

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

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EARLY CHURCH HISTORY TO 313 AD

HISTORIOGRAPHY OR PRELIMINARY ISSUES

TEXTS

Revelation 4:11. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

This passage reveals why God created the universe and everything in it. It was and is for his own glory and good pleasure. His eternal purpose is infallible and will be realized in the “new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” occupied by a redeemed humanity, completely conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29; 2 Pet. 3:13).

Acts 17:22–28. ²² Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. ²³ For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. ²⁴ God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵ Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

This passage contains the biblical and Christian philosophy of history. It commences with the one true God who is self-contained and self-sufficient. His redemptive purpose is the central focus of human history.

Ephesians 3:1–11. For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, ² If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: ³ How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, ⁴ Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ⁵ Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; ⁶ That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: ⁷ Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. ⁸ Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; ⁹ And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: ¹⁰ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage reveals that the church as an institution or entity is distinctly a New Testament phenomenon, a mystery not previously found in the Old Testament, but hidden in ages past.

INTRODUCTION

DEFINITION

Historiography has to do with the writing of history. It is the study of research techniques, methodology and the philosophy of history. The following issues are properly part of this subject.

NECESSITY

There are certain areas of study which are essential to the Christian faith. That Biblical studies are essential is self-evident. Yet a thorough study of the Bible is necessarily inadequate without a given amount of expertise in the areas of the *Original Languages* (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), *General* and *Special Isagogics* (Biblical Introduction), *Biblical Criticism*, *Sacred Geography*, *Biblical* and *Systematic Theology*, *Hermeneutics* (Biblical Interpretation) and both *General* and *Church History*. The Divine revelation that culminated in the Scriptures was given in a different time to different peoples who lived in different cultures and spoke different languages. It becomes self-evident that the study of the Scriptures, if approached adequately and consistently, must include many interrelated disciplines.

There are over twenty centuries of Church History between this generation and the New Testament and the close of the canon of Scripture—twenty centuries of doctrinal development and controversy, missionary endeavor, heresy, persecution, systems of interpretation, church and state relationships and varying approaches to the Scriptures.

Such forces as Gnosticism, the state church or “Constantinian” system, the “Dark Ages” brought about by the power of Rome and the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the rise of Rationalism or the Enlightenment with its subsequent radical criticism of Scripture, Pietism, Fundamentalism, Modernism, and the modern cults, have all had a great effect upon present Christianity. Further, the effect of philosophy—Platonism, Neopythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, Transcendental Idealism, Rationalism and Existentialism to name but a few—has been profound on every area of Christian thought. The present state of traditional Christendom, which hardly touches the inspired Word of God at any given point, is a sad testimony to the failure of professing Christians to learn from history or to gain an historical perspective to their faith.

Church History is thus an area of study that is essential to an adequate comprehension of the Christian faith. It provides an historical perspective to one’s faith and experience, a strong preventive with respect to error and a given amount of incentive to the life. The study of church history should produce a heightened discernment and an intelligent fervency in every area related to Christianity and the Scriptures.

There are certain preliminary questions that need to be answered before proceeding to the events, personalities, controversies and flow of church history:

WHAT IS CHURCH HISTORY?

The word “history” was originally derived from the Greek ἱστορία (*historia*), which denoted an inquiry, investigation, record or narrative.¹ The word may be used in two senses. “It may mean either the record of events or the events themselves.”² The common meaning refers to the record of events. A simple definition of history would be “...the branch of knowledge that deals systematically with the past; a recording, analyzing, correlating, and explaining of past events.”³ *This definition is essentially correct, but fails to situate history in its proper perspective.* There are at least three issues that must be considered.

First, *history is not anthropocentric; it is theocentric.* The God of creation is the God of history. Apart from God all would be random, chance or fate. There could be no purpose or conclusion. History would ultimately become meaningless and so irrelevant. Because human history is theocentric, it is the fulfillment of the Divine decree or purpose and is teleological, or progressing toward a definite consummation.

Second, *all events, agents (i.e., personalities) and information are not of equal importance or significance.* Therefore, there must be an underlying philosophy of history that seeks to select and evaluate the facts of history from given presuppositions.⁴

Third, *the record of events and agents is necessarily incomplete and inadequate,* i.e., we do not know absolutely everything about everybody who has ever lived or absolutely all the details about anything that has ever occurred. Thus, any philosophy of history must necessarily include a systematic evaluation and interpretation of the existing record.

What, then is “church” history? The term “church” traditionally has had various connotations. The proper term is ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), and originally designated an assembly or meeting of Greek citizens. In the New Testament Christian sense, it denoted an assembly of baptized believers gathered together locally and visibly as a distinct body.⁵

¹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, p. 842.

² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, II, p.529.

³ *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, pp. 665–666.

⁴ See Gordon H. Clark, *Historiography: Secular And Religious* for a thorough discussion of historical philosophies. See also C. Gregg Singer, “The Problem of Historical Interpretation,” *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, pp. 53–73.

⁵ A grammatical study of the word yields the following: ἐκκλησία is derived from the preposition ἐκ, “out of,” and καλέω, “call.” *The word denotes an assembly of citizens called out to a public meeting or an assembly of Christians gathered for worship.* This word occurs as follows in the Scriptures: ἐκκλησία occurs 115 times in the Greek New Testament (The Critical Text omits the word in Acts 2:47). It is used to denote a Christian assembly or “church” 111 times. Three times the word refers to a town meeting of citizens (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Once it denotes Israel as an assembly or congregation in the wilderness (Acts 7:38).

Later patristic usage and the development of the doctrine of the “Catholic” or “Universal Church” resulted in this term being used to describe Christianity in general.⁶ In this sense, “Church History” has become synonymous with the history of Christianity. “Church” history, then, in its traditional (though not Scriptural usage) is the study of the history of Christianity or the Christian religion.

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY?

A philosophy of history is necessary for a consistent, relevant comprehension and application of historical data.

There is but one philosophy of history for the Christian, and that is a philosophy derived from the Scriptures—an extension of his world—and–life view. The Bible is the very Word of the self–revealing triune God inscripturated, and so it is necessarily inspired, infallible and inerrant. This forms the ultimate basis for both a consistent Christian world—and–life view⁷ and a Biblical philosophy of history. There are three primary issues:

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

One must be Scriptural concerning the doctrine of God. God is absolute. The created universe is relative to Him. He is absolutely sovereign, holy, righteous, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and perfect in His wisdom. God is intelligent and does not act

⁶ The term “Catholic,” derived from the Greek καθολικός, and the Latin *catholicus*, “universal, general, all–inclusive,” originally referred to doctrine that was universally accepted among Christians.

⁷ Everyone, consciously or not, has a philosophy of life, a framework or a set of presuppositions from which he thinks and acts, a *weltanschauung*, or world–view. It is an individual’s perception of reality and how he relates to it, his convictions and presuppositions which represent his total outlook on life, the world about him and ultimate reality. Our world—and–life view determines literally everything in our relationship to reality. *It also necessarily determines our philosophy of history.*

The following contrast in world—and–life views demonstrates their significance: The atheist, if consistent, must presuppose there is no God, nothing transcendent or supernatural [dialectic materialism], no absolutes [relativism]; no certainty, except fatalism [determinism], no hope, except in chance; no basis for morality except by human consensus, and no ultimate meaning except that which man gives to things, and no future beyond this present life. Thus, the atheist, if at all consistent, must face ultimate meaninglessness and futility. *For such a person, history must have little significance, except in an evolutionary sense of simply learning from the past, while seeking shape the present and future through the principles of Social Darwinism.* The Christian, if consistent with the Scriptures, presupposes that the Self–disclosing God of the Bible is the All–encompassing Living Reality, that He sovereignly rules this universe and everything in it, and is infallibly bringing His eternal purpose to completion for His own glory and the good of His elect. He presupposes that God has created all things and has given them meaning, that obedience to God begins by giving the same meaning to everything that God has given to it. He thus believes that the moral Self–consistency of God [His absolute righteousness as revealed in His Moral Law] determines human morality, that man was created in the image of God to live by God’s Word and “think God’s thoughts after Him.” The Christian further looks to the future with hope and rejoicing because his faith is founded upon the Word of the eternal, immutable, holy God Who has intelligently revealed His redemptive purpose in His Word. *The consistent Christian should therefore have a great interest in history, especially “Church History,” as it reveals the redemptive purpose of God in time and experience.*

without purpose. His purpose reflects His wisdom and moral self-consistency and is infallible, i.e., it will certainly be fulfilled. History is the out-working of the Divine purpose in time.

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

One must understand the implications of the doctrine of creation (Gen. 1:1–5). God created the universe and everything in it by His fiat decree. This means that the universe, man, time and history must be understood in terms of the transcendent, sovereign, self-disclosing, triune God.

The God of creation is the God of history. This means that what God created, He governs, and governs with a purpose toward a culminative end (Eph. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:24–28). It further means that God is absolute or supra-temporal and time is relative to Him. Again, creation is scripturally presented as an act, not a process. This at once negates any evolutionary concept of the origin of the universe or the progress of human history [social Darwinism]. This also means that man has been created in the image and likeness of God and as such bears a definite relationship and responsibility to God (Gen. 1:26–28). He is to live in submission and obedience to Divine revelation. He is to give the same meaning to everything that God has given to it, rather than attempt to superimpose his own meaning on anything in God's created universe.

THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

One must hold scripturally to the doctrine of Divine predestination. The past is not to be found in a primeval void, nor the future in a nebulous, undefined, foreboding abyss, but in the context of the eternal, transcendent, sovereign, triune God, Whose purpose will infallibly be fulfilled in the context of His power, wisdom and moral character.⁸

Divine sovereignty with reference to time and history is predestination. God has from eternity predetermined everything that occurs in time and history (Eph. 1:11; Acts 15:18), including the rise and fall of succeeding civilizations and all the affairs and circumstances of men, (Job. 12:23; Dan. 2:21; Acts 17:26; Rom. 9:6–23).

NOTE: By definition “predestination” (προορίζω, *proorizo*) means “to determine the destiny before hand.” The term has a three-fold usage in Scripture, referring, first, to the comprehensive, eternal purpose of God (Eph. 1:11); second, to the soteriological purpose (Eph. 1:5); and third, to the eschatological purpose realized in the believer's glorification and ultimate conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). The comprehensive use of the term may be described as :

The eternal (Isa. 46:9–10; Acts 15:18; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 4:11), immutable (Isa. 14:24; 46:11; Prov. 19:21), all-inclusive (Acts 17:25, 28; Eph. 1:11; Rev 4:11), all-wise (Jer. 51:15; Rom. 11:33–35; 16:27; Eph 3:10–11; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25), just

⁸ Divine predestination is *not* determinism or fatalism. The difference between determinism or fatalism and biblical Christianity can be noted by contrast: Determinism or fatalism sees everything at the mercy of an impersonal, amoral force in which human endeavor is ultimately meaningless. Divine predestination enables the biblical Christian by faith to view everything in the context of the God of Scripture—sovereign, omnipotent, infinitely wise and good, absolutely righteous and holy, and infinitely merciful and gracious toward His own. It is in this biblical context that the Christian is to submit to the revealed Word and will of God, and live obediently by faith. Divine predestination forms the foundation of all biblical and consistent human responsibility and endeavor!

(Isa. 45:21; Zeph. 3:5; Rom. 9:14) and holy (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 57:15) decree or purpose of God (Isa. 14:24; Dan. 4:17, 24; Eph. 1:11), whereby, from eternity, from within Himself (Psa. 115:3; Dan. 4:35; Rom. 11:33–36; Eph. 1:5, 9) and for His own glory (1 Chron. 29:11–13; Eph. 1:3–6, 12–14; Rev 4:11), He has determined whatsoever comes to pass (Rom. 11:33–36; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Neh. 9:6).

This would include the idea of “decree” or “purpose,” emphasizing the immutability, power and determination of the Divine Mind; “counsel,” stressing the perfect wisdom of God in both its formulation and execution; and “providence,” which is that process by which God brings to pass in time His eternal decree.

Divine predestination is wholly inclusive, even of the alleged free acts of men. Cf. Gen. 24:10–27; Ex. 12:35–36; 34:24; Deut. 2:30–33; Judg. 14:1–4; 1 Sam. 2:22–25; 2 Chron. 10:3–15; 25:14–16, 20; Ezra 1:1–2; 7:1, 6, 12–28; Psa. 76:10; 105:25; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 10:5–15; 42:1–7; Ezk. 38:1–4, 10–13, 16–17; Dan. 4:16–17, 25–26, 32, 34–37; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28.

Divine predestination is necessarily inclusive. Thus, there is no such thing as *trivia* in God’s universe or purpose (Cf. Psa. 139:1–4; Matt. 6:26; 10:29–30; Rom. 11:33–36).

Further, *Divine predestination is the key to a proper understanding of history.* History is not cyclical (i.e., history does not repeat itself) as some ancient and modern thinkers suggest. The flow of time is from the future into the present, and from the present into the past. History is the progressive realization or unfolding in time of the Divine, eternal purpose.

The movement of time, according to the Bible, is from eternity, since it is created by God and moves out of and in terms of His eternal decree. Because time moves in terms of the eternal decree, when its function is finished there shall be time no more (Rev. 10:6). Because time is predestined, and because its beginning and end are already established, time does not develop in evolutionary fashion from past to present to future. Instead, it unfolds from future to present to past.⁹

Church history cannot and must not be considered apart from the sovereign government or providence of God. It is nothing less than the continuance of God’s eternal, redemptive purpose among men from the opening of the Gospel economy in the New Testament to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHY STUDY CHURCH HISTORY?

Every Christian needs a historical perspective to his faith. Most professing Christians are sadly apathetic toward church history. They are more future-oriented and have little interest in the past. This attitude may in part reflect the disinterestedness, emotionalism and irrationalism of contemporary fundamental and evangelical Christianity in general and certain eschatological theories in particular, such as Dispensational Premillennialism with its doctrine of, and undue emphasis on, an imminent rapture. Whatever one may believe about prophecy and eschatology, an ignorance of or apathy toward church history is quite inexcusable, and deprives one of much truth, discernment, encouragement, motivation and hope.

There are several reasons why every believer should acquire a historical perspective to his faith. Every believer needs the following:

⁹ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History*, p. 11.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

History enables one to witness the faithfulness of God throughout history (Dt. 32:7–8; Psa. 77:5–12; Psa. 145:3–4; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1–11). Church history is the continuing record of the faithfulness of God to His own spiritual people within the New Covenant just as Old Testament Hebrew history is a witness to the faithfulness of God to His own national people under the Old Covenant. The providence of God in the lives of His people and churches is for the education, edification and admonition of the present-day believer.

TRUTH AND EXPERIENCE

History enables one to view the out-working of Christian truth and faith in experience. This makes history vital, personally relevant and encouraging.

True believers throughout history have had to suffer for their faith and put their doctrine to the test of experience under the most trying circumstances. Many have lived, labored, suffered and died gloriously for their faith. The stories of martyrs, ministers, and missionaries are always edifying.

TRUTH AND TRADITION

History should enable one to distinguish between truth and tradition. What a person believes is either derived from the truth of Scripture or from religious tradition. This is true, not only of the doctrines and practices of modern Christianity, but it is also true of the persons and events of history. An idealistic tradition often obscures the real personality or event and the given context. At times the truth of historical fact has been lost to the popular mind in the aura of legend. A study of history should bring a proper perspective of reality.

AVOIDANCE OF ERROR

History should enable one to avoid the errors of the past. A study of history will necessarily sharpen one's doctrinal perception. The history of doctrine, or historical theology, is an investigation and evaluation of Creeds, Councils, Confessions, and Controversies of a doctrinal nature.

Those who are ignorant of the history of doctrine are usually prone toward and susceptible to the same doctrinal errors as those who lived before them. The historical Creeds and Confessions of Faith provide discernment and form the basis for much of what historical and traditional Christianity holds to be orthodox. Most modern errors and heresies are but recurrences of ancient errors and heresies.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

History should enable one to understand the full context of any given historical, Scriptural, doctrinal, social, ecclesiastical or practical issue. This is necessary in both scriptural and historical studies. One must understand the historical circumstances of any given Scriptural passage before it can be adequately interpreted. Nothing occurs in a historical vacuum. The historical context often includes the spiritual, moral, ethical, social, cultural and psychological realities. History necessitates the same, as far as research provides the data.

One's own life must be viewed in a historical context. We need to think in terms of years, lifetimes, and even centuries. In what kind of age do we live? What should be the major thrust of our lives and efforts for God? A historical context necessarily gives both discernment and direction in such matters as it witnesses to the truth of Scripture.

THE WORKS OF GOD

History enables one to witness the works of God. He is absolutely sovereign and is not bound or governed by anything external. He is self-consistent and bound only by his self-consistent, moral character.

History reveals that God may be pleased to accomplish in one century or even in one generation what He has not been pleased to do for centuries. This was true in the New Testament era, the Protestant Reformation and in times of great revival and spiritual awakening.

THE PAST WITNESS AS TO THE PRESENT

History enables one to call to remembrance the glorious work of God in the past as an encouragement and witness to the present. The God of the Bible is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of the Apostles, the God of the Waldenses and others before the Reformation, the God of the Reformers, the God of the Puritans, the God of Whitefield and the God of Spurgeon. He is the immutable God of truth, the Gospel, revival and spiritual awakening.

The study of church history should encourage the believer in his own experience and further prompt him to pray and labor with perseverance and fervency for revival in the churches and spiritual awakening among the unconverted.

THE TRUTH CONCERNING RELIGIOUS HUMAN NATURE

Human nature has not changed since the Fall. Men, though religious, are yet sinners. History witnesses to this scriptural truth. No trial, misunderstanding, opposition, or persecution is unique—or even new. Church history is filled with the record of the treatment of those who sought to stand for the truth and what they suffered, not only from the civil authorities, but from their own “brethren.” A historical perspective is a great comfort in the time of trial and adversity from those “who profess to know God, but in works deny him.”

WHAT ARE THE FUNDAMENTAL PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR THE STUDY OF CHURCH HISTORY?

A study of church history must proceed upon certain assumptions or presuppositions. *Consider the following questions:* Is God fully and intimately involved in the history of Christianity, or has He simply left Christianity to itself to develop according to some “natural law” or religious evolution? Is church history self-interpreting, i.e., is it the natural development of the religion found in the New Testament? Was scriptural, historic Christianity represented in the Church of Rome until the Protestant Reformation, when the “Church” was then “reformed?” Were all pre-Reformation groups apart from Rome heretical? The answers to these questions are determined by one’s presuppositions and are essential to any consistent historiography.

TIME AND ETERNITY

The first presupposition is that church history is the out-working in time of the Divine, eternal purpose with reference to Christianity. This has been discussed in detail under the biblical philosophy of history, and asserts that God is intimately involved in the totality of church history.

This presupposition is a denial of the pagan and atheistic concept of natural selection and the modern concept of social and religious evolution. Church history is not a study of the evolution or natural development of the Christian religion, nor is it a study in comparative religions. As the one and only religion derived from Divine revelation, Biblical Christianity is “incomparable.” It cannot be placed on a level with other religions without inherently denying its supernatural origin and unique character.

The key to understanding the work of God in church history is found in two realities: Divine predestination and the moral self-consistency of God. God has eternally and sovereignly ordained all events and agents as to their significance, sequence and interrelationships. The moral character of God [Divine holiness and righteousness] provides the key to understanding the issues of good and evil events and agents in history. God is absolutely sovereign over both good (faith, faithfulness, orthodoxy, etc.) and evil (error, heresy, persecution of true believers, etc.), and thus works in and through both to fulfill His all-wise, most-holy and righteous will.

NOTE: The teaching of Scripture is that God is absolutely sovereign over all men and things, even the sinful or evil acts of sinners (Isa. 45:5–8). The question is: How can God be absolutely sovereign over the sinful acts of men and yet remain holy, righteous i.e., morally Self-consistent, and free from sin? There are three possible answers:

(1) God only foreknew (in the sense of mere foresight or omniscience) the sinful acts of men. It is possible, then, that He might have prevented them by seeking some utilitarian solution, but evidently chose not to do so, thus possibly making Him ultimately responsible for sin by allowing it when He could have prevented it. Or, He could not have prevented it, making Him impotent with regard to sin and evil—a mere spectator to the affairs of this world. Language such as “permitting” or “allowing” sin does not remove the ultimate cause from God, unless it presupposes an impersonal force above or beyond God, i.e., a fatalistic determinism. Such an approach necessarily views God as arbitrary. Could we pray to a God Whose answers to prayer would be completely arbitrary?!

(2) Evil in the universe exists in a mysterious dualism. It cannot be explained, but it exists apart from, independently of, and in opposition to God. But, then, God would be impotent to deal with it. Prayers would be all but useless, and petitions for the souls and lives of sinners would be senseless!

(3) God is absolutely sovereign over all things, even evil and the sinful acts of men. He is good, and He ordains evil, controlling it to bring about the highest good for His own glory. God can foreordain evil only if He Himself is good, because evil is “evil” only by contrast with the goodness of God, Who is absolute, and the Source, Support and End of all things (Rom. 11:33–36). Only, then, if God is absolutely sovereign over and foreordains evil, can He bring forth His good purpose in it for His own glory (Cf. The suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). This approach alone is consistent with the teaching of Scripture. The very idea that God could be the author of sin in the sense of being Himself tainted with evil or

culpable to sin, is an unbelieving attempt to call God into account rather than humbly acknowledging that we have no right to question Him (Rom. 9:14–29).

CHURCH HISTORY IS NOT SELF-INTERPRETING

The second presupposition is that church history is not self-interpreting, i.e., it is not the natural development of the Christianity found in the New Testament. The Scriptures, and specifically, the New Testament Scriptures, form the standard by which church history is to be interpreted. The pattern for the historical church is that of the New Testament church. The pattern for historic Christianity is New Testament Christianity. This has important implications for both Romanism and Protestantism.

Romanism and Protestantism consider the Church to be coextensive and synonymous with the Kingdom of God, rather than an entity within the Kingdom of God. Thus, they perceive the Church to be all-embracing and universal, including all religious agencies (i.e., parachurch organizations).

Romanism developed from apostate Christianity, Old Testament Judaism and paganism. Its concept of the church rests partly on Scripture and partly on tradition and paganism. From its inception in the fourth century, the Church of Rome has never possessed the essential elements of a New Testament church.

Protestantism exists essentially as a Reformation of the Romish church, not a full return or conformity to the New Testament standard and pattern.

Historic, traditional Protestantism possesses an “Old Testament mentality,” i.e., it is patterned more after the Old Testament than the New. This is markedly evident in the monolithic state-church concept, a Reformed covenant theology, the almost universal practice of *paedorhantism* (i.e., infant sprinkling, from ῥαντίζειν [*rhantizein*], to sprinkle. Infant sprinkling allegedly replaced the Old Covenant rite of circumcision.), an ecclesiastical hierarchy and the tendency in some denominations toward a priestly concept of the ministry.¹⁰

¹⁰ An Old Testament mentality derives from the idea that the church is synonymous with the Kingdom of God and began with the history of redemption in the Old Testament. Such a view perceives the Old Testament to be the standard and inherently denies the progressive nature of Divine revelation and the finality of the New Testament in vital areas.

Such an approach reduces many of the Gospel or New Testament institutions to the level of the preparatory nature of the Old Testament. There is, for instance, a tendency to substitute one rite or ceremony for another rather than find the true fulfillment in the New Testament context. Two prominent examples are baptism for circumcision and the Lord's Supper for the Passover. Physical circumcision finds its fulfillment in regeneration, or circumcision of the heart (Cf. Rom. 2:28–29; Col. 2:10–13). If baptism can in any way be considered a sign or seal of the covenant, then it is only for believers (i.e., those who are regenerate) in the New Testament context (In addition to the foregoing texts, Cf. Rom. 4:9–12. Abraham was already a believer. The wording of these texts can only apply to believers.). The Passover was not fulfilled in the Lord's Supper, but in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (1 Cor. 5:7). Incidentals are not a sufficient basis for doctrinal foundations. Further, it is common among some Protestants to find the pattern for a plurality of elders in the seventy ruling elders under Moses rather than seek a New Testament example or rationale.

The institution of the New Testament church is unique to this Gospel economy. Such an entity did not exist in the Old Testament (Eph. 2:11–3:12). The reference of Stephen to Israel in the

Thus, *church history is not the record of the natural development of New Testament Christianity, but rather largely a record of apostasy from the New Testament pattern in doctrine and practice by both Romanism and Protestantism.*

THE PERPETUITY OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

The third and final presupposition is that New Testament Christians and churches existed from the Apostolic era to the Protestant Reformation apart from the Church of Rome. There are several considerations:

THE PROMISE OF CHRIST

The Lord Jesus Christ promised that His church would continue to exist as an institution, that it would not be obliterated and that He would be with it until the close of this Gospel economy or age (Cf. Matt. 16:18; 28:18–20).

Such promises were not fulfilled in or by the Romish state–church system, as alleged by Rome. Some scoff at these promises referring to a continuation of New Testament churches and seek to render them null and void by ridicule. If the Lord did not mean that New Testament churches would continue throughout history, what did He mean? The conclusion is unavoidable and the witness of history confirms its validity. It is only Romish opposition and a Protestant mentality or prejudice that strive to negate the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ and the witness of history.

THE WITNESS OF HISTORY

The witness of history is that New Testament Christians and churches had a continuous existence from the Apostolic era to the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

These groups were considered heretical by the papists and were both slandered and rigorously persecuted. It was against such that the Romish Inquisition was first established and several crusades were raised. Their names varied: Montanists, Phrygians, Cataphrygians, Novatians, Donatists, Paulicians, Vaudois, Paterines, Albigenses, Berengarians, Bogomili, Cathari, Gezari, Arnoldists, Petrobrusians, Henricians, Waldenses, Lollards, Wycliffites, Bohemian Brethren, Hussites, etc. They were inclusively derided from the fourth to the sixteenth century by the generic term “Anabaptist” because they baptized as believers those who were converted, but had been “baptized” as infants in the Romish state–church system (Cf. Church History Chart I).

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

The history of these pre–Reformation groups is not that of a succession of churches with an organic connection through baptism or church–to–church authority as *neo–Landmarkism* supposes. Such an organic [so–called “chain–link”] succession is neither essential nor consistently traceable. It is rather a continuance of New Testament principles and practice.

NOTE: *Old Landmarkism* is a movement among certain Baptists that originated in the mid–nineteenth century over the issue of recognizing *paedobaptist* ministers as

wilderness as a “church” must be understood in the basic and simple sense of an assembly, not a church in the traditional sense (Acts 7:38).

true ministers of Christ or welcoming them into Baptist pulpits (“pulpit affiliation”). The issue reached to the nature of paedobaptist churches. Ultimately and consistently, as Baptists were the only ones practicing scriptural immersion, a view of organic [“chain–link”] church succession was a *later* development.

