his horror of wickedness and sin within the church may be seen from the beginning of the Visions to the end of the Parables. For only the doing of good works will bring the building of the tower to its completion (Herm. sim 10.4). With legalism goes a strong exhortation to endurance. In ethics, perseverance is all. As the

⁶ See especially the introduction, translation and notes by P. Prigent, SC 172, 1971.
smith by constant hammering achieves his end, so the repetition of righteous discourse day by day conquers all evil. Children should therefore be constantly reproved (Herm. vis 1.3). Faith and continence are the first two of seven women who surround the tower (Herm. vis 3.8). With perseverance goes trust, for the Lord receives the cares of those who turn to him (Herm. vis 4.2). A second aspect of Hermas' legalism is his concern for good works which earn merit in the sight of God. Fasting, an important part of repentance, is not merely abstention from food but abstention from wickedness and service of God in purity. The great fast which is acceptable to God is fulfilled in Christian ethical obedience (Herm. sim 5.1).

Christian righteousness as new law is set out plainly in the Didache. Here the two ways of life and death are determined by obedience or disobedience to divine commands. The way of life is the love of God and neighbour, and, as Jesus taught, the love of enemy. Negative commands follow, prohibiting murder, adultery, theft, covetousness, false witness. With this respect for law go a sense of dread of the awful consequences of sin and an uncompromising dependence on the good. Evil is the way of death and the curse, the way of murder, adultery, lust, fornication and other vices. The second part of the Didache sets out the order for the worship of the eucharist and for the ruling of the church. The work concludes with the ever-recurring exhortation to watchfulness and perseverance.

The epistle of Barnabas is strongly oriented to law and righteousness. The Matthean theme of the 'way of righteousness' (1 and 5) points to a special knowledge of the will of God which enables the law to be understood and obeyed. Lawlessness is to be loathed and shunned (4). But the law which now calls for obedience is the new law of Christ (2) which annuls the old law and makes it valid only when interpreted in a non-literal way (10). So the references in the old law to swine refer to swinish men, while birds of prey refer to rapacity, and hares and hyenas point to different forms of sexual excess. All of which means that the ordinances of the Lord are not forgotten but raised to a new righteousness so that believers may bring a richer and higher offering (1). The Jews lost the commandment forever when they turned to idols while Moses was in the mountain; it now belongs to Christians. There is no ground for complacency for the evil one rages and rules where he is allowed to enter, and the Lord judges all men without respect for persons (4). The command to love God is part of the way of light which includes many other injunctions of uncompromising severity (19).

The letter to Diognetus is a short but pithy writing which sees discipleship as the duty of obedience and the imitation of God, by which man himself becomes divine (10). The latter theme is to govern a great part of Christian ethics in the coming centuries. So the Christian has a special place in the world which is paradox at every point. Christians are to the world what the
soul is to the body.

The literary forms of ethics in the Apostolic Fathers are readily identifiable and similar to those of the NT. The 'two ways' schema dominates the Didache which begins: 'There are two ways, one of life and one of death and there is a great difference between the two ways' (see also Barn.18). Catalogues of virtues and vices are found in the Didache where the two ways are described, and similar catalogues are found in Hermas (Herm. sim 9.15) where simplicity, guilelessness, purity, truthfulness, truth, understanding, concord, love, are contrasted with unbelief, intemperance, disobedience, deceit, sadness, wickedness, wantonness, irascibility, falsehood, folly, slander and hatred (cf. also Herm. vis 3.8; sim 6.5). The Haustafel reflects the outlook of the Apostolic Fathers who saw the church as the household of faith and dreaded disruptions of church order as family disturbances. Clement exhorts the Corinthians to reverence and honour for rulers and elders, to guidance and instruction of the young in the fear of God, and to the teaching of children concerning the chaste power of love. The parainetic style dominates letters such as 1 Clement and Barnabas, while the Mandates of Hermas provide an extended exposition of twelve commands. Apart from these extended works there are independent injunctions scattered through the collection. There are proverbs such as, 'The great cannot exist without the small, nor the small without the great' (1 Clem. 37). Perhaps the most common simile is that of the athlete striving in his contest. Parables are also prolific in Hermas who also has prophetic visions and mandates to be kept: 'If then when you hear them, you keep them and walk in them and do them and keep them with a pure heart, you will receive from the Lord all the things which he has promised you' (Herm. vis 5).

The chief substantive issues with which the Apostolic Fathers were concerned are the spiritual life of the Christians and the health of the Christian community. The church is the family of God and its members order their lives and relations so that they may prosper. Discord in the church is omnipresent, but evil. What of the world outside? It is the source of trials to the Christian. The prosperity of the wicked is a ground for patience. The only public act which the Christian offers to the world is martyrdom which is the supreme duty and privilege. As a citizen of heaven he strives towards heavenly perfection. On earth he will care for widows and orphans (Herm. sim 1) and he will be careful against all the forces of evil. So the prophet who asks for money for himself is to be rejected while he who asks for the needy is to be heard (Did.11). All that has to do with magic and astrology is to be rejected as false and evil (Did.3; Barn.20).