According to the *Neo–Landmark* theory, Church validity and authority do not rest on alignment to the New Testament Scriptures, but on a [“chain–link”] succession of churches ultimately and hypothetically traced to the New Testament era by a succession of a church–to–church authority [the absolute necessity of a so–called “mother” church]. This has resulted in such teachings as the “Baptist Bride” position (i.e., only “true” Baptist churches compose the Bride of Christ and are alone true churches). *Any perpetuity must be based on doctrine and practice, not on an alleged succession of baptisms and church–to–church authority. Many modern churches, attempting to trace their perpetuity or succession from Apostolic times, are filled with essential and radical doctrinal error.* Many of the so–called “heroes of the faith” were inconsistent or plainly heretical in some of their doctrinal views. For an exposition of Landmarkism, see J. R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism*; See Douglas A. Moore, *Old Landmarkism vs. the “Pedigree Pushers”* for a contrast between Old and Neo–Landmarkism and for evidence that some “in the succession line” accepted “alien immersion.” It should further be noted that “alien immersion” did not refer to any immersion other than “Landmark Missionary Baptist” baptism, but rather to immersion performed by paedobaptist ministers, Cf. A. C. Dayton, *Alien Baptism*.

W. A. Jarrell, Ben M. Bogard (*Baptist Way Book*), and others among the Old Landmarkers, neither believed nor taught the necessity of a “Mother–Church” concept, or a “chain–link succession” of churches. *This was a later development* and may rightly be termed in some aspects “Neo–Landmarkism.” Note the following:

It is not necessary, but it is customary, for a council of brethren from neighboring churches to be called to assist in the organization of new churches. (Ben. M. Bogard, *The Baptist Way Book*, p. 70).

The late and lamented scholar, J. R. Graves, LL.D., wrote “Wherever there are three or more baptized members of a regular Baptist church or churches covenanted together to hold and teach, and are governed by the New Testament,” etc., “there is a Church of Christ, even though there was not a presbytery of ministers in a thousand miles to organize them into a church. There is not the slightest need of a council of presbyters to organize a Baptist church.”

And the scholarly S. H. Ford, LL.D., says: “Succession among Baptists is not a linked chain of churches or ministers, uninterrupted and traceable at this distant day...The true and defensible doctrine is, that baptized believers have existed in every age since John baptized in Jordan, and have met as a baptized congregation in covenant and fellowship where an opportunity permitted.”

Every Baptist church being, in organization, a church complete in itself, and, in no way organically connected with any other church, such a thing as one church succeeding another, as the second link of a chain is added to and succeeds the first, or, as one Romish or Episcopal church succeeds another, is utterly foreign to and incompatible with Baptist church polity. Therefore, the talk about every link “jingling in the succession chain from the banks of the Jordan to the present,” is ignorance or dust–throwing.

All that Baptists mean by church "Succession" or Church perpetuity, is: There has never been a day since the organization of the first New Testament church in which there was no genuine church of the New Testament existing on earth.¹¹

It is historically demonstrable that among these groups were those who held to the New Testament essentials of salvation by grace, a regenerate church membership, believer's baptism by immersion and liberty of conscience.

It is vital to understand that the aforementioned groups had many common interests: their names were often used interchangeably; they often used the same catechisms; an extensive correspondence circulated among them; refugees from one group were usually assimilated into another; and they made common use of itinerant preachers.

As to the necessity of church succession, *each church then and now possesses a distinct and immediate relation to the New Testament. This is determined by doctrine and practice*, not any type of church succession. That there has been a general succession of baptisms may be assumed.

THE ISSUE OF ORTHODOXY

No inclusive claim of orthodoxy is made for these groups. What is maintained is that among these peoples there existed New Testament believers and churches. No church in the New Testament was entirely without error, neither is any present-day denomination or religious group completely orthodox, although orthodox believers and churches may exist within it.

There is an essential principle that remains constant: *To the extent that any given church conforms to the New Testament, it is to that extent a New Testament church, and, conversely, to the extent that a church departs from the New Testament, to that extent, it ceases to be a New Testament church.* This is not to state that a church may evolve into a New Testament church.

PREJUDICE

What is known about these groups is largely from the writings of their Romish enemies, thus great prejudice exists against them in the minds of some historians who hold to Romish and Protestant presuppositions. The charges made against these "Anabaptists" by the papists have been echoed by some Protestant writers. Historical research in recent times, however, has proven many of these accusations to be false and merely guilt by association.

NOTE: These groups were often charged with the most extreme heresies in order to discredit them, raise armies against them and persecute them as heretics. A common charge was Manichaeism, a pagan dualistic system. Rome likewise charged Martin Luther with being a Manichaeist in order to discredit him. Such charges were groundless. Some historians have followed the traditional Romish view without independent investigation. The Paulicians were one of the most maligned groups. In 1893 F. C. Conybeare, a well-known scholar, obtained a copy of *The Key of Truth*, the ancient Paulician confession of faith, mentioned by writers in the eleventh century. This document has shown them to have been of apostolic origin (i.e., a survival of primitive or New Testament Christianity) and to have been

¹¹ The quotations from J. R. Graves and S. H. Ford and the closing remarks are from W. A. Jarrell, *Baptist Church Perpetuity or History*, pp. 1–3.

evangelical. See John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, I, pp. 48–59. The Waldenses were evangelical, as every Protestant historian admits, and these were closely associated with the Paulicians.

THE TESTIMONY OF ROMISH AND PROTESTANT HISTORIANS

Among both Romish and Protestant historians, there are authoritative voices that have witnessed to the faith of these early Christians.

Cardinal Hosius, President of the Council of Trent, wrote:

Were it not for the fact that the Anabaptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past 1200 years, they would swarm greater than all the reformers...If the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness and boldness of which a man or any sect shows in suffering, then the opinions and persuasions of no sect can be truer and surer than those of the Anabaptists, since there have been none for the 1200 years past that have been more generally punished or that have been more cheerfully and steadfastly undergone, and have offered themselves to the most cruel sort of punishment than these people.¹²

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), a Dutch Reformed pastor and theologian, in answer to the question concerning church perpetuity, wrote:

Where was the Reformed [Calvinistic or Evangelical] church prior to Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin?

Answer: First of all, the true church remains steadfast by reason of her durability—a durability which does not fluctuate. True doctrine is an infallible distinguishing mark of the church...Wherever true doctrine resides...there also is the church...prior to Luther this church existed wherever this true doctrine, which never ceased to be, was to be found.

...The church existed in several independent churches which maintained separation from popery...Such churches existed since early times in the southern parts of France, as well as in some parts of England, Scotland, Bohemia, and also in Piedmont. Against these churches popes have initiated many persecutions, but they continue to exist until this day...prior to the time of Zwingli and Luther there had been very many who adhered to the same doctrine...and that Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin had by renewal brought this doctrine to light...

Reynerius, one of the leaders of the Inquisition, who did some writing prior to the year 1400, writes concerning the Waldenses:

“Among all sects that either are or have been, there is none more detrimental to the Roman Catholic Church than that of the Leonists (that is, the poor men of Lyons—the Waldenses)...it is the sect that is of the longest standing of any; for some say it has existed since the time of the apostles...it is the most general of all sects; for scarcely is there any country to be found where this sect has not been embraced...this sect has a great appearance of godliness, since they live righteously before all men, believe all that God has said, and maintain all the articles contained in the “sybolum” (the twelve articles of faith)...”

Archbishop *Sessellius* writes in his book against the Waldenses:

“The Waldenses originate from a religious man named Leo, who lived during the time of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great [313 A.D.–].”

¹² *Letters Apud Opera*, pp. 112–113, as quoted by John T. Christian, *Op. cit.*, pp. 85–86.

Such is the witness of these parties. Do you yet ask whether the Reformed [Calvinistic or Evangelical] Church existed prior to Luther? To this I reply that she was to be found among those whom we have just mentioned; that is, those residing in Piedmont among the Waldenses.¹³

Pierre Allix (1641–1717) was a French Reformed pastor and then a historian in the Church of England who became an apologist for the Albigenses and Waldenses. He wrote that their origin could be traced to the fourth century, not to Peter Waldo, and that these were evangelical Christians.¹⁴

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the New England Puritan Divine wrote concerning the testimony of the truth during the Middle Ages when Western Civilization was under the power of the papacy:

In every age of this dark time, there appeared particular persons in all parts of Christendom, who bore a testimony against the corruptions and tyranny of the church of Rome. ...ecclesiastical historians mention many by name who manifested an abhorrence of the pope, and his idolatrous worship, and pleaded for the ancient purity of doctrine and worship. God was pleased to maintain an uninterrupted succession of witnesses through the whole time, in Germany, France, Britain, and other countries; private persons and ministers, some magistrates and persons of great distinction. And there were numbers in every age who were persecuted and put to death for this testimony.

Besides these particular persons dispersed, there was a certain people called the *Waldenses*, who lived separate from all the rest of the world, and constantly bore a testimony against the church of Rome through all this dark time...¹⁵

In the year 1819 the King of Holland appointed Dr. J. J. Dermout, his personal chaplain and a historian of international repute together with Dr. Ypeij, an outstanding Reformed scholar and professor of theology at Groningen, to write a history of the Dutch Reformed Church. Among their findings is the following:

We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists...were the original Waldenses, and who have long in history received the honor of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the Apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrine of the Gospel through all ages. The perfectly correct internal and external economy of the Baptist denomination tends to confirm the truth, disputed by the Romish Church, that the Reformation brought about in the Sixteenth century was in the highest degree necessary, and at the same time goes to refute the erroneous notion of the Catholics that their denomination is the most ancient.¹⁶

¹³ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *De Redelijke Godsdeinst*, (The Christian's Reasonable Service), II, pp. 37–39.

¹⁴ See Pierre Allix, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont and of the Albigenses*. See also Jean Paul Perrin, a Waldensian pastor and historian, *History of the Ancient Christians*, a source-book for Allix, and a history of the Waldenses, Albigenses and Vaudois.

¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, I, p. 596. See the entire section on pp. 595–597.

¹⁶ A. Ypeij and J. J. Dermout, *Geschiedenis der Netherlandsche Hervomke Kerk*, I, p. 148, as quoted by John T. Christian, *Op. cit.*, pp. 95–96.

¹⁷ John L. Von Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, pp. 119–120. See. W. A. Jarrell, *Op. cit.*, pp. 309–311 for comments and corrections on the part of the historians and translators, William Jones and Maclaine.

Dr. Williston Walker, the Congregationalist church historian and professor of history at Harvard University, wrote:

Some men of weight in church history...would find a continuous relation between the Anabaptists of the Reformation period and individual sects like the Waldenses, and through them a line of free and possibly evangelical churches, back to the early days of Christianity.¹⁷

John Lawrence Von Mosheim (1694–1755), a Lutheran and the “Father of Modern Church History,” wrote about these pre–Reformation groups:

...the origin of the Anabaptists...is lost in the remote depths of antiquity...Before the rise of Luther or Calvin, there lay concealed in almost all the countries of Europe, persons who adhered tenaciously to the principles of the modern...Baptists.¹⁷

L. Burnett, a “Campbellite,” and editor of the *Christian Messenger*, wrote:

The Baptists have connection with the Apostles through their line of succession, which extends back 350 years, where it connects with the Waldensian line, and that reaches to the Apostolic day...Baptists also have connection with the Apostles in what they teach and practice.¹⁸

Further testimony of the evangelical nature of many of these groups can be found in the works of Samuel Morland, a Puritan; Augustus Neander and J. H. Kurtz, Lutherans; G. S. Faber, an Anglican; J. A. Wylie, a Presbyterian, and E. H. Broadbent, a Brethren.¹⁹

THE BAPTIST WITNESS

Some closing quotes from C. H. Spurgeon, a Baptist of broad fellowship and gracious spirit, are quite appropriate:

We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but have an unbroken line up to the Apostles themselves. We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten, like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents. Persecuted alike by Romanists and Protestants of almost every sect...²⁰

We care very little for the “historical church” argument, but if there be anything in it at all, *it ought not to be filched by the clients of Rome*, but should be left to that community, which all along held by “one Lord, one faith and one baptism....The afflicted Anabaptists, in their past history, have borne such pure testimony, both to truth and freedom, that they need in nothing be ashamed....It would not be *impossible* to show that the first Christians who dwelt in the land were of the same faith and order as the churches now called Baptists.²¹

...when any say to us, “You as a denomination, what great names can you mention? What fathers can you speak of?” We may reply, “More than any other under heaven, for we are of the old apostolic church that have never bowed to the yoke of princes yet; we, known among men, in all ages, by various names, such as Donatists, Novatians, Paulicians, Petrobrussians, Cathari, Arnoldists, Hussites, Waldenses, Lollards, and Anabaptists, have

¹⁷ Quoted by W. A. Jarrell, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁸ L. Burnett, *The Christian Messenger*, December 8, 1886.

¹⁹ See the bibliography at the end of this chapter.

²⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1861, p. 225.

²¹ C. H. Spurgeon, in *Ford's Christian Repository*, as quoted by W. A. Jarrell, *Op. cit.*, p. 330.

always contended for the purity of the Church, and her distinctness and separation from human government. Our fathers were men inured to hardships, and unused to ease. They present to us, their children, an unbroken line which comes legitimately from the apostles, not through the filth of Rome, not by the manipulations of prelates, but by the Divine life, the Spirit's anointing, the fellowship of the Son in suffering and of the Father in truth.²²

THE TIME–DIVISIONS OF CHURCH HISTORY

Church History may be summarized in *six eras or ages*, each possessing its own unique characteristics and time–frame.

The Apostolic Age (26–100 AD) forms the inspired account of and standard for Christianity. True Christianity is preeminently New Testament Christianity.

The Era of Transition (100–313) marks the departure from New Testament or primitive Christianity and the rise of the ecclesiasticism and sacerdotalism that formed the basis for Romanism. This era is the time of the great departure from “the faith once delivered unto the saints.”

The Imperial Age (313–476) was the time of the Catholic State Church under the Roman Empire and the age of the great Ecumenical Church Councils.

The Middle Ages (476–1453) The time–frame and dating varies according to the importance given to certain criteria. Some begin with the fall of Rome (476), and others with Pope Gregory the Great (590). Some date the end of the Middle Ages with the Italian Renaissance (c. 1300), and others with the fall of Constantinople (1453). This outline dates the time from the fall of Rome to the fall of Constantinople (476–1453).

The Era of Renaissance and Reformation (1453–1648) considers both the Renaissance and the Reformation together, as one is inherently related to the other. The time–frame is from the fall of Constantinople to the Peace of Westphalia, which politically ended the Reformation era and settled the Catholic and Protestant boundaries of Europe. This age was a time of both political upheaval and spiritual revival. It forms the spiritual and ecclesiastical basis for all subsequent Church History.

The Modern Era (1648–the present) dates from the Peace of Westphalia and the end of the Thirty Years' War to the present.

There are three eras of Church History that are particularly noteworthy. Each is relatively short, but each is greatly determinative—The Apostolic Era (74 years), the Era of Transition (213 years) and the Age of Renaissance and Reformation (195 years). Each of these eras or ages signaled a great transformation and sweeping changes in the spiritual, religious, and civil order. These lecture notes are concerned with the first two.

²² C. H. Spurgeon, *Op. cit.*, 1861, p. 613.

**CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE
OF
EARLY CHURCH HISTORY TO 313 A.D.
THE APOSTOLIC AGE 26–100 AD**

(74 years)

This age includes both the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and also the lives and ministries of the inspired Apostles.

THE FIVE MAJOR ISSUES IN THIS AGE

- (1) The establishment of New Testament Christianity.
- (2) The inscripturation of the New Testament books.
- (3) The establishment, nature, character and primitive history of the New Testament church as an institution.²³
- (4) The Apostolic missionary endeavors and the spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire.
- (5) The first State persecutions of Christianity.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

I. THE MESSIANIC ERA (26–30 AD).

- A. The Year of Obscurity (26–27).
- B. The Year of Opportunity (27–28).
- C. The Year of Opposition (29–30).

II. THE APOSTOLIC ERA (30–100 AD).

- A. The Era of Transition (30–48).
- B. The Era of Expansion (48–64).
- C. The Era of Persecution (64–100).

**CONTEMPORARY EVENTS
PERSONS**

**EVENTS AND PERSONS CONNECTED
WITH CHURCH HISTORY**

MESSIANIC ERA (26–30 A.D.)

This period of history properly commences with the events leading to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism and public ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Herod Philip (4 B.C.–34 A.D.)

Herod Antipas (4 B.C.–39 A.D.)

30 years preparation: The Annunciation
Birth of John the Baptist (6–4 B.C.)

²³ The term “Church” is used in the institutional or abstract sense. The NT church is concretely expressed in local churches.

Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (6–4 B.C.)²⁴

Wise men from the East (4 B.C.)

Caesar Tiberius (Roman Emperor, 14–37)

Pontius Pilate (Roman Procurator, 26–36)

THE YEAR OF OBSCURITY (26–28 A.D.)

The ministry of John the Baptist

Baptism and wilderness Temptation

Entrance into Public Ministry

Early Judean Ministry (c. 26–27)

First Passover

First cleansing of Temple

John the Baptist imprisoned

Samaritan Ministry (c. 27)

Woman of Samaria

THE YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY (29 A.D.)

Galilean Ministry (c. 27–29)

Healing of Nobleman's son

First rejection at Synagogue in Nazareth

Removal to Capernaum as headquarters

First preaching tour in Galilee

First 4 disciples called

Call of Matthew

Choice of the Twelve

Sermon on the Mount

Second preaching tour in Galilee

Third preaching tour in Galilee

Death of John the Baptist

Feeding of the Multitude

Confession of Peter

Transfiguration

Final departure from Galilee

Later Judean Ministry (c. 29)

Feast of Tabernacles

Seventy commissioned

Feast of Dedication

THE YEAR OF OPPOSITION (30 A.D.)

Perean Ministry (c. 29–30)

²⁴ Chronological data on the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ may be obtained from: Loraine Boettner, *A Harmony of the Gospels*; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*; F. W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ*; John Peter Lange, *The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ*; A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*; W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels*.

Lazarus raised from the dead
Closing Events of our Lord's Earthly Life (c. 30)
 Triumphal entry into Jerusalem
 Second Cleansing of the Temple
 Conflict with Authorities
 Last Passover and Supper
 Gethsemane
 Arrest and Trial
 Crucifixion, death and burial
Resurrection (c. 30)
 Post-resurrection appearances
 Ascension into heaven

APOSTOLIC ERA (30–100 AD)

This period of history extends from the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to the end of the Apostolic era or the end of the first century A.D. It may be sub-divided into three time-frames: The Era of Transition from predominately Judaism to Gentile Christianity, the Era of Expansion or missionary endeavor, largely through the labors of the Apostle Paul and his associates, and the Era of Persecution which began with the Neronian persecution and continued almost unabated through the end of the first century.

ERA OF TRANSITION (30–48 A.D.)

<p>Gaius (Caligula) (Roman Emperor, 37–41) Marcellus (Roman Procurator, 38) Britain becomes a Roman province (43)</p> <p>Herod Agrippa I (37–44)</p>	<p>Pentecost and the empowering of the N.T. Church (30)²⁵ Martyrdom of Stephen (33–35?) Conversion of Saul (34–37?)²⁶</p> <p>Primitive Christianity introduced into Britain (c.43)</p> <p>Epistle of James (44–46)²⁷</p>
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²⁵ The Lord Jesus Christ instituted His church during His earthly ministry. The New Testament church had every essential before Pentecost. Pentecost was the empowering or credentialing of the already-existing New Testament church.

²⁶ Chronological data on the life and missionary work of the Apostle Paul may be obtained from: W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, and F. W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul*. A study on the Apostolic churches and doctrine may be found in Augustus Neander, *History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by the Apostles*.

²⁷ Invaluable data on the order, historical circumstances and content of the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament may be found in the following: J. Lawrence Eason, *The New Bible Survey*; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*; E. F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*; D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*; William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible*; Thomas Hartwell Horne, *Introduction to the Scriptures*; J. Gresham Machen, *The New*

Maryllus (Roman Procurator, 39–44)
Claudius (Roman Emperor, 41–54)

Martyrdom of James the Greater (son of
Zebedee) (c.44)

Cuspius Fadus (Roman Procurator, 45–46)

ERA OF EXPANSION (48–64 AD)

Tiberius Alexander (Roman Procurator, 48)

Ventidius Cumanus (Roman Procurator, 49–52)

Paul's First Missionary Journey (48)

Epistle to the Galatians (48–49)²⁸

Herod Agrippa II (50–93)

The Jerusalem Conference (51)²⁹

Paul's Second Missionary Journey (51)

Epistles of 1 & 2 Thessalonians (51–52)

M. Antonius Felix (Roman Procurator, 3–59)

Gospel of Mark (50–55)

Paul's Third Missionary Journey (53–)

Philip the Apostle bound & stoned at
Hierapolis in Phrygia (c.54)

Epistles of 1 & 2 Corinthians (53–57)

Nero (Roman Emperor, 54–68)

Epistle to the Romans (58)

Paul imprisoned at Caesarea (58–60)

Gospel of Luke (58–61)

Porcius Festus (Roman Procurator, 60–61)

Martyrdom of James the Just (61)

Paul taken as prisoner to Rome (61–63)

**Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians,
Philippians, and to Philemon (60–63)**

Book of Acts (63)

Albinus (Roman Procurator, 62–65)

Gospel of Matthew (60–66)

Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History, W. Graham Scroggie, *Know Your Bible*; Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*; H. C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*; and Theodore Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*.

²⁸ The date of the Galatian epistle is determined by the usage of the term "Galatia." If Paul was referring to the northern portion of the Roman province, then Galatians would have been written later, about 57–58 A.D., forming both a logical and historical introduction to Romans (the "northern Galatian" theory), but if referring to the whole province, then the "Churches of Galatia" would refer to the area of his first missionary journey (the "Southern Galatian" theory). This latter view, which internal evidence seems to substantiate, would necessitate the earlier date.

²⁹ This is traditionally referred to as the "First Church Council" in an ecumenical sense. It was rather a church conference between the churches at Jerusalem and Antioch. Although the Apostles were present, there was no ecclesiastical hierarchy or court, rather a discussion and conclusion. The Apostles did *not decree* anything, but *requested* the compliance of Gentile Christians in certain matters pertaining to immorality, idolatry and diet (Cf. Acts 15).

Paul's release from first Roman imprisonment (63)³⁰

Epistles of 1 Timothy & Titus (63–64)

ERA OF PERSECUTION (64–100 AD)³¹

The Great Fire in Rome and first persecution of Christians under Nero. Believers ravaged by beasts, crucified, used for human torches in Roman celebrations (64)

Barnabas martyred (burned to death) at Salamia in Cyprus (64)

Annaeus Seneca (Roman statesman, Stoic Philosopher (5 B.C.–65 A.D.))

Epistles of 1 & 2 Peter, Hebrews, Jude and 2 Timothy (64–68)

Gessius Florus (Roman Procurator, 66–70)

Martyrdom of John Mark the evangelist (c.68)

Martyrdom of Peter and Paul: Peter (traditionally) crucified upside down. Paul beheaded (68)

Aristarchus, Epaphrus, Priscilla, Aquilla, Andronicus & Junia martyred at Rome (c.68)

Silas martyred at Corinth (c.68)

Onesiphorus & Porphyrius martyred (torn to death) (c.68)

Andrew the Apostle martyred (crucified) at Patras in Achaia (c.68)

Bartholomew the Apostle tortured & beheaded in Armenia (68)

³⁰ There are two views of Paul's imprisonment. Some hold that there was one Roman imprisonment; others that there were two, between which Paul was released for a few months and re-visited many of the churches, ministering until the outbreak of the Neronian persecution and his second arrest.

³¹ It is remarkable that the latter part of the first century A.D. is virtually unknown to historians except in the most general terms. Such lack of historical detail must be considered in the context of the political unrest in the Roman Empire, the frequent transitions in leadership, and destruction of records. This is especially true with regard to matters of Church History. Much information rests on early tradition. Records of the martyrs were preserved and later generations venerated them. Many church records were destroyed during the Imperial persecutions of 303–310 A.D.

It is most probable that all of the original Apostles with the exception of John were martyred during the Neronian persecution. For traditional stories concerning the Apostles and others martyred in the first century, Cf. Thieleman J. Van Braught, *Martyrs' Mirror* (1660) or John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (1563).

Thomas the Apostle martyred (tortured & burned alive) in Calamina (c.68)
 Matthew the Apostle martyred (tortured & beheaded) in Nad-davar (c.68)
 Simon Zelotes & Judas Thaddeus the Apostles martyred (one crucified, the other beaten to death) (c.68)
 Matthias the Apostle martyred (stoned & beheaded) (c.68)
 Prochorus, Parmenas & Nicanor, 3 of the first deacons martyred (c.68)
 Olympus martyred (c.68)
 Carpus martyred at Troas (c.68)
 Trophimus martyred (beheaded) (c.68)
 Maternus, Egystus & Marianus martyred in Germany (c.68)
 Hermagoras martyred at Aquileia (c.68)
 Onesimus & Dionysius the Areopagite martyred (c.68)

Civil wars following the death of Nero (68–69) and the Principates of Galba (68–69), Otho (69) and Vitellius (69)

Vespasian (Roman Emperor, 69–79)

Apollinaris martyred at Ravenna (c.70)

Final revolt of Jewish Zealots and destruction of Jerusalem and Temple (70–72)

Titus (Roman Emperor, 79–81)

Domitian (Roman Emperor, 81–96)

Flavius Josephus writes his *History of the Jews* (81–96)

General persecution of both Jews and Christians in the reign of Domitian (93–96)

Luke the evangelist martyred (hanged) (c.93)

Antipas martyred (burned alive) (c.95)

John exiled to Patmos (96)

The Gospel of John, 1, 2, & 3 John, Revelation (90–98?)³²

³² The dating of the Johannine writings is divided between two views: First, the traditional view that John, out-living the other Apostles, wrote his works at the end of his life during the Domitian persecution (c. 90–98 A.D.). Second, the preterist view that the New Testament canon was

Trajan (Roman Emperor, 98–117)

Timothy martyred (stoned) at Ephesus (c.98)

Urticinus martyred (beheaded) at Ravenna
(c.99)

The martyrs Vitalus (buried alive) & wife
(beaten to death) at Milan (c.99)

THE ERA OF TRANSITION (100–313 AD)

(213 Years)

This era extends from the death of the last Apostle to the Edict of Milan and the general end to Roman state persecution. This era was a transition from primitive New Testament Christianity to an apostate, sacerdotal state religion.

THE SIX MAJOR ISSUES

- (1) The New Testament concept of the church was transformed by the rise of an ecclesiastical hierarchical system which rapidly became *Catholic* or universal in nature and character.
- (2) A sacerdotal system arose to largely replace the spirituality and simplicity of New Testament faith and Christian experience.
- (3) A gradual division developed among the churches. Those assemblies that sought to retain primitive doctrine, piety and purity began to separate themselves from those that became lax and innovative. These would be generically termed *Anabaptists* from the late second century to the time of the Protestant Reformation. The major groups in this era were the Montanists, Novatians and Donatists.
- (4) The Early Church Fathers of the first seven centuries are classified according to their historical relation to the first great Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. There are three designations: The Ante–Nicene, Nicene, and Post–Nicene Fathers.
- (5) The first Christian writers subsequent to the inspired Apostles are classified as the *Ante–Nicene Fathers*, or those who wrote prior to the first great Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325 AD. There are two distinct groups: The Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists.
- (6) This was the age of Roman state persecution. The State sought to systematically obliterate Christianity, but ultimately failed.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE ERA OF TRANSITION

- I. THE PERIOD OF SPORADIC PERSECUTIONS (98–248).
- II. THE FIRST GENERAL PERSECUTION (249–260).
- III. THE PERIOD OF RELATIVE PEACE (260–303).
- IV. THE SECOND GENERAL PERSECUTION (303–310).
- V. THE EDICT OF MILAN AND PEACE (313).

complete before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. John then wrote his works during the Neronian persecution. Both views have had strong conservative adherents.

100–200 AD

Emperor Trajan (98–117)

Clement of Rome (Apostolic Father) (c.30–100)³³

Barnabas of Alexandria (Apostolic Father) (c.100)

Rise of Ebionism (A Jewish cult formed by a merger of a Qumran remnant with Jewish Christianity (1st–2nd cent)

Dacian Wars (101–106)

Simon Cleophas martyred (crucified) (109)

Rufus & Zismus martyred (beheaded) in Philippi (109)

Ethiopian eunuch martyred at Ceylon (110)

Onesimus martyred (stoned) at Ephesus (111)

Pliny persecutes Christians in Bithynia (112)

Publius (pastor at Athens), Barsimaeus, Barbelius & Barba martyred (112)

Justus & Pastor martyred at Complutum in Spain (116)

Tacitus (Roman historian, 55–117)

Emperor Hadrian (117–138)

Ignatius (Apostolic Father & pastor at Rome) martyred (eaten by beasts) (117)

Phocus (pastor at Pontus) martyred (boiled) (118)

Plutarch (Greek writer and biographer, 46–120)

Rise of Ecclesiasticism: Elders and Monarchical Bishops differentiated (c.120)³⁴

Faustina & Jacobina martyred at Brescia in Italy (120)

Papias (Apostolic Father) (c.60–130)

³³ The Apostolic Fathers were an early group of Christian writers believed to have had direct contact with the Apostles themselves. This groups includes: Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas, Barnabas of Alexandria, Papias and Polycarp.

³⁴ The rise of ecclesiasticism. The era from 100–313 A.D. was one of transition from NT simplicity to the Romish hierarchy and Papal system. The first step was a distinction made between bishops and elders, then parochial bishops, then diocesan or monarchical bishops, then the Metropolitan bishops by the early fourth century. The transition was also from the NT simplicity of Gospel preaching and ordinances to sacerdotalism and an ecclesiastical priesthood.

A time of severe persecution of Christians at this time under Hadrian: multitudes slain (c.130)

The rise of Montanism (c.135–230)³⁵

Getulicus, Symphorosa, Cerialus, Amantius, Sapphira & Sabina martyred at Rome (136)

Gnosticism (a mixture of Judaism, Christian-ity, Eastern mysticism & Greek philosophy): The internal threat to Christianity from within for first 3 centuries.³⁶

Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161)

Hermas (Apostolic Father) (c.90–140)

Quadratus (Apologist) (c.117–138)³⁷

Jewish uprising under Bar Kokhba (122–135)

Marcionism (a heretical Gnostic system) (c.140)

Ptolomeus, Lucius & others martyred at Alexandria, Egypt (144)

Beginning of doctrine of and controversy over baptismal regeneration (c.150)³⁸

³⁵ The beginnings of the various groups eventually designated generically as “Anabaptists.” As the more liberal churches took back into fellowship members who had apostatized under threat of persecution and death, conservative churches opposed such action and separated themselves. The rise of ecclesiasticism took place among the same liberal churches. During the era of transition (100–313 A.D.) these influences resulted in several schisms, e.g., Montanism, Novatianism, etc. Each movement was essentially the same, but was named after its prominent leader. After the State–Church system in 313 A.D., these groups continued under various names until the time of the Protestant Reformation. Some were heretical in areas; others were more orthodox in doctrine and Biblical in principle; and some were very orthodox and evangelical. Note the chronology of the Middle ages for a listing of these groups.

³⁶ Gnosticism was a major threat to Christianity during the first three centuries. It was a mixture of Platonic philosophy, Oriental mysticism and apostate Judaism. Gnosticism manifest itself in a variety of forms, e.g., Simonians, Valentinians, Nicolaitans, Cerinthianism, Doceticism, Marcionism, etc.

³⁷ The Apologists were a group of early Christian writers who defended Christianity against the ever-increasing opposition of pagan philosophy, politics and religion. This group includes: Quadratus, Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagorus, Theophilus, Minucius Felix, Melito, Hegesippus and Tertullian.

³⁸ Patristic developments concerning baptism. By the mid-second century, the doctrine of baptismal regeneration was being debated. Until the sixth century, however, believer’s baptism (i.e., faith and instruction or catechizing were necessary prerequisites for baptism) was the general practice (which would preclude infant baptism), until changed by Imperial decree. Immersion was the usual mode (and continued to be, even in the Romish church until the 12th century), but effusion was considered valid in cases of sickness or extreme circumstances. Infant baptism logically followed.

150 AD

- Polycarp (Apostolic Father & pastor at Smyrna) martyred (burned & thrust through with a sword) with 12 others (c.69–160)
- Emperor Marcus Aurelius: A great era of persecution for Christians. 19,000 martyred at Lyons (161–180)
- Aristides (Apologist) (c.138–161)
Felicitas & her 7 sons martyred at Rome (164)
Justin Martyr (Apologist) martyred (beaten & beheaded) (c.100–165)
Carpus, Papyrus, Agathonica & many others martyred at Pergamos (168)
Germanicus martyred (eaten by beasts) at Smyrna (170)
Tatian (Apologist) (110–172)
Vitus Pagathus martyred in France (172)
Attalus martyred (tortured then beheaded) in France (172)
Alexandria of Phrygia martyred (tortured & executed with the sword) in France (172)
Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina & a youth martyred (tormented & beheaded) in France (172)
- Ptolemy (Egyptian astronomer and geographer, c.100–178)
- Photinus, an aged Christian tortured, dies in prison at Lyons (179)
Alcibiades martyred at Lyons (179)
Martyrs Epipodius beheaded & Alexander crucified for the truth at Lyons (179)
Leonides, Plutarchus & others martyred (180)
- Great Plague in Roman Empire (160–180)
Emperor Commodus (180–192)
- Roman Defeat in Scotland (180)
- Athenagorus (Apologist) (c.161–180)
- Theophilus (Apologist) (d. 181)
Hegesippus (Apologist) (c.117–189)
Melito of Sardis (Apologist) (d. 190)
- Emperor Septimius Severus (193–211)
- Irenaeus (Ante–Nicene Father) bishop of church at Lyons (c.175–195)
Rise of Ecclesiasticism: Diocesan or monarchical Bishops and Apostolic succession (c.180)
- Carthage again becomes a world metropolis (c.200)

Period of the Neo-Platonic philosophers (c.200)

Rise of Ecclesiasticism: the Bishop of Rome begins to gain predominant position as pope.³⁹

Galen (Greek physician, c.130–200)

Afghanistan invaded by the Huns (200–540)

200–300 AD

Mavilus martyred (torn by beasts) at Carthage (201)

Perpetua, Felicitas & others martyred (tortured & burned) in Africa (201)

Rutilius martyred (tortured & burned) in Africa (201)

Leonides (father of Origen) martyred (beheaded) at Alexandria (202)

5 disciples of Origen martyred at Alexandria (203)

Rhais & Marcella martyred (burned) at Alexandria (204)

Basilides (a former executioner of Christians) martyred (beheaded) at Alexandria (204)

Tertullian writes opposing the baptism of young children as they had not been instructed sufficiently as disciples (possibly the first mention of infant baptism) (204)

Emperor Caracalla (211–217)

Clement of Alexandria (c.150–215)

Tertullian (Apologist) (c.160–215)

Minucius Felix (Apologist) (c.180–220?)

Emperor Heliogabalus (218–222)

Goths invade Asia Minor and Balkan peninsula (220)

Emperor Severus Alexander: Resumes the persecution of Christians which had ceased from 213 to 223. (222–235)

³⁹ The rise of Ecclesiasticism and the rise of the Papal system: From the earliest times, the Bishop of Rome became central. This prominence derived from: the supposed principle of Apostolic succession from Peter, the Imperial capital being located at Rome, the Latin-speaking western part of the Empire holding preeminence over the Greek-speaking eastern part, the removal of the Roman capital to Constantinople under Constantine in 331 A.D., and the final division of the Empire into East and West in 395 A.D. This left the Pope in virtual control of the Western Empire as the prominent person. The first Pope with ecclesiastical, political and military power was Gregory the Great (590–604) who may be properly called the first pope. The Papal system reached its zenith with Gregory VI (Hildebrand) (1073). By the eleventh century the Pope ruled over an alleged spiritual empire that controlled most of the kingdoms of western civilization. Papal decline began with Boniface VIII (1303) and ended with the “Babylonian Captivity of the Church” in Avignon, France (1309–1377).

Agaptius, Calapodius, Tiburtius, Valerianus, Quirtilus, Julia, Cecilia, Martina & others martyred (223)
 Henricus (bishop of church at Lyons), Narcissus (a patriarch at Jerusalem), Julius & Eusebius martyred (223)
 Hyppolytus (Ante–Nicene Father) (c.170–236)

Emperor Maximin (235–238)

Emperors Gordian I, Gordian II, Balbinus, Pupienus and Gordian III (238–244)

Emperor Philip the Arabian (244–249)

The 1000th anniversary of Rome (248)
 Emperor Decius (249–251)

Multitudes of Christians martyred (237)

Julius Africanus (Ante–Nicene Father) (c.160–240)⁴⁰

Alexander of Jerusalem (bishop of church at Jerusalem & martyr) (d. 247)

Manichaeism (c.250–)
 Crucifixion of Mani (c.251)
 Rise of Ecclesiasticism: a change begins toward sacerdotalism (c.250)
 Rise of Novatianism: Partly a reaction against the developing ecclesiasticism & laxness in discipline in the churches (c.250–)

250 AD

First general persecution of Christians under Decius, coinciding with the 1000th anniversary of Rome and an attempt to enforce the dominance of the old pagan religion (248–251)⁴¹

Emperor Gallus (251–253)

Emperor Vallerian (253–260)

Metras, Cointha, Apollonia & Serapion martyred at Alexandria (252)

Julian, Macar, Epimachus, Alexander & many others martyred at Alexandria (253)

⁴⁰ The Church Fathers are classified according to their historical relation to the Council of Nicea (325): Ante–Nicene Fathers—those who wrote before 325; Nicene Fathers—those who lived and wrote in the immediate context of 325; and Post–Nicene Fathers—those who lived and wrote after 325. The Apostolic Fathers and Apologists are classified with the Ante–Nicene Fathers.

⁴¹ A record of the Christian martyrs and their sufferings down to the 16th century can be read in Theileman J. Van Braught, *Martyrs' Mirror* and John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.

Babylas (bishop of church at Antioch) & 3 others martyred (beheaded) at Antioch (254)
 Pionius (bishop of church at Smyrna) martyred (burned) (254)
 Origen (Ante–Nicene Father) (c. 185–254)
 Maximus martyred (stoned) at Ephesus (255)
 Cyprian (Ante–Nicene Father) (c. 200–258)
 Baptismal controversy re baptism performed by heretics (c.255)

Emperor Gallienus (260–268)
 The Marcomanni invade Black Sea region (257)

First Edict of Toleration for Christians (260)
 Dionysius (bishop of church at Alexandria), Gaius & Peter exiled (260)
 Fructuosus (bishop of church at Tarragona) martyred with his deacons (burned) (261)
 Sabellian Controversy (Trinitarian) (c.262)
 Marinus martyred (beheaded) at Jerusalem (262)
 Priscus, Malchus & Alexander martyred (torn by beasts) at Caesarea (263)

Goths plunder Athens, Sparta and Corinth (268)
 Emperor Claudius (268–270)

Monarchian controversy (Trinitarian) (c.269)

Emperor Aurelian (270–275)

Philip & many others martyred (270)
 Gregory Thaumaturgos (Ante–Nicene Father) (c.213–270)

Plotinus (Neo–Platonic philosopher, 204–270)
 First form of compass used in China (271)

Privatus (bishop of church at Gevaudan) martyred (beaten) (274)
 Mamas martyred in Cappadocia (274)
 Symphorian martyred (beheaded) at Autum (275)

Emperor Marcus Aurelius Probus (276–282)
 Emperor Marcus Aurelius Carus (282–283)
 Emperor Diocletian (284–305)
 First partition of Roman Empire into East and West (285). Period of relative peace for Christians (260–303). During this time the first church buildings were erected.⁴²

⁴² The church was originally the ἐκκλησία, or assembly, congregation of the Lord's people. The first church buildings were designated as κύριακου or κυρίανκον, that which belongs to the Lord [Κύριος]. This eventually became the words "kirk," "chirche" and "Church."

3 brothers & 2 women martyred (tortured to death or crucified) (285)

Zenobius & Zenobia (brother & sister) martyred (tortured & beheaded) at Agaea in Cilicia (285)

Thracus, Probus & Andronicus Martyred (tortured & executed) at Tarsus in Cilicia (290)

Porphyry (Neo-Platonic philosopher, 233–303)

300–313 AD

Arnobius in his writings cites the almost universal practice of faith & instruction before baptism (300)

Second great general persecution of Christianity (c.302–310)

Anthimus (bishop of the church at Nicomedia) & many members martyred (302)

Phileas (bishop of the church at Thumis, Egypt) martyred (beheaded) (302)

Cassian (bishop of the church at Brescia, Italy & a Christian teacher) martyred by his heathen students (302)

Eulalia martyred (burned & suffocated) at Medina, Spain (302)

Eucratis tortured & dies in prison (302)

Euplius martyred (beheaded) at Catania, Sicily (303)

Pancratius martyred (beheaded) at Rome (303)

Justus martyred (beheaded) at Auxerre in Burgundy (303)

Felix (bishop of the church at Thibaris, Africa) martyred (303)

Primus & Felician (brothers) martyred (torn by beasts & beheaded) at Numantina, Italy (303)

Apphian martyred (drowned) at Caesarea for defending the Gospel & reproving idolatry (304)

Ulpian & Aedius (brothers) martyred (drowned) at Tyre (304)

Agathopus (deacon) & Theodulus (lector) of the church at Thessalonica martyred (drowned) (304)

Julitta martyred (beheaded) at Tarsus (304)

40 youths martyred (burned) at Antioch (304)
 Sylvanus (bishop of the church at Emissa, Syria) & 7 others martyred (beheaded) (305)

Emperor Constantius Chlorus assumes reign over eastern and western divisions of the Empire (306)

Theodosia martyred (drowned) at Caesarea (306)
 Pamphilius (an elder of the church at Caesarea) imprisoned & martyred (306)
 Ennathas martyred (burned) at Scythopolis, Palestine (307)
 Catharina martyred (tortured & beheaded) at Alexandria (307)
 Ares, Promus & Elias martyred (burned) & several others banished at Askalon, Palestine (308)
 Peter Apselamus martyred (burned) at Caesarea (308)
 Biblas, Aquilina & Fortunata martyred in Palestine (308)
 Irene & her 2 sisters martyred (burned) (309)
 Peter Nilus & Peter Mythius martyred (burned) & many more put to death at Antioch (309)
 Lucian (an elder of the church at Antioch) dies in prison (310)
 Peter, Faustus, Didius & Ammonius (elders of the church at Alexandria) martyred (310)
 Anysia (a young girl) martyred in the Temple at Alexandria (310)
 Demetrius (a Christian teacher) martyred at Alexandria (310)
 Theodorus (a pastor), Philemon & Cyrilla martyred (310)
 Eugenius, Auxentius (a deacon of the church at Auracea), Maodatus & many others tortured & martyred (311)
 Donatist schism in North Africa (312)

Constantine defeats Maxentius and with Licinius jointly issues two edicts of toleration for Christians, the Edicts of Rome (312) and Milan (313)⁴³

⁴³ The Edict of Toleration issued by Constantine in 313 stopped the persecution of Christians in the western portion of the Empire, but Licinius in the eastern portion still persecuted Christians intently from 319–323. He may have thought they supported Constantine and therefore were not loyal.

AN INTERPRETIVE OUTLINE
OF
THE APOSTOLIC AGE: 26–100 AD
74 YEARS
TEXT: GAL. 4:4–5

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

INTRODUCTION

The Apostolic Age or the first century forms the basis for all subsequent Christianity and the standard or criterion by which it must be evaluated. The Scriptures and especially The New Testament reveal and teach by direct command and inspired Apostolic example the doctrine and practice of and for Biblical Christianity.

This was the age of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ and the inspired Apostles. It was an age of completion and fulfillment, of revival and expansion.

THE GENERAL HISTORICAL OUTLINE

This age extends from the public ministries of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ to the end of the First century A.D. There are two major divisions:

I. THE MESSIANIC ERA (26–30 A.D.).

The Messianic Era contains the beginning and foundation of the New Testament church as an institutional entity. The church was established by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry.

II. THE APOSTOLIC ERA (30–100 A.D.).

The second division is the Apostolic Era, which traces the development and spread of Christianity from the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and Pentecost to the end of the century or the death of John the last Apostle.

This era traces the development and spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire and beyond through the ministry of the inspired Apostles and early Christians. During this time the New Testament was written. There were three distinct periods:

First, the Era of Transition (30–48 AD). This extended from Pentecost to the first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. It was the transition from Jewish to Gentile Christianity.

Second, the Era of Expansion (48–64 AD). This period began with missionary journeys of the Apostle and ended with the great persecution by Nero. It was the great period of expansion across the Roman Empire by the apostle Paul and others.

Third, the Era of Persecution (64–100 AD). This period began with the Neronian persecution and ended with the death of the Apostle John.

THE MESSIANIC ERA (26–30 AD)

Church history properly begins with the ministry of John the Baptist and the earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the eternal Son of God became incarnate, the time had arrived in the eternal redemptive purpose of God to fulfill the Old Testament promises and establish the New Covenant or Gospel economy and church (Gal. 4:4–5; Phil. 2:5–11; Jn. 1:1–14; Heb. 8:1–13; Eph. 2:11–3:12). To properly understand this critical time, several considerations are in order.

THE PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIANITY

HEBREW INFLUENCE

God had been preparing the world for the truth of the Gospel since the Garden of Eden and the entrance of sin into the human race (Gen. 3:15, 21). The institution of substitutional blood sacrifice as a covering for sin and the promise of a redeemer were progressively revealed by God in the Old Testament to His covenant people through prophecies, ceremonies, rituals, types and symbols (Heb. 10:1). The Old Testament was preparatory to the New. The New Testament was the fulfillment and realization of the Old.

Jewish preparation for Christianity consisted mainly in the following:

First, the Divine progressive revelation from Abraham to the prophets concerning the promised Messiah. This messianic expectation, though somewhat obscured by tradition, was prominent in the national consciousness (Matt. 2:1–12; Lk. 2:25–26, 36–38; Jn. 1:19–34). The Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, would be of Jewish descent, the seed of Abraham, of the Tribe of Judah, the Son of David.

Second, the revelation of the moral nature and character of God in His holy Law (Ex. 20:1–17). Wherever Judaism had an influence among the Gentiles, the nature and character of the one true God were known to a given degree. Such teaching stood in stark contrast to the polytheism and relative morality of the time.

Third, the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire and beyond and the institution of the synagogue. The captivity in Babylon had cured the Jews of their idolatrous and polytheistic past. Their strict monotheism was spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. In the synagogues scattered throughout the Empire, Gentiles could hear the Scriptures read and hear the basic truth concerning God, His Law, His moral character and His promises.

These synagogues would providentially provide places of evangelism for the Apostle Paul and others. Many of their converts would be former Gentile proselytes to Judaism.

Fourth, Jewish religious traditions, social and political sects or institutions such as the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Herodians and the ruling Sanhedrin produced an environment for the rejection and crucifixion of the Son of God.

As the Lamb of God, the Savior, the Mediator of the New or Gospel covenant, He must not only live a sinless life (active obedience), but also suffer and die (passive obedience), then be raised again from the dead and ascend into heaven as Mediator, Great

High Priest and sovereign Lord (Phil. 2:5–11; 1 Tim. 2:5; the whole of the letter to the Hebrews; Acts 2:36).

The religious leaders, motivated by criminal unbelief, ignorance and envy, persuaded the people and the Roman authorities to crucify the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 7:1; 8:31–59; 11:45–53; Matt. 27:17–18; Acts 2:22–23; 3:13–18; 4:23–28; 7:51–52).

The Hebrew race then providentially provided a historical, religious, social, geographical and cultural environment for the redemptive revelation of God to the nations.

GREEK INFLUENCE

The Greek influence in the preparation for Christianity was three-fold:

First, Greek philosophy permeated the thought of the ancient world. Many pagans had turned from their irrational and superstitious polytheism to philosophy. It questioned the religious, called attention to the transcendent and the eternal, and explored the nature of moral and ethical issues. But philosophy by its very nature was inherently incapable of enabling the human mind to apprehend the self-revealing triune God of Scripture. It did create an intellectual void that only the truth of the Gospel could fill. It also provided in part a vocabulary and thought-structure for Christianity. The two prevailing philosophies of the first century were Epicureanism and Stoicism. Gnosticism was an admixture of pagan and Christian thought that sought to refine Christianity into an esoteric philosophy.

Second, the Greek language was spread throughout the later Roman world with the conquests of Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.). The Koine (κοινή, common) Greek became the universal language, spoken by Greeks, Romans and Jews. It was the common language of the marketplace and of the Gospel for teachers, evangelists missionaries and the inspired authors of the New Testament Scriptures. The Koine Greek with its grammatical and syntactical intricacies and idioms was the best-suited for expressing the very Word of God.

Third, the Greek spirit, though not so prominent as the philosophy and language, instilled in Christianity an intellectual temper or approach more suited to the Western mind than the oriental Hebrew mentality and thought-process. Christianity was to become largely Gentile and Western in its missionary thrust and thought as its spread throughout the Roman Empire and the Western world.

ROMAN INFLUENCE

The Roman influence was physical, political, social and legal. Men traveled on Roman roads. Rome was the central and ultimate political power. Roman armies kept an enforced peace. There was some relative protection and stability for all subjects of the Empire, and especially Roman citizens.

The *Pax Romana* brought a unifying principle to civilization and at the very first provided a protective and stabilizing environment for the spread of Christianity. Judaism was considered a *religio licita* by the Roman government and the Jewish foundations of Christianity providentially sheltered it for the first four decades.

The Jews in Palestine under Roman rule had no power of capital punishment and were under the authority of a Roman Procurator. Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles and a

Roman citizen enjoyed a given amount of protection and certain privileges. Christian converts in the Roman army took the Gospel to the borders of the Empire in the first century. There is evidence that the Gospel came to Britain by 43 AD in this way.

The preparatory influence in summary is that the Jews gave the world One Lord; the Greeks, One Language; and the Romans, One Law.

THE EARTHLY LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

According to the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC and the dating of the astronomical phenomenon (the “star” of the wise men) in 6 BC, The Lord Jesus Christ was born about 4–6 BC. He entered into his public ministry about 27 AD at age 30, and was crucified about 30 AD.

The public ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ lasted approximately three and a half years. It may be described either by year (the Year of Obscurity, the Year of Opportunity and the Year of Opposition) or by geographical location (The early Judean ministry, the Samaritan ministry, the Galilean ministry, the later Judean ministry, the Perea ministry and the final journey to Jerusalem). The following is a summary:

THE YEAR OF OBSCURITY (26–28 A.D.)

The time was approximately a year and a half. It began with the ministry of John the Baptist who prepared the nation for the public ministry of the Messiah and identified Him for the people (Matt. 3:1–17; 11:2–13; Mk. 1:1–15; Lk. 1:5–17; 3:1–18; Jn. 1:19–34; 3:22–31).

The public life of the Lord began with His baptism and wilderness temptation. This first year included: The calling of the first disciples, His first miracle and the early Judean ministry: the First Passover and cleansing of the Temple, the discourse with Nicodemus, the Samaritan ministry and the beginning of the Galilean ministry.

THE YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY (29 A.D.)

The major portion of the Lord’s ministry was pursued in Galilee north of Judah and Samaria. He would only journey to Jerusalem during the religious festivals. His headquarters were at Capernaum and from there He went on at least three preaching tours of Galilee.

This year encompassed the Galilean ministry and the later Judean ministry. The major events were: the choice of the remaining disciples, numerous healings and other miracles, the Sermon on the Mount, the death of John the Baptist, the transfiguration and the final preparation of the Disciples for the Lord’s suffering, death and resurrection.

THE YEAR OF OPPOSITION (29–30 A.D.)

As opposition and hostility from the religious leaders heightened, the Lord went to the region of Perea beyond Jordan before His final journey up to Jerusalem. He did return for a short time to raise Lazarus from the dead. He finally returned through Jericho, then Bethany. The final week began with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the second

cleansing of the temple and the final Passover and Garden agony. Then followed His arrest, trial and crucifixion.

THE FINAL EARTHLY DAYS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ spent forty days with His Apostles and followers (i.e., His church), preparing them for His own immediate departure and their future (Acts 1:1–5). It was during this time that He instructed and commissioned them before His ascension into heaven to the right hand of God (Matt. 28:18–20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:44–53; Acts 1:4–9; Heb. 1:1–4).

The New Testament Church as an institution possessed all the essentials before the ascension of the Lord. It was complete and functional before the Day of Pentecost.

II

THE APOSTOLIC ERA (30 A.D.–100 A.D.)

During this era, subsequent to the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel was preached beyond the reaches of the Roman Empire and the Apostles wrote the New Testament Scriptures.

The first part of this era (30–63 A.D.) is covered by the historian Luke in the Book of Acts (“The first church history”). The latter part of this century was marked by the first Roman persecutions and the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is remarkable that Christianity in the latter part of this period (68–100 A.D.) is relatively unknown to historians with reference to church history except in the most general terms or by tradition. Roman secular historians and Josephus are major sources in information.

THE ERA OF TRANSITION (30 A.D.–48 A.D.) (18 YEARS)

Peter was the prominent person and Jerusalem was the central place. The transition began from predominantly Jewish to Gentile Christianity. It extended from Pentecost to the first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul (Acts 1–12).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PENTECOST (30 A.D.)

The feast of Pentecost had a six-fold significance: religious, typical, prophetic, ecclesiastical and evangelical.

First, the religious significance: This was a yearly feast-day in the religious calendar of Israel. It was celebrated fifty days after the Passover and was the feast of the first-fruits of harvest (Cf. Ex. 23:16, 19; 34:22; Lev. 23:10–12; Numb. 28:26).

Second, the typical significance: This feast typically anticipated the first-fruits of the Gospel economy (the 3,000 converts) and was the prototype of the Gospel harvest.

Third, the prophetic significance: The out-pouring of the Spirit in Old Testament prophecy and language, as noted by the Apostle Peter in his address to the people (Acts 2:14–21; Joel 2:28–30) was on this particular Pentecost the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy (Acts 2:16, 32–33).

Fourth, the ecclesiastical significance: The out-pouring or giving of the Holy Spirit on this momentous occasion was the identification or credentialing of the already-existent and functioning New Testament church. Through this phenomenon the New Testament church was identified or accredited as the God-ordained institution for the Gospel economy. Pentecost was not the alleged “birthday” of the church, but its endowment with power for the pursuit and accomplishment of its commission (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4–8).

This had typically taken place with the Tabernacle in the wilderness in the Mosaic economy. The Tabernacle was complete and functional, then the *shekinah* or visible glory of God descended and filled the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:1–9; 40:33–35). This identified or credentialed it as the God-ordained institution for that time and economy. The same is true of the Temple of Solomon. It was complete and functional, then the Shekinah filled it (1 Kgs. 7:51–8:11).

Supernatural out-pourings of the Spirit also occurred in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17) and in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44–46; 11:15–18) as signs to the Jewish Christians that the truth and power of the Gospel extended beyond their religious and cultural boundaries.

Fifth, the providential significance: Pentecost was greatest feast of the religious year for Jewish pilgrims and proselytes. The Passover was too early in the spring for safe land travel or shipping. The Yom Kippur was too late in the fall. The safest time of the year for travel was during the time of Pentecost. This providentially assured the Apostles of the greatest possible hearing.

Sixth, the evangelical significance: Pentecost was the beginning of a great revival and spiritual awakening that lasted through the early years of the Jerusalem church then spread to Samaria and on to the Gentiles. Every enduring principle or characteristic of revival was exhibited in this first New Testament revival and awakening. It was the prototype of all subsequent true revivals and spiritual awakenings in church history. Briefly, the following may be noted:

- There are certain spiritual preliminary events. Revival or awakening is preceded by spiritual preparation on the part of some (Acts 1:14).
- There is an unusual out-pouring of the Spirit of God upon the churches, or a revival, which in turn spreads a concern to the unsaved, or spiritual awakening. (Acts 2). Pentecost was unique as the promised Baptism of or in the Spirit, but unusual out-pourings of the Spirit of God have given impetus to every true historical revival.
- There is a return to Biblical preaching. Peter and the others expounded and applied the Scriptures. This was a great departure from the current accepted use of the Jewish Scriptures (Acts 2:14–34; 3:12–26; 4:33; 5:20–21, 42; 6:8–10; 7:2–53).
- There is the experience of great opposition from both religious and secular authorities. The Sadducees and then the entire Sanhedrin opposed and persecuted the church at Jerusalem and even those who had fled. Then the secular authorities joined in the persecution (Acts 4:1–23; 5:17–42; 6:8–8:3; 9:1–2; 12:1–4).
- There are always great obstacles in the form of sinning believers or false converts and false doctrines. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–10) and Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9–24) are early New Testament examples.

- There are necessary and often unusual consequences to revival. The churches are purified, disciplined and filled with joy (Acts 2:41–47; 4:32–37; 5:11–13). There are a great number of people convicted of sin, converted and added to the churches (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). Revival inevitably creates problems, even within the churches (Acts 6:1).

THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN (33–35 A.D.)

The death of Stephen occurred approximately 33–35 A.D. John the Baptist was the first martyr of the Christian dispensation; Stephen the first of the Apostolic church and era. His preaching and prayers were blessed by God to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 6:5–8:2).

THE CONVERSION OF PAUL (34–37 A.D.)

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus (The Apostle Paul) was pivotal in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:1–18). His conversion prepared the way for the great transition from Jewish to Gentile Christianity. Paul was the great intellectual and theologian of the First Century, the great missionary, the inspired writer of most of the New Testament Scriptures.

THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS (35–38 A.D.)

It was on this occasion that the door of Christianity was opened to the Gentiles by Peter (Acts 10:1–11:18; 15:1–12). God had to supernaturally and providentially overcome the extreme religious, racial and cultural prejudice of both Peter and the Jewish Christians. The issue of uncircumcised Gentiles becoming Christians without first becoming Jews through circumcision and proselytism was again a controversy that led to the conference at Jerusalem (Acts 15). This was the beginning of the Judaizing party in Jerusalem.

THE MARTYRDOM OF JAMES (44 A.D.)

This was James the Greater, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21). He became the first of the original disciples to be killed for the testimony of the Gospel (45 A.D.). Peter was also taken prisoner at this time, but was supernaturally delivered (Acts 12:1–24).

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES (44–46 A.D.)

The Epistle of James (44–46 A.D.) was the first New Testament Scripture. This was James “the Just,” the half-brother of Christ and was converted after His resurrection. He became a leading elder in the Jerusalem church.

This epistle was written to Jewish Christians of the dispersion (Jas. 1:1) to comfort them through the triumph of true faith and correct them from the tendency to worldliness. This epistle also dealt with the Law and justification, a necessary issue in view of the Jewish and Old Testament influence on Christianity.

THE ERA OF EXPANSION (48 A.D.–64 A.D.) (16 YEARS)

Paul was the prominent person and the center of focus became Antioch in Syria, a predominantly Gentile church. The transition was complete from Jewish Christianity

centered in Jerusalem to Gentile Christianity and the great missionary impetus to the Roman world.

The great theological issue was the nature of the Gospel of grace in relation to the Law and Judaism. This marked the controversy over legalism and the separation of primitive Christianity from its Judaistic background. During this period most of the books of the New Testament were written. A major theme in many of these early epistles is justification by faith.

MARTYRDOM OF PHILIP AND “JAMES THE JUST” (54–61 A.D.)

Tradition states that Philip the Apostle was stoned to death at Hierapolis in Phrygia approximately 54 A.D. James “the Just,” the half-brother of the Lord was allegedly martyred approximately 61 A.D. in Jerusalem during the interregnum after the death of the Roman Procurator Festus. He was thrown from the Temple, stoned and finally beaten to death with a fuller’s club.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL (48 A.D.)

Paul and Barnabas were sent on this mission by the Syrian Antioch church after being separated to that ministry by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1–4).

This missionary excursion occurred about 48 A.D. and extended into Cyprus and Asia Minor (Perga and Atalia in Pamphylia and the Galatian cities of Pisidia: Anitoch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) (Acts 13:4–26).

This inspired account is vital to the establishment of Biblical missionary principles, the example of the synagogue evangelism and Christianity’s contact with paganism.

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS (48–49 A.D.)

This was the second writing in the New Testament and also, as the epistle of James, dealt with justification and the Law. The clarification of this issue was vital to the purity of the grace of the Gospel and the definitive separation between Christianity and Jewish legalism. The Apostle wrote this letter to those he had evangelized on his first missionary journey in the southern area of the province of Galatia.

THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE (51 A.D.)

The conference in Jerusalem occurred about 51 A.D. and is described in detail in Acts 15. Again, the nature of the Gospel and the relation of Jewish and Gentile Christians was the major issue. The legalistic controversy, however, would continue until the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (70–72 A.D.).

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL (51–52 A.D.)

This evangelistic mission began approximately 51 A.D. Because of a personal disagreement between Paul and Barnabas concerning John Mark, Paul took Silas as his companion. This was providential, as Silas was also a Roman citizen and gave him an equal standing with Paul which Barnabas may have lacked. This was quite significant at Philippi (Acts 16:37–38).

Their route took them overland to Cilicia, then on to the southern region of Galatia, the site of Paul's first missionary labors. there, Paul took Timothy as his assistant.

The Spirit lead them away from Asia Minor and Bithynia to Macedonia (northern Greece). Preaching at Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica and Berea. Entering Achaia (southern Greece), they preached at Athens and Corinth, where Paul preached for a year and a half. From Ephesus, Paul sailed back to Jerusalem (Acts 15:36–18:22).

THE EPISTLES OF I & II THESSALONIANS (51–52 A.D.)

These two epistles were written approximately 51–52 A.D. during the second missionary journey from Corinth within a few months of leaving Thessalonica (I Thess. 3:1–7; Acts 18:5). As in James and Galatians, there is mention of the opposition of the Jews against Christianity.

These two epistles are the earliest compendium of Christian truth, covering both doctrinal and practical matters.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK (50–55 A.D.)

Tradition identifies the author as John Mark, a cousin to Barnabas and a younger companion to Paul and Peter (Acts 12:25; 13:1–5; 15:36–41; Col. 4:10; Phlm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13). This was the first written account of the Messianic era (c.50–55 A.D.).

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL (53–57 A.D.)

This trek began approximately 53 A.D. from the Syrian Antioch. Paul retraced his route to the cities of southern Galatia, then westward to Ephesus in Asia Minor where he spent some three years. He left Ephesus after the city-wide riot and made a circuitous route through Macedonia and Achaia, visiting previously-established churches. From Corinth, he retraced his route back through Macedonia and down the coast of Asia Minor, meeting with believers along his way toward Jerusalem (Acts 18:22–21:15).

At Jerusalem, after meeting with the leaders of the church, Paul was arrested by the Roman authorities after a riot (Acts 21:16–22:29). He was imprisoned at Caesarea until taken to Rome about 61 A.D. (Acts 22:30–26:32).

THE EPISTLES OF I & II CORINTHIANS (54–56 A.D.)

These two letters by the Apostle Paul followed a first letter that has not been preserved (1 Cor. 5:9). They were written approximately 54–56 A.D. from Ephesus during the third missionary journey.

I Corinthians was written to correct disruptive, immoral and unethical conditions within the church; to answer questions concerning marriage, foods, worship and the resurrection; to give instructions concerning a collection for the poor believers Jerusalem; to thank them for their gift which a deputation had delivered.

II Corinthians was written to prepare the church for his intended visit; to express his rejoicing over the obedience of the majority to the truth; to urge them to complete the offering for the poor believers at Jerusalem; to vindicate his apostleship against the charges of the Judaizers and their legalism.

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (58 A.D.)

This Pauline epistle was written from Corinth approximately 58 A.D. (Rom. 1:1; 16:21–23). The purpose was two-fold: First, to prepare the believers at Rome for his anticipated arrival (Acts 19:21; Rom. 1:9–13; 15:15–32). Second, because of Judaistic error, opposition and possible martyrdom and the need for a positive, didactic statement of truth, Paul set forth the major truth of salvation in a comprehensive and systematic epistle with the righteousness of God as the major theme. The epistle was delivered to Rome by Phoebe (Rom. 16:1–2).

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE (57–61 A.D.)

Luke was a Greek physician and the author of both this Gospel record and the book of Acts (Lk. 1:1–4; Acts 1:1). He was the only Gentile writer of Scripture. He was a companion of the Apostle Paul (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm. 24. Cf. also the “we” and “us” sections of Acts, where Luke travels with the Apostle on his missionary journeys (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16).

Luke wrote this Gospel record for Gentile converts, notably Theophilus. The approximate date was 58–61 A.D. while Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea (Acts 23:33–26:32).

PAUL: THE JOURNEY TO AND IMPRISONMENT AT ROME (61–63 A.D.)

The Apostle Paul, having as a Roman citizen exercised his right to appeal to Caesar, was transported to Rome under guard. The record of the incidents and the two years of imprisonment are found in Acts 25:9–12, 21, 24–25; 27:1–28:31.

THE PRISON EPISTLES AND ACTS (61–63 A.D.)

The so-called “Prison Epistles” written by the Apostle Paul during the first Roman incarceration were Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon and Philippians. Acts was written by Luke toward the end of this time (61–63 A.D.).

The epistles to the Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon were sent from Rome by Tychicus and Onesimus to Asia Minor. The Philippian letter was written last and sent by Epaphroditus just prior to Paul’s release.

The Colossian letter was occasioned by the arrival of Epaphrus (1:7) who reported the heresy that had taken root in Colosse. It was a strange mixture of ritualistic Judaism (2:2–3, 10–18), Oriental mysticism (2:8, 18, 23), pagan asceticism (2:8, 16–23) and elements of Greek philosophy (2:8, 18–23). In answer, Paul proclaimed the completeness of the Person and work of Christ (1:9–2:3, 8–10, 17; 3:1–4).

The Ephesian letter has many parallels with Colossians. Both have Christ and His Church as dominant themes. However, where Colossians is more apologetical, Ephesians is more theological. Colossians is controversial, whereas Ephesians is contemplative. Colossians emphasizes the local while Ephesians emphasizes the ideal or institutional.

Philemon is a short letter to a close personal friend. It concerned a runaway slave, Onesimus, who had fled providentially to Rome and been converted under the ministry of

Paul. The purpose was intercession and reconciliation. This short epistle possesses vital implications concerning the nature of the Gospel and the institution of slavery.

The Philippian epistle was occasioned by the arrival of Epaphroditus from Philippi with a gift for the Apostle (1:5; 4:10, 14–18). An answer from Paul was delayed because Epaphroditus contracted a severe illness (2:25–30). When he was recovered, Paul sent him back to Philippi with this letter.

The purpose was to thank them for their gift and concern; to inform them of his state in prison and anticipated release (1:12–25); to encourage and exhort them to unity (1:26–2:16; 4:1–9); and to warn them of Judaistic and antinomian teachers (3:1–21).

The book of Acts, “The first Church History,” Was written by Luke from Rome during the final time of the Apostle Paul’s imprisonment (Acts 28:16–31). It is vital for a proper comprehension of the implementation of New Testament truth in principle and practice.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW (60–66 A.D.)

Matthew was one of the original twelve disciples. His Gospel record was written approximately 60–66 A.D. The purpose was to demonstrate that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah and the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in His Person and work. It was a record suited for Jewish converts to Christianity.

PAUL: RELEASE FROM FIRST ROMAN IMPRISONMENT (63 A.D.)

There are reasons for believing that the Apostle Paul was released from prison about 63 A.D. and that he revisited many of the churches before the outbreak of the Neronian persecution which began in 64 A.D. The reasons put forth include: First, the charges against him at the first were Jewish and he had an anticipation of an imminent release (Phil. 1:23–26; 2:23–24; Phlm. 1, 9, 22), whereas the persecution under Nero was directed specifically against Christians who were slaughtered unmercifully. Second, the first letter to Timothy mentioned nothing of imprisonment. Third, the first time he was not bound and was allowed relative freedom (Acts 28:30–31). The second letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:6–9) seems to describe a different situation (2 Tim. 1:8–9, 16–18; 2:9; 4:6–18).

THE EPISTLES OF I TIMOTHY & TITUS (63–64 A.D.)

I Timothy was most probably written by the Apostle Paul during his short interval of freedom between the two Roman imprisonments (63–64 A.D.). Timothy had been left at Ephesus to supervise the work (1:3).

This letter is intensely personal and was written with a three-fold purpose: first, to warn Timothy against false teachers and their doctrines (1:4–11; 4:1–7; 5:15; 6:3–5, 20. Cf. Acts 20:17–32); second, to exhort Timothy about order and disorder in the church (2:1–15; 3:1–15); third, to encourage Timothy to be faithful, courageous and industrious in the face of opposition (1:2–3, 18–20; 3:14–15; 4:6–16; 5:21–23; 6:5, 11–21).

The epistle to Titus was written about the same time (63–64 A.D.). Paul had left Titus at Crete as he had left Timothy at Ephesus (1:4–5).

The purpose of writing was three-fold: First, to authorize Titus to supervise in the ordaining of elders (1:5–9), in the strengthening of the churches against the false teachers of Judaistic traditions (1:9–16), to urge believers to live godly lives (2:1–15), and to exhort believers to be good citizens (3:1–8), and remain doctrinally pure (3:9–11). Second, to exhort Titus to avoid any and all occasions for self-reproach (2:1, 7–8, 15; 3:9). Third, to inform Titus of his own intention of wintering at Nicopolis (3:12), that he will send Artemas or Tychicus to Crete (3:12), and that Zenas and Apollos are expected to arrive at Crete also (3:13).

THE ERA OF PERSECUTION (64–100 A.D.)

There is little known concerning Christianity in this era apart from the remaining epistles, secular historians, Josephus and religious tradition.

According to tradition the Apostle John was the prominent person and the center of Christianity moved to Ephesus after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus in 70–72 A.D.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple ended the legalist controversy, but an incipient Gnosticism in various forms had already begun its infiltration of Christianity and would prove to be its insidious enemy for future generations.

The Roman persecutions began with Nero (64–68 A.D.). Jewish Zealot insurrection led to the destruction of Jerusalem, then a general persecution of both Jews and Christians followed in the reign of Domitian (93–96 A.D.). This century ended with another general persecution under the Emperor Trajan (98–117 A.D.).

THE PERSECUTION UNDER NERO (64–68 A.D.)

The reign of Nero lasted from 54 to 68 A.D. He was a profligate and became more degenerate as his reign progressed. His personal history was one of murder, intrigue and possible insanity. He died a suicide.

It is alleged by the Roman historian Tacitus that Nero had the great fire in Rome started on his orders so he could rebuild it in greater glory and name it after himself, Neropolis. The fire was started about the 19th of July, 64 A.D. and raged for ten days. It consumed a major portion of the city.

To remove suspicion and blame from himself, Nero had the Christians accused. They would prove convenient victims for the Roman government for the next two and half centuries. What began as a lie evidently became established policy under the subsequent Roman persecutions of Christians. This reign of terror lasted from 64 to 68 A.D.

Believers were tortured and murdered in the most cruel fashion for the sport and entertainment of Nero. They were burned as human torches, as the sentence for incendiaries was to be burned alive. Some were torn apart by wild beasts, and others subjected to the utmost cruelties in death.

The persecution spread to the Provinces where authorities were evidently quick to follow suit, venting themselves upon the defenseless Christians. The Jews also allegedly used this opportunity to seek their own vengeance upon the Christians within their power.

Thus, the very state power that at first had provided their providential protection finally turned upon the Christians in fury. Sporadic persecutions would occur until the Edict of Milan under Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D.

According to ancient tradition The martyrs of this persecution included most of the Apostles and first-generation Christians. The Apostle Peter was crucified upside down and Paul was beheaded. The other Apostles martyred under Nero in the years 64 to 68 A.D. were Andrew, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, Simon Zelotes, Judas Thaddeus and Matthias, who had replaced Judas.

Some prominent believers mentioned in the New Testament were allegedly tortured and killed at this time: Barnabas, John Mark, Aristarchus, Epaphrus, Priscilla, Aquilla, Silas, Onesiphorus, Prochorus, Parmenas, Nicanor, Carpus, Trophimus, Onesimus, and Dionysius the Areopagite.

I & II PETER (64–68 A.D.)

The first epistle of Peter was written to Jewish (1:1–2, 15–16; 2:6–8; 3:5–6) and Gentile (1:14; 2:10; 4:3–4) Christians in Asia Minor at the very beginning of the Neronian persecution. The theme of the letter is suffering.

The purpose of writing was to exhort the readers to a consistent, godly life despite suffering adversity and persecution (1:13–14; 2:11–12, 19–25; 3:17–18; 4:1–2, 7–11) and to encourage them in the face of suffering and possible death with the certainty of the ultimate Christian hope (1:3–9, 13, 18–21; 4:12–19; 5:10–11).

The second epistle of Peter was written toward the end of the Neronian persecution and very shortly before his death (1:12–15). If Peter was martyred at Rome as tradition alleges, it was either before Paul was brought to Rome or shortly after, as Peter was not there during Paul's final days (2 Tim. 4:9–17).

The purpose of writing was three-fold: *First*, to emphasize the return of the Lord and the end of the world in judgment (1:16–21; 3:1–17). *Second*, to warn his readers of false teachers who were evidently Gnostics (2:1–22). *Third*, to encourage his readers to live consistent, godly lives and progress toward spiritual maturity in light of their Christian hope, the certain judgment of these false teachers and the dissolution of this world (1:2–19; 2:1–12; 3:1–2, 8–9, 11, 14, 17–18).

HEBREWS (64–68 A.D.)

Traditionally, the Apostle Paul has been considered the author of this epistle, but there have been other strong contenders in the minds of biblical scholars. This epistle was written to Jewish Christians who were tempted to revert back to Judaism to avoid persecution. The historical circumstances and internal evidence necessitate a date of writing prior to the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem (64–68 A.D.).

The purpose for writing was three-fold: *First*, to warn that a return to Judaism was apostasy. (There are five major warnings 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:20; 10:26–39; 12:14–29). *Second*, to emphasize the typical and transitory nature of the Mosaic and Levitical institutions of the Old Covenant (7:11–19, 26–28; 8:6–13; 9:1–28; 10:1–18; 12:18–24; 13:10–16). *Third*, to demonstrate and emphasize the finality of New Testament Christianity

over Judaism, the superiority and finality of the Person and work of Christ over the Old Testament priestly and sacrificial system and the transition from the Old Covenant to the New (1:1–4; 2:5–18; 3:1–6; 4:14–16; 5:1–10; 6:18–20; 7:11–25; 8:1–13; 9:11–15, 23–28; 10:1–22; 12:2–4).

JUDE (67–68 A.D.)

The author was Jude, the brother of James and also a half–brother to the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of the great similarity of this letter to II Peter, it is traditional to place this later in time (67–68 A.D.).

The antinomianism described in this epistle (4, 7–8, 10–11, 13, 15–16, 18–19) may well betray a Gnostic dualism that separated the material or the flesh from the spiritual. Such teaching separated fleshly practices from spirituality, allowing for licentiousness (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:1–22).

Jude in his writing emphasized the following: *First*, an aggressive attitude toward such error; *Second*, the certain judgment of God upon such individuals (5–7, 11, 13–15); *Third*, the use of spiritual discernment when dealing such individuals (22–23), *Fourth*, an encouragement and exhortation concerning the readers themselves (20–21, 24–25).

II TIMOTHY (67–68 A.D.)

This epistle was the last writing of the Apostle Paul before his execution (4:6–8), written approximately 67–68 A.D. Roman persecution was wreaking havoc in the Empire and error was advancing in the churches of the eastern provinces. Paul himself was facing death by the state. This letter contained the final words to his younger associate and son in the faith.

The purpose of writing was three–fold: *First*, to encourage and exhort Timothy (1:1–14; 2:1, 3, 7–13, 15–16, 19–26; 3:5, 14–17; 4:1–5, 14–15); *Second*, to urge Timothy to come to him in Rome immediately (1:4; 4:9–11, 21); *Third*, to obtain necessary belongings and help (4:9–13).

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM (70–72 A.D.)

The death of Nero was followed by a decade of political turmoil in the Empire. Florus, the Judean Roman Procurator (66–70 A.D.) plundered the Temple at Jerusalem and thus initiated the final revolt of the Jewish zealots. The Roman garrison at Jerusalem was massacred and a Roman army under Cestius Gallus was defeated and routed during its retreat by the Jews. This sealed the fate of the Jews and Jerusalem. The country was invaded and Jerusalem put under siege. The city and temple were destroyed in 70–71 A.D. Over a million Jews were killed. The Herodian fortress of Masada fell shortly afterwards to the Roman general Silva. With the final Jewish insurrection in Egypt, the Jewish national identity was almost obliterated.

Before the final onslaught on Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians left the city and passed over the Jordan River to Pella in Perea. Tradition states that later Ephesus became the center for Christianity toward the end of the first century.

PERSECUTION UNDER DOMITIAN (93–96 A.D.)

Emperors Vespasian (69–79 A.D.) and Titus (79–81 A.D.) were largely concerned with administrative affairs of state. Under Domitian (81–96 A.D.), however, there came a renewed persecution of Christians. He was zealous for the state religion and insisted upon being worshipped as a “god” or “Lord” (Greek, Κύριος [*Kurios*]). Thus began the three century–long persecution of Christians as “atheists” and enemies of the state for refusing to bow to the Imperial insignia or burn a pinch of incense to image of the Emperor. The issue was Καίσαρ Κύριος versus Χριστός Κύριος [“Caesar is Lord” vs. “Christ is Lord”].

Despite such persecution, Christianity continued to expand and penetrate even the Roman nobility. Martyrs during this era included Luke the physician and historian. John the Apostle was exiled to Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

THE JOHNNINE WRITINGS (64?–98 A.D.)

John was probably the only Apostle to outlive the Neronian persecution. He died approximately 98 A.D. The dating of his writings varies from the Neronian persecution before the destruction of Jerusalem to the persecution under Domitian (64–98 A.D.)⁴⁴.

The Gospel according to John was traditionally written toward the end of the first century while he was at Ephesus. It was supplementary and selective in nature in relation to the earlier Synoptic Gospels. John emphasized the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, evidently against Cerinthian Gnosticism.

The Epistle of I John was written against *Docetic* Gnosticism that denied the true humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. II and III John were more private letters.

The Apocalypse or Book of Revelation was the final word of the New Testament in thought, if not in time. It was a tract for the times, written during a time of great trial and suffering to encourage believers in the seven churches of Asia Minor concerning the ultimate future. John wrote this work while exiled on the island of Patmos

PERSECUTION UNDER TRAJAN (98– A.D.)

The Emperor Trajan (98–117 A.D.) held Christianity to be a proscribed sect (*religio illicita*) and considered it to be a bad superstition, incompatible with state religion. Christians were treated as capital offenders. This was the general attitude of the Roman government until the reign of Constantine (313–337 A.D.). The traditional date of Timothy’s martyrdom is under Trajan’s reign in 98 A.D.

A SUMMARY OF APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY

The institution of the Christian Church was unique to the New Testament and distinct from the Old Testament Jewish theocracy. It originated with the public ministry of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles.

The New Testament Church was identified and supernaturally credentialed at Pentecost by the visible and audible presence and power of the Holy Spirit. A great revival and spiritual awakening followed for several years until Christianity was firmly established.

⁴⁴ See footnote 35.

The polity of the New Testament churches was simple. Each local assembly was indigenous and autonomous. The officers or leaders were pastors, bishops or elders, the terms denoting the same office. The office of deacon was instituted later as an office of necessity.

The inspired Apostles exercised an authority over all churches, but their office ceased with their death. There is no inspired record of an Apostolic succession to subsequent individuals, offices or succeeding generations.

There was a transition from predominantly Jewish to Gentile Christianity as it spread across the Roman Empire, largely through the labors of the Apostle Paul and others. Christianity penetrated every strata of society.

Christianity was for a time incidentally protected because of its Jewish extraction. Judaism was a *religio licita*, or legal religion. When the distinction between Judaism and Christianity was made with the Neronian and later persecutions, it was pronounced a *religio illicita*, or illegal religion, and offenders were liable to capital punishment.

The first opposition to Christianity was Jewish legalism, the second was Gnosticism, a mixture of religion and philosophy which took several forms. Jewish legalism ceased to be a direct threat after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, but Gnosticism would continue to threaten and seek to modify Christianity for the next three centuries. The principles inherent in the Gnostic system have resurfaced throughout church history.

The New Testament Scriptures formed the completion of the progressive Divine revelation or Word of God inscripturated. As such, the Scriptures were and are the sole rule of faith and practice for Christianity. Subsequent Christianity would either be aligned to the New Testament teaching, pattern and practice or be in error and apostasy.

THE ERA OF TRANSITION: 100–313 A.D. 213 YEARS

TEXT: GALATIANS 1:6–7

"I marvel that you are so quickly transferring yourselves ... unto another gospel [of an altogether different kind]...which is not a gospel [of the same kind]..." (ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, implying an essential difference in nature).

INTRODUCTION

This era extended from the death of the Apostle John to the Edict of Milan and the official end of the government persecution of Christianity under Constantine. The transition was from the primitive, New Testament Christianity of the Apostolic Age to a religion largely characterized by sacerdotalism, outward rituals, ecclesiastical hierarchy and spiritual laxity.

During this era Christianity was transformed from a persecuted sect to the dominant religion of the Empire. This was predominantly the age of the martyrs and was characterized by

- State persecution.

- The influence of various errors and heresies.
- The challenge of Christian thought to Greek philosophy.
- The rise of ecclesiasticism and sacerdotalism.
- A gradual division developed among the churches. Those assemblies that sought to retain primitive doctrine, piety and purity began to separate themselves from those that became lax and innovative. The major groups in this era were the Montanists, Novatians and Donatists.⁴⁵

I GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANITY

Roman government persecution was the predominant characteristic of this era and provides the most consistent basis for an outline of development. Several general observations must be made.

OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

This took several forms: popular antagonism, intellectual assaults and physical persecution.

Popular Antagonism. Christianity necessarily did much to offend the general population:

- *Religiously.* Christians did not subscribe to the Roman gods or State-sanctioned worship, and were thus charged with being atheists.
- *Socially.* The old pagan societies held to rites, rituals and social gatherings that had pagan overtones. Christians simply did not fit in such a society.
- *Morally.* Christianity condemned the moral relativism of the Greco-Roman society.
- *Economically.* The rise and spread of Christianity meant the demise of many industries related to idolatry, pagan observances and all forms of pagan worship, the pagan priests of the Roman state religion, and fortune-tellers.

Intellectual Assaults. Christianity had to face the pagan philosophers and scholars who severely criticized and challenged the truth and implications of the Gospel. This led to the rise of the first Christian apologists and the gradual development of a systematic theology.

Physical Persecution. The Roman government used intimidation, fines, confiscation of property, imprisonment, torture and capital punishment in its attempt to eradicate Christianity.

⁴⁵ The churches which remained faithful to the principles of primitive Christianity would be generically termed *Anabaptists* from the late second century to the time of the Protestant Reformation.

REASONS FOR THE ANTAGONISM AGAINST CHRISTIANITY

First, Christianity was a *religio illicita*, or illegal religion. Some religions [that offered no threat to the State, the social structure and character, or the Roman religions] were each allowed as a *religio licita* [legal religion]. Christianity by its very nature could not qualify. To preserve the Roman state and the security of the Empire, the persecution of Christianity was viewed as a necessary policy.

As the Roman Emperor was considered the embodiment of the State and its power, Christians were finally forced to choose between their faith and their life.

The issue was decided by forcing them burn a pinch of incense to the image of the Emperor as a sacrifice and acknowledge him as “Lord” or be executed. The issue was “Caesar is Lord” or “Christ is Lord.”⁴⁶ Polytheistic religions could easily comply; Christianity could not.

Second, Christianity was viewed as a secret society, or mystery–cult. Such secret societies were forbidden under Roman Law.

Christian meetings and rites were perverted in the unregenerate mind: Church meetings and the love–feast or ἀγάπη (*agape*) (clandestine meetings where debaucheries and immorality were practiced), Baptism (allegedly done in or with water or blood as a mystery rite), and the Lord’s Supper (allegedly cannibalism).

Third, Christianity was exclusive by nature (Jn. 14:6) by moral or righteous in character. It necessarily condemned all other religions and gods as false; condemned immorality and licentiousness; and enjoined holiness and separation from the world. It stood as a rebuke to the society, religions and philosophies of the day.

Fourth, Christianity was aggressive in its evangelism and universal in its claims. The Empire had laws against religious proselytizing, which Christianity by its very nature had to transgress. The Roman State viewed Christians as a threat to the peace and safety of the Empire.

Fifth, Some Christians at times brought persecution upon themselves by iconoclastic activities or practices considered subversive to the Roman State.

Sixth, Christianity had Jewish roots, which aroused the anti–semitism of some Emperors. Jewish opposition to Christianity also created difficulties, misrepresentations and fostered persecution.

Seventh, Christians were blamed for natural and public disasters such as earthquakes, drought, pestilence, invasions by foreign armies, etc. It was thought that their religion had angered the pagan gods who then brought judgment upon society.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN EMPERORS

Not all of the Roman Emperors were bloodthirsty tyrants like the insane Nero. However, those considered the wisest, the most conscientious and tolerant were often the

⁴⁶ Καίσαρ Κύριος or Χριστός Κύριος. The various reasons for State antagonism against Christianity all pointed to its inherent tendency to unsettle the *status quo* religiously, socially, and thus politically. In a sacralist society Christianity was early equated with anarchism.

greatest persecutors of Christianity. These Emperors sought to maintain the coherency and peace of the empire. In attempting to do so, they adhered more rigidly to the laws forbidding unlawful religions and were prone to stifle any movement that threatened the peace and stability of government or society. They also sought to maintain the old state religion.

II THE HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The traditional view that there were ten great Roman persecutions during this era derived from an early Christian allegorical interpretation of Rev. 2:10 coupled with the analogies of the ten Egyptian plagues and the ten horns or kings in Rev. 17:3, 12, and 14. Such tradition has no basis in Scripture or history.

The following is a general outline of this era:

A. THE PERIOD OF SPORADIC PERSECUTIONS (100–248 A.D.)

POLITICAL

Trajan (98–117), one of the best Roman Emperors, enforced laws against secret societies and so persecuted Christians as a matter of State policy.

Emperor **Hadrian** (117–138) also considered the Roman religious establishment a high priority and political necessity; but he opposed indiscriminate persecution of Christians.

The final **Jewish revolt** under Bar Kokhba (122–135). Prohibition of circumcision and desecration of Jerusalem by pagan idolatry resulted in the final Jewish insurrection. The uprising was defeated and most of Palestine was devastated. The Jews forbidden to enter the city of Jerusalem, which Hadrian had rebuilt as a Roman colony (and renamed Aelia Capitolina). He further erected a temple to Jupiter and Venus in the old temple area. This marked the end of Jewish national geographic identity. Large numbers of Christians were martyred by the Jews during this uprising.

Emperor **Antonius Pius** (138–161) attempted unsuccessfully to shield the Christians during times of the great natural and public calamities (earthquakes, famine, pestilence, insurrections and foreign invasions) that occurred during his reign.

Marcus Aurelius (161–180) was an Emperor–philosopher and greatly biased against Christianity. Thousands of Christians were martyred during this time.

The Emperor **Commodus** (180–193) was a weak individual, but favorable toward the toleration of Christianity.

Emperor **Septimius Severus** (193–211) was not overtly hostile to Christianity, but enforced the laws against it.

The Emperors **Caracalla** (211–217) and **Heliogabalus** (Avitus) (218–222), though personally dissolute and licentious, tolerated Christianity.

Emperor **Alexander Severus** (222–235) gave Christianity a place in his eclectic religious system. During this time, the first Christian public houses of worship seem to have erected. Persecution was later resumed under his reign (224–235).

Emperor **Maximinus the Thracian** (235–238) severely persecuted Christians.

Emperor **Philip the Arabian** (244–249) was very favorable toward Christianity.

RELIGIOUS: DOCTRINAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL

The rise of Ecclesiasticism: Elders and Ruling Bishops differentiated by about the year 120. The rise of Montanism as a reactionary movement against spiritual and disciplinary laxity in the churches (c. 135–230). The beginning of the Diocesan or Monarchical Bishops and the notion of Apostolic Succession. The Bishop of Rome begins to gain a predominant position as the central figure in Christianity. (c.180).

Doctrinal: Beginnings of the doctrine of and controversy over baptismal regeneration (c. 150).

B. THE FIRST GENERAL PERSECUTION THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE (249–260 A.D.)

POLITICAL

There were two periods of persecution during this time with a short respite between:

The first occurred under the reign of **Decius Trajan** (249–251). The 1000th anniversary of the founding of Rome was being celebrated with great splendor (248). Decius was concerned about the revival of the state religion as the means of securing the stability of the empire. An imperial edict was issued in 250 to universally suppress Christianity. Many were imprisoned, enslaved and martyred. Multitudes, however, apostatized and turned from their profession of Christianity.

The second period of persecution occurred during the reign of Emperor **Valerian** (253–260). For the first four years of his reign, he was favorably disposed toward Christianity, but reversed his policy, and from 257 to 258, he sought to suppress Christianity without bloodshed. From 258–260, he imposed the death penalty on all Christian leaders and men of note who persisted in their faith after confiscation of property and imprisonment.

RELIGIOUS: DOCTRINAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL

The rise of Ecclesiasticism: A change begins toward sacerdotalism (c. 250). The rise of Novatianism as a reaction against the developing ecclesiasticism and laxness in church discipline (c. 250).

Doctrinal: A Baptismal controversy re the legitimacy of baptism performed by heretics (c.255).

C. THE PERIOD OF RELATIVE PEACE (260–303 A.D.)

POLITICAL

The Emperor **Gallienus** (260–268) was favorably disposed toward Christianity. He recalled exiles, restored church properties and prohibited further harassment of Christians. Sporadic, localized persecutions and martyrdoms occurred, however.

RELIGIOUS: DOCTRINAL

The Sabellian and Monarchian controversies (Trinitarian) (c.262–269).

D. THE SECOND GENERAL PERSECUTION THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE (303–310 A.D.)

POLITICAL

Emperor **Diocletian** (284–305) began a policy of persecution against Christians in the imperial army (295), then a general edict against Christians throughout the Empire (303).

RELIGIOUS: DOCTRINAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL

Doctrinal: The Donatist schism in North Africa as a reaction against the Catholic or majority party (c. 312).

The rise of ecclesiasticism: The development of the Metropolitan or Patriarchal Bishop. The Metropolitans were bishops of the great cities or provinces of the empire, rising above other city bishops. The Patriarchs were those bishops who ruled in the churches of Apostolic origin. Although the title (from *metropolis*, a major center) was not used legally until the Council of Nicaea (325), the hierarchical system had already developed during the later years of this era.

E. THE EDICT OF MILAN AND PEACE (313 A.D.)

The first partitioning of the Empire into East and West occurred in 285. Several individuals vied for power. In 312 **Constantine** defeated Maxentius to become the sole ruler in the West. Before the battle he allegedly saw a vision of a cross with the words *hoc vinces* (By this thou shalt conquer). He attributed his victory to the God of the Christians. This moved him to issue an Edict of Toleration (Edict of Milan) in 313.

Licinius ruled in the East and followed a policy of opposition to Christianity. A brief period of intense persecution occurred from 319–323 in the East under his rule. Constantine conquered Licinius in 323 and became the sole ruler of the Empire and the State persecution of Christians ended.

III

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Conflict between Christianity and the Roman Empire was inevitable. It was a conflict of power: the spiritual and moral versus the political, the eternal versus the temporal, the true God and the truth of God versus the false gods of paganism. Yet, as religion invariably not only modifies human institutions, but is in turn modified by them, so Christianity in its ecclesiastical expression eventually came to reflect the structure of Imperial Rome.

Although Christianity and the Empire were deadly enemies, there was a tragic transference from one kingdom to the other. The kingdom of God became identical with The Church in a Catholic sense. This alleged spiritual kingdom increasingly took to itself the structure of the Empire.

The rise of ecclesiasticism took place during these two centuries, beginning with local assemblies of believers with their elders and deacons and ending with diocesan, patriarchal and metropolitan bishops.

The bishop of Rome began to claim superiority over other bishops. The beginning of the actual papacy, however, dates from the sixth century with Gregory the Great (590–604).

IV THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY

Despite great and varied opposition, Christianity spread across the Empire and gained converts from every class of society. Tertullian, the early Church Father (c.160–215) could write about Christians:

We are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled every place belonging to you—cities, islands, castles, towns, assemblies, your very camp, your tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum. We leave you your temples only. We can count your armies; our numbers in a single province will be greater.⁴⁷

This permeation of every class of society in the Empire by Christianity may be accounted for by the following:

First, the eternal, redemptive purpose and sovereign grace of God. Wherever the truth of the Gospel went, it was accompanied with saving power, and, as at Antioch in Pisidia, “... and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48). God predetermined the spread and success of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

Second, the means used was preaching or the declaration of truth through preachers, evangelists and ordinary believers. It is remarkable that without any organized missionary endeavor or outstanding evangelists since the Apostles, Christianity rapidly and firmly entrenched itself in every part of the Empire and beyond.

Third, Christian doctrinal truth produced a moral influence and earnestness that enabled men and women to willingly die for that truth. Paganism produced no martyrs. It was during this era that a Church Father, Tertullian, wrote that “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

While it is true that many apostatized to avoid persecution and death, the glorious influence of those who were martyred was a moving force within and without Christianity.

Fourth, paganism was in an irreversible state of decay. Only Christian truth answered the deepest desires and needs of the human soul. While pagan religion and philosophy might contend for this life, only Christianity pointed clearly and authoritatively beyond to life eternal.

Fifth, the insistence of Christianity that it was the only true religion. Further, Christianity transcended all racial and national boundaries; it was universal rather than national or racial in nature.

Sixth, the Christian truth—claims of Divine origin that derived from the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies was a deciding factor to many.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *Apology*, chapter xxxvii. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, III, p. 45.

Seventh, the life and witness of the churches in practically reflecting the truth of the Gospel in love, concern, sympathy and brotherhood made an indelible impression.

V THE RISE OF ECCLESIASTICISM

The nature, structure and concept of the church changed radically during these two centuries. The major changes occurred in (1) The distinction between clergy and laity, (2) The development of the episcopal system, (3) The transition to sacerdotalism and sacramentalism, and (4) The emphasis upon catholic unity.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CLERGY AND LAITY

By the close of the first century and the beginning of the second, *the preaching and teaching ministry of the church was no longer under gifted men* (i.e., men called and gifted by the Holy Spirit and so spiritually qualified), but under the office of the eldership.

This innovation began to create *an official distinction between the elders or bishops and the people*. Only the official ministers could baptize, administer the Lord's Supper, publicly teach and preach, and administer the funds.

By the third century A.D. *the developing sacerdotalism, referring to the ministers of the churches as priests*, completed the distinction and separation of clergy and laity. The scriptural truth of the priesthood of the individual believer was largely lost.

Among the laity, there were two classes, the faithful or baptized members and the catechumens, or those who were being instructed in preparation for baptism.

THE RISE OF THE EPISCOPACY

An ecclesiastical hierarchy gradually developed from the second to the fourth centuries. The autonomous nature of the local church and its eldership was soon lost to the principle of the episcopacy.

The development was generally from the local pastor or bishop to the Parochial Bishop with his influence over other elders, to the Monarchical Bishop who had authority over the eldership of a given church, to the Diocesan Bishop who had authority over a city and its surrounding areas, and ultimately, to the Metropolitan or Patriarchal Bishop.

By the middle of the second century (c. 150), there were Diocesan Bishops who presided over several churches and their elders in a given locality. The principle was "One city, one Church; one Church, one Bishop."⁴⁸ The developing sacerdotalism taught "Where the Bishop is, there is the Church."

By the end of the third century (250–300) and into the beginning of the fourth (300–325), there were Metropolitan Bishops who presided over provinces and vast geographical areas. Some of these were Patriarchal Bishops whose churches were apostolic in origin (e.g., Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, etc.), and thus believed to be in a direct line with the purity of apostolic truth.

⁴⁸ Charles M. Jacobs, *The Story of the Church*, p. 20.

How did such a departure from the New Testament take place? The causes were manifold:

First, a pragmatic approach to church government. With a plurality of elders in a large assembly, one eventually became its president or leader, and hence a bishop in the episcopal sense.

Many assemblies of believers were small and rural. An early distinction was made between country bishops with relatively small congregations and city bishops with large assemblies and greater influence. A city bishop would eventually preside over a whole city, including the smaller assemblies of believers in the rural districts within that locality. Among these Diocesan Bishops, one would eventually come to greater prominence and so there eventually developed the office of the Metropolitan Bishop.

Second, The gradual departure from the New Testament ministry to a sacerdotalism necessarily gave tremendous power and authority to the bishops, who were looked upon as the visible representatives of God. Ignatius (d. 117) stated “We ought to regard the bishop as the Lord himself.”⁴⁹

Third, the bishops became the administrators of the churches and their funds, in sole charge of distributing to the widows and the poor.

Fourth, the assaults of pagan religion and philosophy had to be answered and orthodoxy had to be maintained against error and heresy. This was the burden of the office of bishop. Thus, the Diocesan and Metropolitan Bishop became the source of orthodoxy for the church.

Fifth, there was a tendency to pattern the government of the church after the model of the Empire. The secularization of Christianity was a constant trend.

Sixth, before the third century bishops were claiming Apostolic Succession to buttress their doctrinal positions and authority over the churches.

Did the episcopal system derive from the Apostolic office, or did it elevate from the eldership? It developed from the eldership, but very early claimed the tradition of Apostolic succession.

THE RISE OF SACERDOTALISM

Sacerdotalism denotes reliance on a priesthood (from the Latin *sacer*, sacred or holy and hence, *sacerdos*, priest). This radical departure from the New Testament Gospel ministry was gradual, with Christian ministers so designated by Tertullian (c.160–215), who, however, also argued the priesthood of the individual believer.

Cyprian (c.200–258) was the first writer to maintain the full priesthood of the Christian minister and especially the bishop. Cyprian stated that no man could have God for his father who did not have the church for his mother. This was customary by the third century. Salvation thus became inseparable from the Catholic Church.

How did such a radical departure occur? The most probable reasons are as follows:

⁴⁹ Henry Melville Gwatkin, *Early Church History to A.D. 313*, I, p. 294).

- The separation or distinction made between clergy and laity. Once the ministry became an office apart from the necessary gifts, the foundation was laid for the subsequent emphasis on the outward: the office, authority and ritual or ceremonial.
- Many Jewish and pagan converts still possessed a strong inclination for a priesthood, an altar and rituals or ceremonies.
- The large influx of professing Christians during times of relative peace lowered the general spirituality of the churches. Many of these nominal adherents received the whole traditional episcopal system without question. Institutional Christianity had already largely substituted tradition for the inscripturated Word of God.
- An “Old Testament mentality” began to develop which equated the Christian ministry with the levitical priesthood and sacrificial system.
- The administration of baptism and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist had become rites closely associated with regeneration, and only the official ministers could administer such. This was by nature a sacerdotal function and gave the officials control of the alleged spiritual power and regenerating grace of the church.

SACRAMENTALISM

Sacramentalism is derived from the Latin *sacer*, holy or sacred, and so *sacare*, to consecrate, and *sacramentum*, an oath of loyalty. It is the belief in the efficacy of the outward and symbolic rather than the reality of inward grace. The two ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper soon became sacraments or in themselves saving rituals.

By 150 A.D. the *baptismal regeneration controversy* had begun. This would eventually lead to two issues: infant baptism and “anabaptism.”

Infant baptism is the logical result of sacramentalism. If baptism is a regenerating ritual, then logically it should be performed as soon as possible. The controversy over infant baptism would continue into the sixth century when infant baptism would be commanded by Imperial decree during the reigns of the Byzantine Emperors Justin and Justinian. *Immersion would continue as the predominant mode until approximately the twelfth century*, with pouring or sprinkling performed in cases of emergency, sickness or imminent death.

“Anabaptism,” or alleged re-baptism began in this era and would continue into the seventeenth century, a reaction to both Catholicism and later Protestantism.

Those who maintained *the Scriptural observance of believer’s baptism* by immersion would be labeled “Anabaptists” as a generic distinction. Historically, they would be known by a variety of names.⁵⁰

The Lord’s Supper, communion, or *Eucharist* (from the Greek εὐχαρίστειν [*eucharistein*], to rejoice, receive with gratitude) began to have an elevated place in worship.

⁵⁰ Their names varied: Montanists, Novatians, Donatists, Paulicians, Vaudois, Paterines, Albigenses, Berengarians, Bogomili, Cathari, Gezari, Arnoldists, Petrobrusians, Henricians, Waldenses, Lollards, Wycliffites, Bohemian Brethren, Hussites, etc. They were inclusively derided from the fourth to the sixteenth century by the generic term “Anabaptist” because they baptized believers who had been baptized as infants in the Romish state-church system.

It eventually came to possess the nature of a sacrament in the popular mind, then by the end of this era, that of a [bloodless] sacrifice in the writings of some of the Church Fathers.

CATHOLIC UNITY

The term Catholic (from the Greek Καθολικός and the Latin *Catholicus*, all-inclusive or universal) originally referred to the common or Apostolic faith which was universally held as orthodox. Ignatius (d. 117) was the first to use the term Catholic Church.⁵¹

This catholic concept viewed the church as a religious organization of priests and bishops, a religious empire that was universal in scope and authority. It is true that many of the essential dogmas of Rome were as yet non-existent, but the foundation and essential structure were laid in this era of transition.

There was a great tendency to centralize and unify Christianity into a cohesive whole. This theory of the nature of the church allegedly derived from the spiritual unity of all believers.

The *Catholic* or *Universal Church* as manifested through the bishops became synonymous with the Body of Christ. It allegedly gave the church a united front when facing the challenge of pagan religions and philosophies. It helped quell heresy and schism and quieted fanaticism. It became the interpreter and preserver of the Scriptures and doctrinal orthodoxy. But it was a radical departure from the New Testament Church which was expressed through each local assembly as the Body of Christ.⁵²

Church Councils or Synods were a means of maintaining and promoting ecclesiastical unity. They were convened to consider and decide matters of doctrine, discipline and practice. These were attended by representatives from the various congregations and were held publicly. These were mainly consultative in nature.

From the *Council of Nicea* (325) onward, only the bishops had power to discuss, challenge and vote, and not as representatives of their churches, but as the alleged successors to the Apostles.

VI PRIMITIVE AND CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

As Catholic Christianity was progressively transformed by the rise of ecclesiasticism, sacerdotalism, unscriptural tradition and laxity in discipline, increasing tension mounted between the remnants of primitive, New Testament Christianity and the Catholic party.

There are several preliminary considerations:

⁵¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, II, pp. 145–148

⁵² ἐκκλησία. This term denoted the local assembly in the *usus loquendi* of the New testament and the Κοινῆ.

First, the schisms or divisions were between the representatives of primitive, New Testament Christianity and the progressive, contemporary Catholic majority party, not merely attempts within the Catholic Church to reform itself.

The Catholics during this age were not universally in power nor did they universally represent Christianity as the Universal or Catholic Church. This claim to universal power would not have validity until the “Constantinian change” to the State–Church concept. They did, however, in the third and early fourth centuries, comprise the majority party.

Second, this era marks the time of division between the Catholic or majority party and those groups that sought a return to purity of membership and holiness of life. Such schisms or divisions between primitive and Catholic Christianity would continue down to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. These all denied the validity of Catholic baptism and so “re–baptized” their adherents, hence the beginning of the generic term “Anabaptist.”⁵³

During these centuries of government persecution, various groups began to situate themselves in rural or mountainous regions to avoid persecution. Such groups as the Vaudois and the Waldenses in the Piedmont valleys of the Alps, and the Paulicians in the eastern part of the Roman world can be traced back to these early times.

Under the Emperor Constantine, the persecuted church, largely represented by the Catholic majority, became the persecuting Church of the Empire. This State Church system would develop into the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages and Reformation era with its Inquisition and crusades directed against the “Anabaptist heretics.” When “The Constantinian Change” to a State Church took place in the early fourth century, many identified with these primitive “Anabaptists” in the rural and mountainous areas of the Empire.

In the British Isles primitive, New Testament Christianity existed until Pope Gregory (590–604) sent the Monk Austin to “convert” the ancient Britons to the Romish faith (597).⁵⁴ The subjugation of primitive Christianity to Catholicism was officially completed by 664 when England adopted the Romish faith at the Synod of Whitby.

Third, three major schisms occurred during this era: Montanism in the second century (c. 135–160), Novatianism in the third century (c. 250), and Donatism in the beginning of the fourth century (c. 311). These were interrelated reform movements, each succeeding attempt gathering the remnants of the preceding movement.

⁵³ The allegations of “anabaptism” were denied by these groups, as they did not recognize Catholic baptism as valid. Most historians note the interrelationship of these early groups. See Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, p. 197; Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, I, pp. 206–209.

⁵⁴ Patrick the Roman Catholic “Patron Saint” of Ireland had lived, exercised his ministry from c. 387–461, or 136 years before the Romish religion entered Britain with Austin. Patrick was a primitive or New Testament Christian. He personally immersed over 12,000 converts, established 365 independent churches, preached salvation by grace and baptized believers only. He taught that the Lord’s Supper was a memorial observance with believers partaking of both the bread and the wine. Primitive Christianity in Britain was subdued by warfare waged by a Catholic army. Cf. W. A. Jarrel, *Baptist Church Perpetuity or History*, pp. 472–479.

Fourth, these early movements did not differ in doctrine from the orthodox or Catholic faith, but were mainly concerned with laxness in discipline concerning those who had renounced the faith or apostatized during persecution (Those who had renounced the faith or apostatized were termed the *lapsi*. Those who had surrendered copies of the Scriptures or other Christian writings to be destroyed were the *traditores*.). The Catholic or liberal churches re-admitted such back into membership; the strict churches would not.⁵⁵

Fifth, it must be noted that some of these movements were reactionary in nature and so themselves were given to some alleged extremes. However, they were attempts to reform Christianity and bring it back to its original purity. Each group contained both extreme and moderate elements, and what is known about them is largely from the writings of their enemies or opponents.

MONTANISM

HISTORY

The Montanist movement began in Phrygia in Asia Minor in the mid-second century (c. 135–160) and can be traced down to the eighth century.⁵⁶ This movement began in Ardaba, a rural village of in the area of Mysia in Phrygia. Montanism was most prominent in Asia Minor and in North Africa, although adherents were found across the Empire and even in Rome. It derived its name from Montanus, who claimed a supernatural prophetic gift. He was joined by two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla.

The Montanist movement was not merely a schism from or an attempt to reform the Catholic Church. It was representative of the primitive Christianity of that time. Dr. Moeller wrote:

Montanism...was...not a new form of Christianity; nor were the Montanists a new sect. On the contrary, Montanism was simply a reaction of the old, primitive church, against the obvious tendency of the day, to strike a bargain with the world and arrange herself comfortably to it.⁵⁷

The greatest adherent of Montanism was the Church Father Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160–215), who became the prominent spokesman and theologian for the Montanist movement. The character of such adherents leads one to question the slanders made against these people. Dr. David Benedict, the Baptist Historian stated:

With this party the famous Tertullian united, about A.D. 200, and wrote many books in the defense of their sentiments. It is proper here to remark that heresies in abundance

⁵⁵ When the claim is made for the doctrinal orthodoxy of these groups or movements and their doctrinal agreement with the Catholic party, the following should be noted: By “doctrinal orthodoxy,” is meant the essential truth concerning the basics of the Christian religion (e.g., The Trinity, Nature and character of God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, sin, and to some degree, salvation). There were differences concerning salvation, the nature and character of a true church, church discipline, holy living and baptism.).

⁵⁶ Most historians trace the continuance of the Montanists to at least the sixth century. Christian states that they were in existence in the year 722 and were probably in contact with the Paulicians, who were located in that geographical area. Cf. John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, I, p. 44.

⁵⁷ Dr. Moeller, *Schaff–Herzog Encyclopedia*, II, p. 1562, as quoted by W. A. Jarrel, *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

were attributed to this people, relative to both their faith and practice; but when we consider that such a man as Tertullian, with many other eminent characters, became their associates and defenders, it seems to relieve in a measure the gloomy picture which many have drawn of their ignorance and fanaticism.⁵⁸

They called themselves “spiritual” Christians in contrast to the “carnal” or Catholics, and were the earliest Puritans in their moral perspective. They were variously known as Montanists, Phrygians, Cataphrygians, Pepuziani, Tertullianists, and Priscillianists (after one of their prophetesses). *These are not to be confused with the later Priscillianists who were followers of Priscillian, a fourth century Spanish Bishop and martyr from Avila.*

Montanism was opposed by a number of Catholic bishops. The Catholic party in theory did not deny the continuance of prophecy and other miraculous gifts, but sought to discredit the movement by attributing the alleged prophesying to demonic activity. Their leaders were also charged with immorality, madness, infant sacrifice, and suicide. Several of the early Church Fathers wrote against Montanism. In the year 230 the Montanists were excommunicated by the Catholic party at the Synod of Iconium. They were later identified with the Novatians of the succeeding centuries.

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

There was no departure from the orthodox faith. There were, however some alleged extremes in the areas of asceticism, legalism, and a rigorous church discipline.

There were either attempts to continue some of the Apostolic gifts, or some of them had not completely died out at the beginning of the second century. It must be remembered that the Apostolic gifts had begun to decline at the most less than a generation before toward the end of the first century.⁵⁹ Montanism was hardly a generation removed from the Apostolic age (c. 135) and there was no inherent reason for any to believe that such gifts had completely ceased. Women could exercise the prophetic gift, but the Montanists did not allow them to teach or perform any spiritual ministries in the churches.

The Montanists, although believing in the Apostolic gift of prophecy or inspired preaching, denied the Apostolic office and were opposed to the ecclesiasticism and sacerdotalism of the Catholic party. They affirmed the universal priesthood of all believers.

They were designated “Anabaptists,” as they denied the efficacy of Catholic baptism and “re-baptized” those who became their adherents or those who had denied the faith under persecution. They opposed infant baptism. Tertullian, the first Church Father to write about the subject, condemned it.

⁵⁸ David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ It must be noted that both Catholics and Montanists held to the continuance of the Apostolic gifts, especially prophecy, or inspired preaching. Alleged reports of such would continue into the second and even into the early third century. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:8–13. With reference to the charismatic gifts, the terminology used (καταργηθήσονται...παύσονται...καταργηθήσεται) seems to indicate a gradual inactivity and cessation. Further, the reference to that which is perfect (τὸ τέλειον, neut.) refers, not to the completion of Scripture, but to the maturity of Christianity, as necessitated by the context. The modern idea that that which is perfect refers to the completion of the canon of Scripture has doubtless given rise to idea that the Montanists sought to revive the prophetic gift which had allegedly already ceased.

The Montanists were *Chiliastic* or Premillennarians, proclaiming the imminent return of the Lord. They held to three dispensations: That of the Father (or Old Testament dispensation), the Son (or New Testament era), and the Holy Spirit (i.e., in their day). The dispensation of the Spirit to them meant a continuation of the supernatural gifts and the imminent end of the world with the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOVATIANISM

This third-century movement was a reaction against laxity in discipline concerning those seeking re-admittance to the churches after the Decian persecution (249–251). Novatianism was in reality Montanism revived.

HISTORY

Toward the end of the Decian persecution (249–251), a crisis was reached with the election of Cornelius, a liberal to the bishopric of Rome after the death of Fabian (c. 250). (By a “liberal” is meant one who would receive again into the church’s communion the *lapsi*, or those who had renounced the faith under persecution or torture.). A conservative presbyter, Novatian, was unwillingly elected as rival bishop of Rome by the strict party, and a schism occurred. Novatus of Carthage had recently removed to Rome and championed the strict party, aligning himself with Novatian.

Novatus and other elders in the church at Carthage had opposed the election of Cyprian as Bishop of Carthage over other older, allegedly more qualified candidates. Further, Cyprian as an elder in the church at Carthage had retired during the Decian years to avoid persecution. When Novatus ordained a deacon in his own church without the approval of Cyprian, the Bishop declared such an act a violation of his episcopal rights. A schism then developed between those who would readmit into the church the *lapsi* and those who would not.

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage supported the election of Cornelius and his practice; Novatus supported Novatian. Cornelius excommunicated Novatian and schism began. Novatianism spread across the Empire and flourished for two centuries, despite later State–Church opposition. Remnants of this movement have been traced down to the eighth century. Schaff wrote about its later history:

Despite this strong opposition the Novatian sect, by virtue of its moral earnestness, propagated itself in various provinces of the West and the East down to the sixth century. In Phrygia it combined with the remnants of the Montanists. The Council of Nicaea recognized its ordination, and endeavored, without success, to reconcile it with the Catholic church. Constantine at first dealt mildly with the Novatians,⁶⁰ but afterwards prohibited them to worship in public and ordered their books to be burnt.

Robinson wrote:

In the end, Novatian formed a church, and was elected bishop. Great numbers followed his example, and all over the empire puritan churches were constituted, and flourished through the succeeding two hundred years. Afterward, when penal laws obliged them to lurk in corners, and worship God in private, they were distinguished by a variety of names, and a succession of them continued till the reformation.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁶¹ Robert Robinson, *Ecclesiastical Researches*, pp. 126–127.

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

The Novatians were orthodox in doctrine, and differed mostly in the area of the church and discipline. Slanders were raised against these separatists to discredit them, but as Mosheim, the Lutheran historian, wrote:

This sect cannot be charged with having corrupted the doctrine of Christianity by their opinions...There was no difference, in point of doctrine, between the Novatians and other Christians. What peculiarity distinguished them was, their refusing to re-admit to the communion of the church, those who, after baptism, had fallen into the commission of heinous crimes, though they did not pretend, that even such were excluded from all possibility or hopes of salvation. They considered the Christian church as a society where virtue and innocence reigned universally...and, of consequence, they looked upon every society which re-admitted heinous offenders to its communion, as unworthy of the title of a true Christian church. It was from hence, also, that they assumed the title of Cathari, i.e., the pure...they obliged such as came over to them from the general body of Christians, to submit to be baptized a second time, as a necessary preparation for entering into their society.⁶²

Crispin, a French historian, alleges that the Novatians were distinguished by four characteristics:

- For purity of church members, by asserting that none ought to be admitted into the church but such as are visibly true believers and real saints.
- For purity of church discipline.
- For the independence of each church.
- They baptized again those whose first baptism they had reason to doubt.⁶³

The Novatians, as the earlier Montanists, were called “Anabaptists” for their practice of denying the validity of Catholic baptism and thus “re-baptizing” those entering their membership. They also, as the Montanists, must have opposed any infant baptism. The Baptist Historian J. M. Cramp wrote:

Novatianism and infant baptism were diametrically opposed to each other. It was impossible to preserve the purity for which the Novatians contended in any church which had admitted the novel institution....We may safely infer that they abstained from compliance with the innovation, and that the Novatian church were what are now called Baptist churches, adhering to the apostolic and primitive practice.⁶⁴

DONATISM

This movement grew out of the Diocletian persecution (c. 303–305) and the laxness of discipline concerning *traditores*, or those who had previously renounced their faith and then sought re-admission to the churches. This early fourth century movement followed the Montanist revival of the second century and the Novatian schism of the third century. The Donatist schism belongs more to the Imperial Age than to the Era of Transition, but a brief consideration is given.

⁶² John Lawrence Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, II, p. 84.

⁶³ Crispin, as quoted by G. H. Orchard, *A Concise History of the Baptists*, p. 87.

⁶⁴ J. M. Cramp, *Baptist History*, pp. 58–59.

HISTORY

Again, as with Novatianism, a crisis erupted over the ordination of a bishop. In 311 Caecilian, an alleged *traditor*, was a candidate for the bishopric of Carthage. (He and his predecessor Mensurius had given up heretical documents rather than surrender the Scriptures, but it was considered an outward act of compromise.). Knowing that he would be opposed by the other Numidian bishops, especially Donatus and Secundus, he was ordained by a neighboring bishop, Felix of Aptunga, himself a *traditor*. Donatus and the other Numidian bishops elected Majorinus bishop and declared Caecilian deposed. The name of the movement was derived from another Donatus, who succeeded Majorinus as bishop in 315.

The subsequent schism spread over North Africa. Both the Catholics and the Donatists appealed to the Emperor Constantine; a step which they afterward had to repent. Constantine referred the matter to the Roman bishop and other prelates. They decided against the Donatists. The Donatists were again condemned at the Synod of Arles in 314. They appealed to Constantine again, and he judged against them and issued penal laws against them in Milan in 316. In an edict of Toleration in 321, he granted them full religious freedom. Their subsequent history is one of state persecution and martyrdom. The Donatists thus became the first group to be persecuted by the State Church.

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

The doctrinal characteristics of Donatism differed little from either Montanism or Novatianism. The Donatists insisted on rigorous church discipline, a pure membership and the rejection of unworthy ministers. Later in their history they opposed the interference of the state in religious matters and championed liberty of conscience.

As the history of this schism only began in the early fourth century, a further discussion is reserved for the Imperial Age (313–476).

VII EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY

During the first three centuries, there were several concerns which challenged Christianity internally and externally, doctrinally, and intellectually. The major internal attempt to corrupt the Christian religion came from Gnosticism; The great external challenge came from Greek philosophy. The former sought to entrench itself into and modify the Christian religion; the latter sought to challenge and discredit it.

As Gnosticism was religious in nature and an attempt to corrupt and modify Christianity, it is considered under “Errors and Heresies.”

The subject of Greek philosophy and its relation to early Christianity must be approached with some preliminary considerations.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ It must be noted that Greek philosophy was not the complex and developed science or system exemplified by modern philosophies. Philosophy in the Greco–Roman world was primarily a way of life and an attempt to find an intellectual or rational substitute for the ancient pagan polytheistic religions.

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.

Theology and philosophy are necessarily, inescapably, interrelated. Philosophy is concerned with a comprehensive and systematic knowledge and understanding of all reality. Theology possesses the same goal, and, if deriving from and consistent with Divine revelation, claims to possess the answers to the questions raised by philosophy, leading to a seemingly inevitable conflict between faith and reason.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY DEFINED

The term “Philosophy” is derived from the Greek words φίλος [*philos*] “friend, associate;” or φιλέω [*phileo*], “love,” and σοφία [*sophia*], “wisdom.” The term φιλοσοφία denotes “the love [or pursuit] of wisdom.” A basic definition and description of philosophy from a Christian perspective may be stated as follows:

“Philosophy,” the love of wisdom—first so called by Pythagoras—may be defined...as “Man’s scientific total-view of all created reality.” Philosophy is man’s view, a view qualified by human capabilities and limitations....philosophy is not man’s simple knowledge, but rather his scientific knowledge of creation. . . . Philosophy is man’s total-view of all created reality...it attempts to account for [all] interrelationship[s] as parts of the cosmic whole....philosophy is man’s scientific total-view of all created reality. It deals with the created universe and all creatures in that creation. It is not (and does not include) man’s scientific view of the Creative Reality, of God the Creator of the universe...[which is the realm of theology]. Philosophy is therefore the human science of all created reality, and accordingly the science of all its sub-sciences. It is the encyclopaedia of all the sub-sciences in their relation and separate demarcation...Philosophy is the omnibus science of all the many facets of an integrated world outlook, and Christian philosophy is the scientific study of God’s entire creation as revealed in all of His works and as interpreted according to all of His Word.⁶⁶

The term “Theology” is derived from two Greek words: θεός [*Theos*], “God,” and λόγος [*logos*], “word,” “rational expression of thought,” “study or science.” (Cf. the Eng. “-ology”). Thus, “Theology” is essentially “A discourse about God,” or “the science of God.”

A basic definition or description of theology may be stated in the words of W. G. T. Shedd as follows:

Theology is a science that is concerned with both the Infinite and the finite, with both God and the universe. The material, therefore, which it includes is vaster than that of any other science. It is also the most necessary of all sciences.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Francis Nigel Lee, *A Christian Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, pp. 2–3

⁶⁷ W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. I, p. 16. When theology is termed a “science,” however, it must not be thought that the Divine revelation or the inscripturated Word of God is in itself in some way deficient or must be understood in another sense, i.e., that one must go beyond Scripture to fully arrive at theological truth. (E.g., Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology*, I, p. 19, states that Scripture contains “facts” which theology then puts in their proper order and relation, which might seem to imply to some that the Scriptures are in some way improper or insufficient). *Theology is an attempt to consistently systematize and harmonize all truth into a coherent or unified whole and apply this truth to every area of the life. It is “the application of God’s Word by persons to all areas of life.”* Cf. the remarks of John M. Frame concerning the relation of Scripture to theology in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp. 76–81.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY CONTRASTED

Philosophy begins with man and reason; theology must properly and consistently begin with God and faith. This is not to intimate that theology and faith are irrational, but to emphasize the difference of approach. Philosophy is primarily rational i.e., it derives from human reason or rationality; theology is primarily revelational i.e., derives from Divine revelation and is systematized by an intelligent or rational faith (as opposed to an irrational faith). Philosophy is anthropocentric i.e., it derives from man and his abilities or inabilities. Theology, if consistent, must be theocentric, i.e., it derives from the consistent, Self-revelation of God as revealed in His inscripturated Word.

The contrast or conflict, therefore, is not in reality between faith and reason, but between reason and revelation, i.e., between human reason and Divine revelation. It is, further, a contrast between an intelligent or rational faith and an emotional or irrational faith. An intelligent faith presupposes an intelligent God; an irrational faith presupposes a non-intelligent God.

The conflict is likewise focused upon the question of priority: Which is prior, faith or reason? Belief or understanding? This question is fundamental and the consequences are pervasive.

The issue may be illustrated by the statements of two Medieval scholastics: Thomas Aquinas and Anselm of Canterbury. The Thomistic tradition is summarized by *Intelligo et credo*, “I understand and I believe.” The Statement of Anselm was: *Credo ut Intelligam*, “I believe in order that I may understand.” In the Thomistic tradition of the priority of reason over faith stands Roman Catholic tradition, Arminianism and evidential apologetics, which reasons *to* the Scriptures. The priority of faith over reason is characteristic of the Augustinian, consistent Reformed tradition and presuppositional apologetics, which reasons *from* the Scriptures.⁶⁸

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY CORRELATED

Philosophy and theology are not necessarily opposed to each other. In the providence of God, many of the early Church Fathers were prepared by Greek philosophy for the truth of God. In the words of Philip Schaff:

The Grecian philosophy, particularly the systems of Plato and Aristotle, formed the natural basis for scientific theology; Grecian eloquence, for sacred oratory; Grecian art, for that of the Christian church. Indeed, not a few ideas and maxims of the classics tread on the threshold of revelation, and sound like prophecies of Christian truth; especially the spiritual soarings of Plato, the deep religious reflections of Plutarch, the sometimes almost Pauline moral precepts of Seneca. To many of the greatest church fathers, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and in some measure even to Augustine, Greek

⁶⁸ For a thorough discussion of the relation of faith to understanding, cf. Robert L. Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge*, pp. 7–10.

The relation of faith to reason must be carefully noted in Hebrews chapter 11. Mark the words of v. 2: “By faith we understand. . .” (Gk. Πίστει νοοῦμεν, from νοέω, “to perceive with the mind, intellectual perception, to ponder, consider, understand.”). The properties and exemplification of such a faith are reiterated throughout this chapter.

philosophy was a bridge to the Christian faith, a scientific school master leading them to Christ.⁶⁹

Christian theologians have defended the faith against the philosophical onslaughts of the greatest worldly intellectuals. It is likewise true that Christian philosophers have defended the faith against the corruptions of unbelieving theologians.

The truth or falsity of one's position does not lie in either philosophy or theology, as though one were inherently correct or right and the other inherently incorrect or wrong. The rightness or wrongness lies in one's presuppositions. The decisive issue is whether one's presuppositions are biblical, and consistently derive from scriptural principles or are inconsistent with or a denial of the Word of God.⁷⁰

Theology broadly provides the material for Christian doctrine in the inscripturated Word of God and the substance of the Christian religion. Philosophy provides the means and method of organization through logical argumentation, organization, and a consistent, definitive thought-process. Mark the words of Dr. Colin Brown with reference to the Apostle Paul and philosophy:

To Paul rational thinking was important. Without it the unbeliever and the believer alike could bring disaster upon themselves. Philosophy could be used, but not as a substitute for faith and discipleship. To Paul and other New Testament writers philosophy was what it was to many other great Christians in later ages—a good servant but a bad master.⁷¹

Both philosophy and theology necessarily remain fallible, due to the finite limitations of the human mind and the noetic effects of sin, i.e., any and all epistemic efforts of man have been affected by the fall, and are not totally removed at regeneration (Rom. 1:18–25; Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–10). No one man possesses all the truth; nor does any given system, be it philosophical or theological, contain all the answers. The imperfection or inadequacy lies with the human mind and both its finite and noetic limitations.

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN CONFRONTATION

Philosophy and theology must also necessarily confront each other. Philosophy raises theological questions which must be answered, and theology raises philosophical questions which it in turn must attempt to answer Biblically, systematically, cogently and with authority. This confrontation is what occurred in the first three centuries between early Christian theology and pagan philosophy.

⁶⁹ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, I, p. 78. It must be emphasized that pagan philosophy was fallen man's intellectual search for ultimate truth without the necessary reality of Divine revelation. What approach to truth may be found in the ancient pagan philosophers derived from the image of God in them, an image devastated in every aspect by the effects of the fall.

⁷⁰ Cf. Robert L. Reymond, *Loc. cit.* for a full discussion. The doctrines and practices of the modern Charismatics, Evangelicals and Fundamentalists are filled with inconsistencies and inherent contradictions. These serve as examples of an anti-intellectual bias and an irrational faith resulting from the lack of a consistent Christian philosophy. Such thinking, or rather lack of the same, may be characterized by *Credo quia absurdum est*, or "I believe because it is absurd," i.e., the focus is placed on subjectivism or the inward religious experience and thus tends toward irrationalism.

⁷¹ Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, p. 75.

THE HISTORY OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY.

A survey of the history of Greek philosophy demonstrates its influence upon and relation to Christian thought and theology.⁷² There are three main periods:

THE PRESOCRATIC ERA (585–399 B.C.)

The Presocratic era began with Thales and ended with Socrates himself (c. 470–399 B.C.). This was the age of the Ionians or Milesians, Pythagoreans, Atomists, Sophists; of Thales, Parmenides and Socrates. In this era some of the basic tenets and forms of Greek philosophy were formed.

Major issues that would influence Christian thought included: speculative pantheistic and polytheistic theories concerning the gods, the origin of the universe, the nature of the universe or κόσμος [*kosmos*] with its unifying principle or Λόγος [*logos*], the evolution of human life, the principles of speculative science, theories of relativism and pragmatism, and the transmigration and immortality of the soul.

THE ERA OF PLATO AND ARISTOTLE (385–323 B.C.)

The era of Plato and Aristotle marked the high point in the development of Greek philosophy. The influence of these two great thinkers would constantly re-surface in Christian thought through the centuries to and including the Modern Era.

The influence of **Plato** (c. 427–347 B.C.) may be noted in: the theory of “forms,” or “ideas,” which reject a materialistic concept of the universe; a cosmological argument for the existence of the gods; the immortality of the soul and a life after death associated with rewards and punishments; the refutation of atheism; and a political philosophy in his *Republic*,⁷³ which anticipated socialism, or a welfare state, with statist education, wives in common, a military class, artisan class, and a ruling class of philosopher-kings.

The influence of **Aristotle** (384–322 B.C.) is seen in: the classification of knowledge, the science of logic or “Analytics,” his works on physics, metaphysics, a form of cosmological argument for God as the transcendent First Cause (“Unmoved Mover”), his studies on human nature and the soul (the human soul is distinguished from the animal soul by its rational capacity), and his system of ethics (i.e., habit and character more than behavior).

THE HELLENISTIC ERA (300 B.C.–529 A.D.)

The Hellenistic era was historically the longest and the most diverse, spanning over five centuries and encompassing historically most of the Intertestamental period (397 B.C.–

⁷² For a history of the influence of Greek philosophy—particularly Neoplatonism—and its influence on Christian thought, see Colin Brown, *Op. cit.*; Gordon Clark, *Op. cit.*; Sinclair Ferguson and David E. Wright, Eds., *New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 519; Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Volume I: Greece and Rome; Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, pp. 299–371; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Flight From Humanity*.

⁷³ Though seemingly innocuous, the *Republic* remains one of the most influential documents ever penned.

6 B.C.), the Apostolic Christianity of the first century, the Era of Transition (100–313), the Imperial Age (313–476) and the beginning of the Middle Ages (476–529).

There were several prominent and competitive philosophical systems or schools of thought:

First, The **Epicureans**, who were the ancient empiricists, and held that all knowledge derives from sensations or experience; the belief that everything in the universe is composed of atoms and constantly in motion; the theory of a materialistic universe and no life after death; the idea that pleasure is good and pain is evil. Epicureanism emphasized the need for practical wisdom in securing pleasure, which was not necessarily synonymous with hedonism.⁷⁴

Second, the **Stoics**, deriving their name from the Painted Porch (Gk. ποικίλη στόα [*poikile stoa*]) in Athens, a colonnade where the founder, Zeno, began teaching. Stoicism went through several stages of development. Emphasis was upon the necessity of strength of character in personal ethics and politics; the Λόγος was the universal Word which sustained all things; a peculiar pantheism that equated Reason with God and a spark of Divinity in every human being.

The idea that stoicism means the attempt to make one's self immune to the joys or trials of life derived from later Stoicism. Some later Stoics, whose lives or influence affected Christianity were Seneca (c. 4 B.C.–65 A.D.) and Marcus Aurelius (121–180), a Roman Emperor, who, because of his pagan philosophical mentality became a persecutor of Christians. Cf. Acts 17:18 for their reaction to the Apostle Paul (see above under “Epicureanism.”).

Third, the **Cynics**, so called from the nickname given to their founder, Diogenes (c. 400–325 B.C.). The name is from the Greek κύνικος [*kunikos*], or “dog-like,” and given to him by Plato, who questioned his ability to think abstractly. The Cynics taught that virtue is the only good (not moral virtue in the Scriptural or Christian sense, but virtue as self-realization brought about by an awareness of the natural as opposed to artificial values.). The best life was one of simple self-sufficiency and so Cynics were prone to asceticism. They were unconventional and believed their mission in life was to criticize all that was conventional and to uncover the illusionary.

Fourth, the **Skeptics** (Gk. σκέπτικός [*skeptikos*], an “inquirer.”) or Pyrrhoneans began with Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–270 B.C.). His method of questioning and casting doubt on claims to knowledge gave rise to the current meaning of the term “skeptic.” The goal of this inherently futile school of thought was to attain ἀταράξια [*ataraxia*], or the state of being unperturbed. A governing principle was the suspension of judgment in conflicting arguments.

⁷⁴ Cf. The statement of Acts 17:16–18. Mark the designation given to Paul: τί ἄν θέλοι ὁ σπερμιολόγος οὗτος λέγειν; i.e., an eclectic philosopher. Note the polytheistic mentality and presuppositions: “He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods,” (Gk. Ξένων δαίμονίων , “alien or foreign deities.” Consider the words: “Jesus and the Resurrection,” (Gk. τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν), which they evidently took to be male and female gods because of gender of the words.

Fifth, **Neopythagoreanism**, a first-century revival of certain tenets of older Pythagoreanism (which had all but disappeared by the fourth century B.C.), mixed with an eclecticism borrowed from Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic philosophies.

This eclectic system helped form the basic tenets of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. It was a philosophico-religious system that stressed the One or Divine Reality from which all other realities emanate; personal religion, and a direct intuition of the Divine or a type of direct revelation to the extent that its followers were sometimes depicted as philosopher-prophets; a return to asceticism, and a dualistic concept of the universe.

Sixth, **Middle Platonism** and **Neoplatonism**, which are considered separately as having the greatest influence upon Christian thought. Middle Platonism was predominant in the first and second centuries (80 B.C.–220 A.D.) and Neoplatonism was the final attempt of paganism to challenge Christianity from the third to the sixth centuries (c. 250–529).⁷⁵

The era of Greek philosophy properly ended in 529 A.D. when Emperor Justinian closed the last pagan philosophical school at Athens. Further, in 642 A.D. the Arabs conquered Alexandria, the intellectual center of Greek philosophy, and brought their Islamic religion and philosophy into Northern Africa. These historical incidents marked the end of formal pagan philosophy.

Although the sixth century properly marked the end of Greek philosophy, it continued to be a major influence in Christian thought and theology.

Neoplatonism surfaced in the early tendencies toward asceticism and monasticism with its contempt for the body, deriving from a dualism between, and separation of, the material and the spiritual. Elements of Greek philosophy greatly influenced the thought of the greatest Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine.

The influence of Aristotle and Plato overshadowed Medieval Scholastic theology and the Protestant Reformers. Neoplatonism lived on in the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, Puritanism and is evidenced in much of modern evangelical Christianity.

MIDDLE PLATONISM

This revival of Platonism flourished from 80 B.C. to 220 A.D. and exerted a great influence on the Christianity of the first two centuries.⁷⁶

Middle Platonism was an attempt to revive and systematize Platonic thought to meet the religious demands of the day. The result was an eclecticism with Neopythagorean, Aristotelian, Stoic and even Jewish elements.

⁷⁵ The pervading religious character of Neopythagoreanism, Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism must be noted. These to a great extent became or were a reaction to Christianity. All had elements of religion, mysticism and even some even magic as an attempted answer to the power and influence of the Christian religion and its claims.

⁷⁶ For a further discussion of Middle Platonism, Cf. Colin Brown, *Op. cit.*, pp. 84–85; Frederick Copleston, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 456; Sinclair B. Ferguson, et. al., *Loc. cit.*; J. D. Douglas, Gen. Ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 787.

Religious concerns dominated the system and reflected the contemporary religious atmosphere, notably the early Christianity of the first two centuries. The major issues included:

- The transcendence of God, Who was all but incomprehensible and indescribable except in negative terms. The Platonic “forms” now became thoughts in the Divine Mind.
- The theory that Creation was achieved through intermediaries such as the λόγος [*logos*], or “World–Soul,” and a host of lesser deities, or good and evil “demons” (Gk. δαίμων [*daimon*] an inferior deity, good or evil). Thus, Middle Platonism was a philosophico–theological system which stood in opposition to, and yet at given points close to, Christianity.

Middle Platonism was closely aligned to the religious system of Gnosticism and entered Christian circles through that medium on a local level in the latter part of the first century.⁷⁷

Some of the prominent Middle Platonic Philosophers included Albinus, Numenius, Plutarch and Celsus. Celsus produced a thorough critique against Christianity entitled *Ἀλήθης Λόγος* [*Alethes Logos*], The True Word, or The True Doctrine, which was evidently very influential. Eighty years later Origen replied with a line–by–line refutation.

The Christian faith was defended against Middle Platonic thought by the early Church Fathers or Christian writers known as “The Apologists.” This system, however, also influenced some of these Apologists, notably such writers as Justin Martyr. Middle Platonism also greatly influenced the Christian philosophical theologians of Alexandria, including Clement and Origen.

NEOPLATONISM.

Neoplatonism was the last attempt of intellectual paganism and Greek philosophy to challenge Christianity from the third to the sixth centuries (c. 250–529). The historian Schaff summarizes the system and the situation:

This system presents the last phase, the evening red, so to speak, of the Grecian philosophy; a fruitless effort of dying heathenism to revive itself against the irresistible progress of Christianity in its freshness and vigor. It was a pantheistic eclecticism and a philosophico–religious syncretism, which sought to reconcile Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy with Oriental religion and theosophy, polytheism with monotheism, superstition with culture, and to hold, as with convulsive grasp, the old popular religion in a refined and idealized form.⁷⁸

Neoplatonism was thus both a redefining and revising of earlier Platonic thought and a concerted effort against Christianity.

⁷⁷ There are probable references to an incipient Gnosticism in Col. 2; 2 Pet. 2; and Jude. The Gospel of John was evidently written in part as an apology against Cerinthian Gnosticism which denied the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the First Epistle of John against Docetic Gnosticism, which denied His true humanity and His physical body.

⁷⁸ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 96–97. See also Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 244; W. L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 385–386. For a further discussion of Neoplatonism, see Philip Merlan, “Neoplatonism,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, V, pp. 473–476.

The major personalities were Ammonius Saccas of Alexandria (d. 243), Plotinus, the great developer of the system (204–269), and Porphyry of Tyre (d. 304), who wrote against Christianity and was considered by some of the early Church Fathers to be its greatest enemy.

The apology of Porphyry, *Against the Christians*, attacked the Scriptures, pointing out alleged contradictions and seeking to refute Divine inspiration. He argued against prophecy and opposed the allegorical interpretation of Origen. He charged the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles with inconsistencies and fraud. Several of the Church Fathers, including Methodius, Eusebius and Apollinarius wrote apologies against him.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE CHURCH FATHERS

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND PRIMARY CONCERNS

Christianity during the first and the beginning of the second century was primarily concerned with evangelism and the more practical issues of individual and corporate Christian life, experience, and doctrinal orthodoxy. The major external issue was Roman State persecution.

It was left to the early Christian writers who lived after the Apostolic Era to systematize their faith into a theological system from the Scriptures and present it in a consistent and cogent form which met the doctrinal and intellectual challenges of their day.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ISSUES

Internally, doctrinal questions, errors and heresies, such as Gnosticism, Monarchianism, Patripassianism, and Sabellianism, led to the beginnings of the development of a systematic or dogmatic theology.

Externally, these early Christian scholars had to defend the faith against the challenge of paganism in the form of Greek philosophy. To do so intelligently and consistently, they had, to a given extent, meet their opponents on their own ground and speak to them in their own terms.

SPECULATION AND REACTION

The development of early Christian theology was greatly influenced by contemporary Greek philosophy and pseudo-Christian systems. This often led to subordination of Scripture and gave prominence to philosophical speculation and reaction. For example, the early Church Fathers were almost universal in their declaration concerning the alleged free will of man because they reacted against the dualism and determinism of the Gnostic systems.

THE ALLEGORICAL APPROACH TO THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

The most far-reaching error and most notable influence of Greek philosophy and pagan thinking came through the appropriation of the allegorical method of interpretation, which by the second century began to corrupt Christian thought. This synthesis of Greek philosophy and biblical interpretation was derived from Philo the Jew of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.–50 A.D.). He sought to discern deeper truths and spiritual implications behind the more

obvious or literal sense of the text. *This confused application with interpretation at the very least, and imported irrationalism into the interpretation of Scripture at the very worst.* Allegorical interpretation had been used by Greek philosophers for centuries when dealing with earlier philosophical writings. Philo was a Jewish philosopher in a Hellenistic society, and used this same principle or method in treating the Old Testament Scriptures in attempting to demonstrate that Judaism was superior to Hellenism. He sought to synthesize Greek philosophy and the Hebrew religion by allegorizing the Old Testament Scriptures. His writings had a pronounced influence upon early Christian intellectuals, who espoused the allegorization of Scripture.⁷⁹

This approach seeks a deeper meaning than the literal or common and ordinary usage of the language (the *usus loquendi*). *Any method or system is only in the mind of the interpreter.* Such allegorizing of Scripture is necessarily arbitrary, fanciful, and often irrational. *This approach became the predominant method of interpretation until the Protestant Reformation.* It was largely an attempt by the Apologists to make the Old Testament a “Christian Book” by spiritualization, and so confused Old Testament typology with allegory. The later polemicists adopted this method and applied it to the New Testament to buttress their peculiar doctrinal views. Thus, by the middle of the third century A.D., the allegorical approach had effectively separated Christianity from the very text of Scripture, i.e., from

This allegorical method of interpretation was adopted by Clement of Rome (c.90–100), and Justin Martyr (c. 150) and used extensively by such Church Fathers as Origen (c.185–254) and Augustine (354–430).

Farrar points to the first instance in the Patristic writings:

...Clement of Rome [c.90–100]. This ancient bishop...is the first...who endows Rahab with the gift of prophecy, because by the scarlet cord hung out of her window she made it manifest that redemption should flow by the blood of the Lord to all them that believe and hope in God. As the pictorial fancy of a preacher, such an illustration would be harmless; but when it is offered as the explanation of an actual prophecy it is the earliest instance of the overstrained Allegory, which was afterwards to affect the whole life of Christian exegesis.⁸⁰

The development of the allegorical approach may be noted in examples taken from the Church Fathers, who finally applied it to the New Testament as well:

Clement of Alexandria (c. 155–220) taught at least five possible meanings in any given passage:

- The *historical* sense, or actual and literal.
- The *doctrinal* sense, or moral, religious and theological.
- The *prophetic* sense, or prophetic and typological.
- The *philosophical* sense, or finding meaning in natural objects and historical persons, following the psychological method of the Stoics.

⁷⁹ Philo the Jew (c. 20 B.C.–50 A.D.) of Alexandria seems to have been the first to combine Greek philosophy with an interpretation of Scripture. By the extended use of allegory, he sought to find a deeper meaning than the literal or obvious meaning of the text.

⁸⁰ F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation.*, p. 166.

- The *mystical* sense, or the symbolism of deeper truths. An example of Clement’s approach to Scripture is noted in the following:

...[Clement] commenting on the Mosaic prohibition of eating the swine, the hawk, the eagle, and the raven, observes: “The sow is the emblem of voluptuous and unclean lust of food...The eagle indicates robbery, the hawk injustice, and the raven greed.” . . . Clement of Alexandria maintained that the laws of Moses contain a four-fold significance, the natural, the mystical, the moral, and the prophetic.¹

Origen (c. 155–254) held that, as the nature of man is composed of body, soul and spirit, so the Scriptures possess a corresponding three-fold sense: the literal, the moral and the spiritual.

Augustine (354–430) “justified the allegorical interpretation by a ‘gross misinterpretation’ of 2 Cor. 3:6. He made it mean that the *spiritual* or *allegorical* interpretation was the real meaning of the Bible; the *literal* interpretation kills.”⁸¹ He was forced into such an approach by his polemic encounters with the Manichaeans and the Donatists. Thus, he justified the use of force by the civil authorities to “compel” dissenters to return to the Catholic Church by interpreting the parable of the great supper to the “Church” (Cf. Lk. 14:16–24, esp. v. 23).

Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274) typifies the Medieval approach:

The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man can also do), but also by things themselves. So...that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it. Now this spiritual sense has a threefold division...the allegorical sense...the moral sense...the anagogical sense. Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says (*Confess. Xii*), if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses.⁸²

It survives to the present and has been is responsible for a great misinterpretation of Scripture throughout the history of Christianity.⁸³

Many of the early Church Fathers had been schooled in contemporary Greek philosophy and so used its form and method as vehicles for defending the faith, including the allegorical method of interpretation. Thus, even while trying to answer the challenges of the intellectual pagan world, Christianity itself came to incorporate into its theology and methodology many philosophical elements which would forever modify it.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 35.

⁸² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 1, Article 10.

⁸³ See Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, I, pp. 63–66; Gordon Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, pp. 195–210; and F. W. Farrar, *Op. cit.*

⁸⁴ It must be remembered that philosophy came before theology in the sense that the latter was developed in the environment or context of the former. The Church Fathers of the first five centuries forged out various theological controversies on the anvil of Scripture with the hammer of philosophy. The Ante-Nicene age was given to anti-Trinitarian controversies. The major Christological, anthropological, hamartiological and soteriological doctrines were debated and formulated in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Nicene era. The various views of the atonement

OPPOSING PATRISTIC ATTITUDES TOWARD PHILOSOPHY

There were two opposing attitudes toward Greek philosophy on the part of the early Church Fathers. Some were diametrically opposed to it and others endorsed it and used it in their attempts to further the faith. This inclusion of or opposition to philosophy was largely dependent on one's education or training and spiritual pilgrimage. Most of the better-educated fathers were philosophers, rhetoricians or lawyers.

Those trained as philosophers or educated in the philosophical schools were generally favorable. Justin Martyr (d. 165) might be called the first Christian philosopher, as he was a philosopher before his conversion to Christianity and made great use of philosophy in his defense of Christianity. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), Origen (c. 185–254) and Augustine (354–430) all made much use of a philosophical approach to truth and its defense.

Tertullian (c. 155–220) was hostile toward Greek philosophy and asked, “What has the Christian in common with the philosopher? Jerusalem with Athens?”⁸⁵ Tertullian, however, was a lawyer and his writings inescapably betray his legal background.

Thus, as noted previously, theology and philosophy became inevitably intertwined from the mid-second century and continue to be so throughout the history of Christianity. The influence of Greek philosophy led to the continued speculative character of theology and ultimately gave rise to rationalistic or *philosophical theology*

...which seeks to employ the best of philosophical methods and techniques for the purpose of gaining as much clarity as possible concerning the major concepts, presuppositions, and tenets of theological commitment, as well as the many connections that exist among them.⁸⁶

VIII THE ANTE-NICENE CHURCH FATHERS AND EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The term “Church Father” (Gk. Πατήρ , Lat. *Pater*.) originated from the early custom of transferring the concept of “father” to spiritual or ecclesiastical relationships and was used for teachers, priests and bishops. Such terminology arose with the development of ecclesiasticism.

The Church Fathers are properly those Christian writers who lived and wrote during the first eight centuries A.D. John of Damascus (c. 675–754) is considered the last of the Church Fathers. Mark the following:

First, *their writings were substantially orthodox* in contrast to the heretical writings of the time and they enjoyed a widespread approval within the Christianity of their day,

were still being debated and formulated in the Middle Ages. The truth of justification by faith was not fully and finally formulated with proper balance until the Reformation.

⁸⁵ Gordon Clark, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁸⁶ Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*, pp. 15–16.

although there were disputes and differences over individual issues. Most of these Fathers espoused a given amount of error on individual points of doctrine.

Second, *the importance or significance of the Christian literature* of the first three centuries is noted in the following:

- There is a marked contrast with the New Testament writings of the inspired apostles and these later writings of the Church Fathers, the latter being inherently and greatly inferior to the former.
- These writings contain all information as to the use and canonization of the New Testament Scriptures by the churches of the first three centuries.
- This literature is the major source of information as to the character and process of transition from apostolic Christianity to the “Constantinian change.”⁸⁷

Third, *by the fourth century their writings were held in high esteem and considered greatly authoritative in doctrinal and interpretive matters*, although never equal to the Scriptures themselves. The Church of Rome considers the Church Fathers infallible when unanimous on any given point.⁸⁸

Fourth, *these Church Fathers may be classified in a general order both with respect to time and language*:

- *Chronologically*, the first great Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325 forms the common focal-point. The Church Fathers are properly classified as Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers, according to the time-frame of their lives and writings.
- *Linguistically*, the Fathers may be classified as Greek Fathers or Latin Fathers. The first Christian writers wrote in Greek. The first of the great Latin Fathers was Tertullian. The transition from Greek to Latin was completed during these first six centuries. The long line of Latin Fathers extended to Gregory the Great (Pope Gregory I, d. 604) and the Greek to John of Damascus (d. 754).

The historian Schaff comments on the differences in both language and thought:

The ecclesiastical learning of the first six centuries was cast almost entirely in the mold of the Graeco-Roman culture. The earliest church fathers...used the Greek language, after the example of the apostles...Not till the end of the second century, and then not in Italy, but in North Africa, did the Latin language also become, through Tertullian, a medium of Christian science and literature. The Latin church, however, continued for a long time dependent on the learning of the Greek. The Greek church was more excitable, speculative, and dialectic; the Latin more steady, practical, and devoted to outward organization; though we have on both sides striking exceptions to this rule, in

⁸⁷ Albert Henry Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 211–213.

⁸⁸ The Church of Rome did not recognize all the Church Fathers as equally authoritative:

...the Roman church excludes a Tertullian for his Montanism, an Origen for his Platonic and idealistic views, a Eusebius for his semi-Arianism, also Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Theodoret, and other distinguished divines, from the list of “Fathers” (*Patres*), and designates them merely “ecclesiastical writers” (*Scriptores Ecclesiastici*). Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 627.

the Greek Chrysostom, who was the greatest pulpit orator, and the Latin Augustine, who was the profoundest speculative theologian among the fathers.⁸⁹

Fifth, *there is a logical and somewhat chronological development of thought among the Ante-Nicene Fathers.* The historian A. H. Newman divides this era into four periods: (1) The edificatory period of the Apostolic Fathers. (2) The apologetic period. (3) The polemical period. (4) The scientific period of the Alexandrian school.⁹⁰

Sixth, *the development of doctrine or dogma was progressive.* The theological controversies, errors and heresies of the Ante-Nicene age were concerned with the basic tenets of Christian truth. The Christological, anthropological and soteriological controversies would surface in the succeeding ages. For this reason, most of the Ante-Nicene Fathers were advocates of free will as they opposed the dualism and fatalism of Gnosticism and pagan philosophies. It would be left to each succeeding generation of Christian theologians and thinkers to re-think and refine the truth.⁹¹

Seventh, *the Ante-Nicene Fathers may be classified into several groups:* (1) The Apostolic Fathers, (2) The Apologists, (3) The polemicists or controversialists (4) The Alexandrian school, (5) The Antiochian school, and (6) The North African school.

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

INTRODUCTION

These formed the earliest group of Christian writers apart from the inspired Apostles. The name refers to the sub-apostolic or post-apostolic, non-canonical writers of the late first and early second centuries (c. 90–160). These were the leaders, teachers and writers who had direct contact with and were taught by the inspired Apostles themselves.

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers are characterized by pastoral concerns, primitive zeal, piety and love. They were concerned with the practical matters of faith and life rather than theological disputes or philosophical speculation. Following is a list of the Apostolic Fathers and their writings:

CLEMENT OF ROME

Clement of Rome (Titus Flavius Clemens, c. 30–100). A disciple of Peter and Paul and presbyter-bishop at Rome (c. 92–100). He may possibly be the “Clement” mentioned in Phil. 4:3. He wrote an epistle in the name of the Roman church to the Corinthians concerning internal divisions (c. 93–97). This epistle was held with high esteem and read in public services in several churches to the fourth century. He allegedly died as a martyr by drowning during the reign of Trajan (c. 101).

⁸⁹ A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.* I, p. 626. For an excellent introductory survey of the Church Fathers, see Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, vols. II, III and IV. For a comprehensive edition of the writings, see Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 Vols. and Philip Schaff, Ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 28 Vols.

⁹⁰ A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 212–214, 237–239, 271–272.

⁹¹ For a comprehensive treatment of this principle, Cf. James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma*, in which he seeks to demonstrate that the historical progression and development of dogma corresponds generally to the logical arrangement of systematic theology.

The Roman Catholic tradition holds Clement to be the successor to Peter as bishop of Rome. Several later pseudo-writings and legends are attributed to him: *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, *Two Encyclical Letters on Virginty*, *The Apostolical Constitutions and Canons*, *The Pseudo-Clementina*, and *Five Decretal Letters*. He was the first recorded Christian writer to use the allegorical method of interpretation.⁹²

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

Ignatius of Antioch (Ignatius Theophorus) (d. 117). A presbyter-bishop of the church at Antioch in Syria. He wrote seven letters: *To the Ephesians*, *To the Magnesians*, *To the Trallians*, *To the Romans*, *To the Philadelphians*, *To the Smyrneans*, *To Polycarp*, Bishop at Smyrna. These were written on his way to martyrdom in Rome from Syria under Roman guard during the reign of Trajan. Ignatius died by being torn apart and devoured by lions in the Coliseum.

In six of his epistles, he attacks a heresy of Gnostic, Judaistic and Docetic features. Alleged references to a developed ecclesiasticism are questionable.

POLYCARP OF SMYRNA

Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69–160) was an elder-bishop at Smyrna, a disciple of the Apostle John, a younger friend of Ignatius and the teacher of Irenaeus. Ancient history presents him as a godly and faithful Christian. Polycarp was burned to death as a martyr during the reign of Antonius Pius about his 91st year.

He wrote an *Epistle to the Philippians* and *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, a circular letter. His writings betray no tendency toward an ecclesiastical hierarchy, they oppose Docetic Gnosticism, and are mostly direct and indirect quotations from Scripture.

PAPIAS

Papias (c. 60–130) was a disciple of John the Apostle, friend of Polycarp and bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia. He was a *Chilias*t or premillennarian.

He published a collection of the oral traditions of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles in five books entitled *Explanation of the Lord's Discourses*, now lost, except for fragments preserved in the writings of Irenaeus and Eusebius.

HERMAS

Hermas (c. 90–140). The author is known only as the brother of Pius, a pastor of the church at Rome, and from his work, *The Shepherd of Hermas*. It is an allegorical work on Christian morality, a call to repentance and renovation on the part of the churches in view of approaching judgment. It consists of three parts: Five Visions, Twelve Mandates, and Ten Similitudes. This work sheds much light on the beliefs of Jewish Christianity and on the primitive Christianity of a congregation in a Graeco-Roman society.

⁹² Cf. the quotation by F. W. Farrar concerning Clement of Rome and allegorical interpretation on p. 76.

BARNABAS

An unknown writer (c. 90–140), traditionally, but incorrectly held to be Barnabas, the mentor of the Apostle Paul, known only through his *Epistle of Barnabas*, a doctrinal dissertation in two parts: Part I seeks to prove that the Jews (i.e., the adherents of Judaism) cannot understand the Old Testament or the Covenant; such is only for Christians. Part II is a catechetical discourse on the “The Two Ways.” The writing was considered canonical by some early Christians in Alexandria, and the author was greatly influenced by the allegorical method of interpretation. This work is not to be confused with the pseudo-writing, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, which is of Medieval origin.

THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS

The Epistle to Diognetus is a very important but anonymous writing of the early to mid-second century that sought to vindicate the Christian doctrine and life for a heathen inquirer. It is comprised of three questions and answers: What is the nature of Christian worship and how does it differ from other forms of worship? What is the nature of Christian charity? Why has Christianity appeared so late in human history?

THE DIDACHE

The Didache, or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Dating varies from 70–165). It is the oldest and simplest Jewish Christian manual of church order. The book contains 16 chapters in four parts:

- A summary of moral instruction in the form of a parable of the ways of life and death, based on the Decalogue and the Royal Commandment.
- Directions for observing the ordinances of baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and fasting.
- Directions on discipline and church officers.
- An exhortation in view of the return of the Lord and the resurrection.

The Didache formed the basis of several works of the next centuries, notably the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions*.

SIXTUS OF ROME

Sixtus of Rome (c. 119–128). He was the sixth presbyter–bishop of the church at Rome, known formally as Sextus I. He is the traditional (?) author of a collection of 430 moral and religious maxims written in Greek, translated into Latin and read extensively in the Latin church.

THE APOLOGISTS

INTRODUCTION

The term “Apologist” denotes one who defends a certain position.⁹³ *The Apologists were Christian writers of the second and third centuries (c. 120–220) who sought to defend the Christian faith against misrepresentation and attack by Judaism and paganism.*

Mark the following:

First, *these were men of higher learning and culture than the earlier Apostolic Fathers.* Most of these writers were either philosophers or rhetoricians by training. The Apologists were more theological, systematic and philosophical than their forebears in the faith, although they manifested the same fervent spirit and earnestness.

Second, *they naturally accommodated the form, method and terminology of their pagan contemporaries and used it to defend the Christian faith.* It is with these writers that Greek philosophy began to insert its influence into Christian thought.

Third, *the writings of the apologists are of great historical value, as:*

- They contain major arguments for the validity of Christianity that have value for every generation.
- They contain a faithful representation of early Christianity lived in the very face of the enemy.
- They accurately depict the character of contemporary paganism in its intellectual assaults against Christianity.

Fourth, *the Apologists may be divided into two classes:*

- According to their language, or the Greek and Latin Fathers.

Here at once appears the characteristic difference between the Greek and Latin minds. The Greek apologies are more learned and philosophical, the Latin more practical and juridical in their matter and style. The former labor to prove the truth of Christianity and its adeptness to the intellectual wants of man; the latter plead for its legal right to exist, and exhibit mainly its moral excellency and salutary effect upon society. The Latin also are in general more rigidly opposed to heathenism, while the Greek recognize in the Grecian philosophy a certain affinity to the Christian religion.⁹⁴

- According to the recipients of their treatises: Some apologies were intellectual appeals for toleration addressed to Roman Emperors and rulers; others were sustained arguments, addressed to pagan philosophers or Judaistic writers in answer to their arguments against Christianity.

Fifth, *the major charges against Christianity were often absurd and without substance, e.g., cannibalism, from a superstitious and perverted view of the Lord’s Supper; licentiousness in lifestyle, etc.* Those of more substance included “atheism,” as Christians did not worship the gods of the State; the lack of social and intellectual standing; the novelty or newness of Christianity among the religions of the Empire; the alleged absurdity of its

⁹³ The term “apology” derived from the Gk. ἀπολογία, to speak from a certain position, and so defend it, a verbal defense.

⁹⁴ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 105–106.

doctrines, e.g., regeneration, the resurrection, etc.; alleged contradictions between the Old and New Testaments and among the Gospel records; the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and His shameful death, etc.

The apologists sought to answer these objections by setting forth the truth of the spirituality of God; the truths of Christian love, holiness of life and chastity; the purity of Christ's life and teachings; and the transforming power of Christianity. They demonstrated that Christianity was the oldest religion in the history of the world, and that it was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. This approach gave a centrality to the Old Testament, which was largely interpreted allegorically.⁹⁵

Sixth, *some of the Early Church Fathers wrote both against paganism and also against various heresies and errors, and so may be variously classified as either Apologists or Polemicists.* Such writers would include Tertullian, Methodius, Arnobius, Minucius Felix and Lactantius, who are considered under the North African school.

The following is a list of the major Apologists and their works:

QUADRATUS OF ATHENS

Quadratus, bishop of Athens (c. 117–138) was “a disciple of the Apostles,” and wrote an Apology (c. 124–126) to the Emperor Hadrian which has been lost. All that is known about him is a quotation by Eusebius.

ARISTIDES OF ATHENS

Aristides of Athens (c. 138–161) was a philosopher and a contemporary of Quadratus. He who wrote a defense of Christianity to Emperor Antoninus Pius which contained three parts: (1) A declaration of the nature of the one true God, (2) A scathing exposure of pagan mythological systems in contrast to Christianity, and (3) An appeal to persecutors and opposers of Christianity in view of coming Divine judgment.

ARISTO OF PELLA

Aristo of Pella (c. 140) was a Jewish Christian who wrote a Dialogue between Jason and Papiscus concerning Christ, a defense of Christianity against Judaism, which has been lost.

JUSTIN MARTYR

Justin Martyr (Flavius Justinus) of Samaria (c. 100–165) was a converted philosopher and became *the first learned Christian thinker and theologian*. He had studied all the leading philosophies of his day, seeking a vision of God. He was finally converted through a conversation with an aged Christian he providentially met while on a walk by the seaside. Justin became an itinerant evangelist and missionary and held no regular church office, retaining the garb of the philosopher. He traveled widely and was finally beheaded at Rome at the instigation of Crescens, a Cynic philosopher.

⁹⁵ For an introduction to the Apologists, Cf. Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 104–120, 708 and A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 237–239.

Justin wrote two Apologies against paganism: *The First Apology* (c. 150) contains 68 chapters, and was addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, his son Verissimus, and the philosopher Lucius. It contains three parts: (1) As Christians are innocent of alleged crimes, they should not be condemned without a fair hearing, (2) Various arguments for the truth of Christianity, and (3) A description of the worship of Christians. *The Second Apology* (c. 153) contains 25 chapters, and was addressed to the same Emperor concerning the calumnies of the Cynic philosopher Crescens and the unjust treatment of Christians.

His other major work is his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, containing 142 chapters and presented in the form of a Socratic dialogue. It has three parts: (1) He refutes the opinions of the Jews concerning the law of Moses. (2) A vindication of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and (3) The calling of the Gentiles and the constitution of the church were predicted and prefigured in the Old Testament. Justin's polemic works, *Against All Heresies*, *Against Marcion*, and writings to the Greeks, etc., have all been lost. Several spurious works have been wrongly attributed to him.

The theology of Justin martyr reveals the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy and the allegorical interpretation of Philo. His soteriology would be considered as Pelagian. His ecclesiology reveals the simplicity of New Testament offices, a regenerate church membership, and the baptism of believers only.

TATIAN OF ASSYRIA

Tatian of Assyria (c. 110–172) was a philosopher before his conversion and afterward became a pupil of Justin Martyr. In later life he was influenced to a given extent by Gnosticism or asceticism. He wrote an *Apology to the Greeks*, in which he both defended Christianity and ridiculed the mythologies and philosophies of paganism with much vehemency. His *Diatessaron*, or Harmony of the Four Gospels, is important for showing the existence and ecclesiastical use of the Four Gospels by the middle of the second century.

ATHENAGORAS OF ATHENS

Athenagoras of Athens (c. 161–180) was a “Christian Platonic philosopher,” who was converted while seeking to refute the Scriptures. He wrote an apology entitled *Intercession in Behalf of the Christians* to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, which has been termed “the best defense of Christianity produced in that age.”⁹⁶ In this work he refutes the three major charges against Christians: atheism, cannibalism, and incest. In his work, *On the Resurrection of the Body*, he defends the truth of the resurrection against pagan philosophy.

THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH

Theophilus of Antioch (d. 190) was the sixth leader from the Apostles of the church in Syrian Antioch. He was evidently well-read in the Greek classics, possessed considerable philosophical ability, and was a powerful writer. All of his polemical and exegetical works have been lost except three books to Autolycus, in which he sought to convince him of the falsity of paganism and the truth of Christianity.

⁹⁶ Donaldson, quoted by Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 732.

MELITO OF SARDIS

Melito of Sardis (d. 190) was bishop of Sardis in Lydia. He was evidently a gifted writer, praised by other early writers such as Tertullian. He wrote twenty works, all of which have been lost, except for a few fragments. In the remains of his works, there are three important issues:

- He provides the first list of the Hebrew canon of Scriptures, which omitted the Apocrypha. He traveled to Palestine in 170 to affirm the Hebrew canon and to question the inclusion of the Apocrypha, which were contained in the LXX.
- He wrote that the persecutions of that age originated more from popular violence than from imperial edict.
- Christians were at that time bold enough to assert that Christianity was a blessing to the Roman Empire.

APOLINARIUS OF HIERAPOLIS

Apolinarius (Claudius Apollinaris) of Hierapolis in Phrygia (c. 160–180) was the author of many works now lost and was highly esteemed by later Church Fathers and historians.

HERMIAS THE PHILOSOPHER

Hermias the philosopher (c.160–200) is unknown except for his work, *Mockery of Heathen Philosophers*, in which he seeks to disprove the various systems by demonstrating their contradictions and absurdities.

MILTIADES

Miltiades (c. 150–200) was an Apologist mentioned by Eusebius the church historian as the author of several Apologies to the Rulers, against the Jews, and against the Greeks, all now lost.

HEGESSIPUS

Hegesippus (c. 180) was a Jewish Christian and an antiquarian, writing memoirs of his travels to prove the purity and catholicity of the church against the various sects of Gnosticism.

DIONYSIUS OF CORINTH

Dionysius of Corinth (c. 180) was a bishop at Corinth and a person of considerable influence. He wrote seven epistles to various churches.

THE POLEMICISTS

INTRODUCTION

*The Polemicists were the writers of the late second and third centuries who refuted the heresies of pseudo-Christianity.*⁹⁷ As the Apologists defended the faith against attacks from without Christianity, the Polemicists defended the truth from within the ranks of professing Christianity. Mark the following:

First, *the major threat to the truth of Christianity in the first three centuries was Gnosticism*, an admixture of Christianity, Judaism, Greek philosophy and Oriental mysticism. It gained many adherents and sought to modify or corrupt every tenet of Christian truth. The polemicists wrote mainly against such Gnostic error.

Second, *Gnosticism sought to build a comprehensive and coherent system with its religious speculations*. The polemicists saw the necessity, not only of demonstrating the absurdity of the Gnostic systems, but of accurately stating doctrinal truth in a systematic fashion. Thus, *with the polemicists began the development of a systematic or dogmatic theology*.

Third, the Apologists were generally individuals who were converted from heathenism and had a background in philosophy; *the polemicists were generally individuals who had grown up within Christianity* and thus were more refined and therefore less crude or rudimentary in their doctrinal statements.

Fourth, *the Apologists sought to prove the truth and antiquity of Christianity* against the onslaughts of paganism and Judaism, and so gave prominence to the Old Testament. The Gnostics and others within the ranks of professing Christianity repudiated the Old Testament, making the New Testament and its teachings the center of controversy. This centrality of the New Testament, and the Gnostic tendencies toward allegorizing Scripture, caused some of the Polemicists to recognize the evils of the allegorical method of interpretation, although this method would continue to exist and exert a great influence in Christian thought.

Fifth, *the need for a unified stand against errors and heresies gave rise to the concept of the orthodox or Catholic Church*, i.e., the universal, common or orthodox faith and teaching as expressed through the churches.⁹⁸

Sixth, *among the Ante-Nicene Fathers there are those who may be classified variously as apologists or polemicists because of the varied nature of their writings*. These include such writers as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, etc.

The major polemical writers were Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Gaius of Rome:

⁹⁷ Polemics, the study of doctrinal differences and controversies, derives from the Greek noun πόλεμος, "war," or the adjective πολέμικος, "war-like," and so "war, battle, combat, quarrel, or dispute."

⁹⁸ A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 246–248; Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 747.

IRENÆUS

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c. 115–202) was born and reared in Smyrna in Asia Minor, where as a youth he was a disciple of Polycarp. He received a liberal education in the Greek classics and was well-studied in all the Early Church Fathers, from whom he quoted extensively in his own writings. He removed to Rome, then to Gaul (ancient pagan France) as a missionary. Upon the martyrdom of Pothinus, he became bishop of Lyons. Irenaeus was active as a mediator in several disputes and was the greatest leader in Catholic Christianity in latter part of the second century. *He was the most orthodox of all the Ante-Nicene Fathers.*

His major written work is *Against Heresies*, a five-book defense of Christianity against Gnosticism:

- Book I is an historical account of various Gnostic sects and by contrast a declaration of the Christian faith set forth in a series of propositions.
- Book II is a philosophical polemic against Valentinian Gnosticism, proving the unity of God and disproving the Platonic theory of the correspondence between the world of ideas or forms and the visible world.
- Book III is a refutation of Gnosticism from the Old and New Testament Scriptures.
- Book IV is a refutation of Gnosticism from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His recorded sayings.
- Book V is a vindication of the resurrection against the Gnostic teaching of the inherent evil of matter, with some remarks on premillennarianism.

The other works of Irenaeus include: *The Epistle to Florinus*, *On the Unity of God and the Origin of Evil*; *On the Ogdoad*, against the Valentinian system of *aeons* and the mystic meaning of the number “eight;” *On Schism*, concerning the Montanist and *Quartodeciman* (concerning the celebration of Easter as either the very day of the Jewish Passover or the following Sunday) controversies. Eusebius mentions other works now lost: *Against the Greeks*, *On Apostolic Preaching*, *Book on Various Disputes*, *On the Wisdom of Solomon*.

HIPPOLYTUS

Hippolytus (c. 170–236). Little is known about the life of this man, except that he was a Presbyter, then a rival Bishop at Rome, and finally, a martyr. He was also the last prominent writer in the Roman church to use the Greek language. Schaff writes:

This famous person has lived three lives, a real one in the third century as an opponent of the popes of his day, a fictitious one in the middle ages as a canonized saint, and a literary one in the nineteenth century after the discovery of his long lost work against heresies. He was undoubtedly one of the most learned and eminent scholars and theologians of his time. The Roman church placed him in the number of her saints and martyrs, little suspecting that he would come forward in the nineteenth century as an accuser against her.⁹⁹

Hippolytus opposed the Noetian heresy (an early form of Sabellianism that held the Father and Son to be identical) of the Roman bishop Zephyrinus and his successor Callistus.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 758–759.

He set himself up as a rival bishop over a schismatic church. He was finally exiled to Sardinia and martyred during the reign of Maximinus the Thracian. He opposed the laxness of discipline in the catholic churches and anticipated the Novatian schism of following decades.

His writings include dogmatic, polemical and exegetical works. He “was the most learned divine and the most voluminous writer of the Roman church in the third century; in fact, the first great scholar of that church...”¹⁰⁰ His principal work was the *Philosophumena*, or *Refutation of All Heresies*, one of the most important works of the Ante-Nicene age. It reveals much about ancient heresies, church doctrine, the history of philosophy and the conditions of the churches during that time. Other works include: *On the Universe*, a polemic against Platonism; a work on Antichrist; a commentary on The Apocalypse, and various lost works, e.g., a work on the *Charismata*.

GAIUS OF ROME

Gaius of Rome (c. late second–early third century). Little is known of this writer, except that he was a presbyter in Rome during the episcopate of Zephyrinus and wrote a Dialogue against Proclus and Montanism. He denied the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, and allegedly rejected the canonicity of the Gospel of John and the Apocalypse.

THE ALEXANDRIAN SCHOOL

Alexandria was the great cosmopolitan center of Egypt and the ancient world, a blend of the Occidental and Oriental. It was a great commercial center, the seat of Jewish and Greek learning and the intellectual center of the world for the first five centuries of the Christian era. It possessed the greatest library of the ancient world. It had been the home of Philo the Jew and of the allegorical method of interpretation. It was the birthplace of Neoplatonic philosophy and Gnosticism.

The catechetical or theological school at Alexandria was under the headship of a long list of eminent individuals: Pantaenus, Clement, Origen, Heraclas, and Didymus. This school was destined to exert a powerful influence on early Christianity. Here was developed a Christian Platonic philosophy, an intellectual Christianity, as the true possessor of knowledge in opposition to the false knowledge and fantasies of Gnosticism. Here the allegorical method of interpretation was refined and reduced to a system. Alexandria produced the greatest Christian philosophers, the first Biblical and systematic theologians and textual critics, and the greatest Bible commentators of the Ante-Nicene age. Here theology was developed into a system and a science.¹⁰¹

The great Christian scholars associated with this school include: Clement, Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, and Julius Africanus.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Clement (Titus Flavius Clement) of Alexandria (c.155–220) has been called “The first known Christian scholar.” He was a native of Athens, highly-educated in philosophy

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 763–764.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 777–781; A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 271–272.

and literature, and had traveled widely before his conversion. He became a presbyter in the Alexandrian church and then succeeded Pantaenus as superintendent of the Alexandrian school (c. 190).

Clement was the real father of the Alexandrian theology. He possessed a great speculative mind and taught Christianity as the true philosophy and the true knowledge. He sought to systematize Christianity. He also wrote the first Christian hymn that has been preserved apart from Scripture.

His principal works constitute a trilogy: *Protrepticos* (Exhortation to Conversion), *Paidagogos* (The Tutor), and *Stromateis* (Miscellanies). In addition he wrote *Hypotyposesis* (Outlines of Scripture Interpretation), and a small treatise on *Who is the Rich Man Who will be Saved?* (on the right use of wealth).

ORIGEN

Origen (Origenes Admantius) (c. 185–254) was born of Christian parents in Alexandria and was the son of a martyr. At age eighteen he became the superintendent of the Catechetical school in Alexandria. In early adult life he emasculated himself, taking the admonition of Matt. 19:12 literally.

His genius was unsurpassed among the early Church Fathers. Schaff writes: “...one of the most remarkable men in history for genius and learning, for the influence he exerted on his age, and for the controversies and discussions to which his opinions gave rise.”¹⁰²

Origen was the greatest scholar of his age, and the most gifted, most industrious, and most cultivated of all the Ante-Nicene fathers. Even heathens and heretics admired or feared his brilliant talent and vast learning. His knowledge embraced all the departments of philology, philosophy, and theology of his day. With this he united profound and fertile thought, keen penetration, and glowing imagination. As a true divine, he consecrated all his studies by prayer, and turned them, according to his best convictions, to the service of truth and piety.¹⁰³

Newman follows: “He was the most learned man and one of the profoundest thinkers in the ancient church. . . and probably exerted more influence on the doctrinal development of the church than any other man.”¹⁰⁴

He sought to become a universal scholar and submit all his learning and abilities to the cause of Christ. He became a pupil of Ammonius Saccas, the father of Neoplatonism. He traveled widely about the Mediterranean world, and mastered the Hebrew language to better understand the Old Testament Scriptures. Many great and eminent individuals came to sit under his teaching and were converted from pagan philosophy and Gnosticism. He personally taught Julia Mamaea, the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus and others of royalty and fame.

While on a journey to Caesarea, he was invited to preach, and was later ordained by two bishops. This, together with his self-mutilation and doctrinal speculations, resulted in his excommunication by Demetrius, the Bishop of Alexandria. Demetrius was doubtless

¹⁰² Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 786.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 790.

¹⁰⁴ A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, p. 281.

largely motivated out of jealousy. Origen then returned to Caesarea where he established another school and remained for the rest of his life, serving God as a teacher and an adviser in several religious disputes. He was arrested and tortured during the Decian persecution. He later died of his injuries at age sixty–nine.

Origen was a voluminous writer. One of his opponents numbered his written works at 6,000. Jerome in the fifth century stated that Origen wrote more than other men can read. His Biblical works were numerous, the *Commentaries* covering almost all the books of the Bible. His critical works, the *Hexapla* and the *Tetrapla*, gave him the distinction of being *the first Biblical exegete and textual critic*. His polemic and apologetic works were of the highest order. He also wrote several dogmatic works, the best known is the *De Principiis*, *the first attempt at a systematic theology*. There were also many homiletical and practical works.

Origen was the first to refine and reduce the allegorical method of interpretation into a system. He held heretical opinions on certain doctrines, i.e., he did not believe in a literal resurrection, held to a universalism or final restoration of all things, and was greatly influenced in his theology by Neoplatonic and Gnostic thought. His critics were numerous, including Methodius (Eubulius), Bishop of Olympus and Patara.

GREGORY THAUMATURGUS

Gregory Thaumaturgus (“The Wonder Worker”) (c. 213–270) was a pagan lawyer at Neocaesarea in Pontus who became a convert of Origen at Caesarea in Palestine, and remained his disciple for eight years, returning to labor with great zeal as a missionary, then bishop at Neocaesarea.

His most important writing is his *Panegyric*, a eulogy on Origen that is “...not only one of the most eloquent discourses in all the literature of the age, but gives us a view of the character of Origen and his methods of teaching and of bringing his influence to bear upon young men, that we should not otherwise have possessed.”¹⁰⁵ His other works include a *Declaration of Faith*, a *Metaphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes*, and a *Canonical Epistle* containing directions for penance and discipline.

DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

Dionysius of Alexandria (“Dionysius The Great”) (c. 200–264) was a pagan philosopher, then a convert and pupil of Origen, superintendent of the catechetical school, and finally Bishop of Alexandria. He possessed an irenic spirit in the controversies over the *lapsi*, but wrote against Sabellianism. Only fragments of his works remain.

JULIUS AFRICANUS

Julius Africanus (Sextus Julius Africanus) (c. 160–240) was a Christian philosopher, an older friend of Origen and *the first Christian chronographer and universal historian*. He was commissioned by the Emperor Severus to organize the public library in Rome. In his five–volume *Chronographia*, he sought to synchronize sacred and secular history. This

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 287–288.

formed the basis for the later church history by Eusebius. He also wrote *Cesti*, a 24-volume encyclopedia on a variety of subjects.

Heraclas, Theognostos, Pierius, Pamphilus, Peter and Hieracas were minor divines of the Greek church in the Ante-Nicene age.¹⁰⁶

THE ANTIOCHIAN SCHOOL

Lucian of Antioch (d. 311) was a presbyter and a martyr during the Diocletian persecution. He was a critical scholar. He seemed to be fairly orthodox in his Christology and the creed that bears his name is trinitarian. The Arians and Nestorians both claimed a close affinity with Lucian.

Lucian is the reputed founder of the Antiochian school of theology, which was more prominent in the fourth century during the Nicene era. Later leaders and the real founders were both former leaders in the Antioch church: *Diodorus*, Bishop of Tarsus (c. 379–394) and *Theodorus*, Bishop of Mopsuestia, who was its best theologian and Biblical commentator (c. 393–428). *John Chrysostom* was its greatest preacher (c. 347–407). Schaff writes:

The Antiochian School was not a regular institution with a continuous succession of teachers, like the Catechetical School of Alexandria, but a theological tendency, more particularly a peculiar type of hermeneutics and exegesis which had its center in Antioch. The characteristic features are, attention to the revision of the text, a close adherence to the plain, natural meaning according to the use of the language and the condition of the writer, and justice to the human factor. In other words, its exegesis is grammatical and historical, in distinction from the allegorical method of the Alexandrian School.¹⁰⁷

Newman follows with:

Antioch did not so early [as Alexandria] become a seat of Christian learning, but from c. 270 onward, under Lucian, it came into rivalry with Alexandria as a center of theological thought and influence. In the great Christological controversies of the fourth and following centuries Alexandria and Antioch were always antagonists, Alexandria representing a mystical transcendentalism and promoting the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures; Antioch insisting on the grammatico-historical interpretation of the Scriptures and having no sympathy with mystical modes of thought.¹⁰⁸

THE NORTH AFRICAN SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

The earliest Church Fathers and writers were Greek and wrote in Greek. With Tertullian, the Western Church began the transition to Latin. Because the first prominent writers lived and labored in North Africa, the Western or Latin Church has been identified as the North African School. Schaff writes:

The Western church in this period exhibits no such scientific productiveness as the Eastern. The apostolic church was predominantly Jewish, the Ante-Nicene church, Greek, the post-Nicene, Roman. The Roman church itself was first predominantly Greek, and her earliest writers—Clement, Hermas, Irenaeus, Hippolytus—wrote exclusively in Greek. Latin Christianity begins to appear in literature at the end of the second century,

¹⁰⁶ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 806–808.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 816.

¹⁰⁸ A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, p. 297.

and then not in Italy, but in North Africa, and not in Rome, but in Carthage, and very characteristically,¹⁰⁹ not with converted speculative philosophers, but with practical lawyers and rhetoricians.

The two greatest Ante–Nicene representatives of this school were Tertullian and Cyprian, both of Carthage. The first Latin writers were:

TERTULLIAN

Tertullian (Quintus Septemius Florens Tertullianus) (c.160–220) was the son of a Roman proconsular centurion and educated in liberal arts, rhetoric and law, attaining considerable fame before his conversion. He was converted in mid–life and may have become a presbyter in the church at Carthage. In his later life he joined with the Montanist movement (c.190), becoming its chief advocate and theologian. He possessed an ascetic tendency and a fiery, yet sagacious personality. Schaff writes:

...[Tertullian] is the father of the Latin theology and church language, and one of the greatest men of Christian antiquity...few writers have impressed their individuality so strongly in their books as this African father. In this respect, as well as others, he resembles St. Paul, and Martin Luther.¹¹⁰

His authority was so strong and influence so great, that through his writings, the Montanist views infiltrated the dominant church. Thirty–one of his writings have survived.

His writings may be classified as four–fold:

- Apologetical works against heathen and Jews.
- Polemic or anti–heretical works, mainly against the Monarchians and Gnostics. In his precise polemical work against Monarchianism, he laid the foundation for orthodox Trinitarian theology. He was the father of the *traducianist* theory of the origin of the human soul (i.e., that the soul is derived from the parents by the process of procreation). He did more than any other single writer to overthrow Gnosticism.
- Ethical, practical and ascetic works.
- Montanist tracts against Catholicism.

MINUCIUS FELIX

Minucius Felix lived either prior to or after Tertullian. He was a Lawyer in Rome and probably of North African descent. He never became a member of the clergy. His single writing is an apologetic work, *Octavius*, which is directed to pagan readers. This work shows a close resemblance to the *Apologeticus* of Tertullian, and it is evident that they are interdependent.

CYPRIAN

Cyprian (Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus) (c. 200–258) was a native of Carthage, born into a wealthy and cultured family. His father was a Roman officer. He became a brilliant rhetorician. He was converted in mid–life and only two years later made Bishop of

¹⁰⁹ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 819.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Carthage. His appointment led to a schism in the church and he became embroiled in the Novatian controversy. He had retired from the city to avoid persecution during the Decian era and also took a lenient view toward the *lapsi* and the *libellatici* (those who purchased certificates from the civil authorities stating that they had sacrificed to idols when they had not). He excommunicated Novatus from the church at Carthage, and supported the election of Cornelius at Rome, opposing the stricter party of Novatian. After a decade as bishop, he was martyred under the reign of Valerian. Concerning his character and significance, Schaff writes:

As Origen was the ablest scholar, and Tertullian the strongest writer, so Cyprian was the greatest bishop of the third century. He was born to be a prince in the church. In executive talent, he even surpassed all the Roman bishops of his time; and he bore himself towards them, also as frater...in the spirit of full equality. Augustine calls him...“The catholic bishop and catholic martyr.”...His stamp of character was more that of Peter than either of Paul or John.

His peculiar importance falls not so much in the field of theology, where he lacks originality and depth, as in church organization and discipline...Cyprian directed his polemics against schismatics...In him the idea of the old catholic hierarchy and episcopal autocracy, both in its affinity and in its conflict with the idea of the papacy was personally embodied....¹¹¹

His writings include various tracts, eighty-one epistles to various churches and leaders, and a series of moral and apologetic works.

NOVATIAN

Novatian (mid-third century) was the second rival bishop or “anti-pope” of Rome (Hegesippus being the first). He was the founder of the schism bearing his name, resulting from the Decian persecution and the treatment of the *lapsi*. He represented the strict-discipline party. The church at Rome was split by this schism, and Novatian was elected bishop by the strict-party minority. Schaff gives a description of the Roman church at this point in time:

At that time the Roman congregation numbered forty presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolytes, besides exorcists, readers, and janitors, and an “innumerable multitude of the people,” which may have amounted perhaps to about 50,000 members.¹¹²

Novatian wrote several works on theological, polemical and practical subjects. His writings betray a dependence on the allegorical method of interpretation.

COMMODIAN

Little is known of the life of this third century writer, except that he was probably a presbyter in North Africa. He was a Patristic in Christology and a Chiliast in eschatology. His works are comprised of two poems, *Instructions for the Christian Life*, and *Apologetic Poem against Jews and Gentiles*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 845–846.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 850.

ARNOBIUS

Arnobius (d. c. 327) was a teacher of rhetoric and was first an enemy, then an apologist for Christianity. He wrote an Apology of Christianity, or *The Case Against the Pagans* in seven books.

VICTORINUS OF PETAU

Victorinus of Petau (d. 303) was a rhetorician, Bishop of Panonia, and a martyr during the Diocletian persecution. He was the first Latin exegete and commentator. He also wrote a polemic work, *et multa alia*, or *Against All Heresies*.

IX HERESIES AND ERRORS OF THE ANTE–NICENE ERA

INTRODUCTION

There are three theological terms that must be defined and historically correlated to properly comprehend the doctrinal issues of the Ante–Nicene age: Error, Dogma, and Heresy:

- “Error,” from the Latin *errorare*, “to err.” and thus “a wandering, a going astray, a missing the way.” An error is a wrong belief or an incorrect opinion.
- “Dogma,” from the Gk. δοκέω [*dokeo*], “to believe, think, seem, have an opinion,” and thus “dogma,” from the rel. part. τὰ δεδογμένα [*ta dedogmena*], “what seems to be right, a principle, doctrine, decree, official ordinance or edict.” The Latinized *dogma* means “doctrine.” Theologically and historically, dogma refers to the official or orthodox doctrines of Christianity or a given religious body.
- “Heresy,” from the Gk. n. αἵρεσις [*haireisis*] or the vb. αἵρετίζω [*hairetizo*] in the mid. voice, “to take or choose for one’s self, an opinion.” Theologically and historically, heresy is a religious belief opposed to the orthodox doctrines or dogma of a given church or religious body or, a rejection of a belief that is part of church or religious dogma.

The historical correlation of these terms is very significant. Technically, one can be in error, i.e., wander or go astray from the truth or be wrong or incorrect and not be heretical if there is no dogma or established orthodox teaching on a given doctrine. Therefore, the difference between error and heresy relates historically to the dogma or orthodox doctrine of Christianity. Most of the early Church Fathers were heretical in their doctrinal views in major areas by later standards, but, as there existed at that time no dogma or established orthodox teaching, in given areas they were simply in error. They were yet formulating their doctrinal system and did not have the great advantage of an existing systematic theology. This historical relation must be kept in mind lest they be judged too severely or by a subsequent standard.

ANTE-NICENE HERESIES

The early heresies were forms of pseudo-Christianity or false religions that incorporated forms of Christian teaching into their systems. The three major heresies were the Jewish Christian sects, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism.

CHRISTIAN JEWISH SECTS

Jewish Christians were either eventually assimilated into Gentile Christianity, or remained separate and developed into various sects. The Judaizers of the Apostolic era grew more separated from Gentile Christians after the destruction of Jerusalem. Between the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70–72 and the revolt of Bar Kochba in 132, Judaism experienced a revival, greatly furthering the separation of Jewish and Gentile Christians. Pharisaic, Essene and Gnostic influences combined to produce four sects in the second to fourth centuries: The *Nazarenes*, The *Ebionites*, the *Elkesaites*, and the *Mandaeans*. These groups largely existed in a state between Judaism and Christianity.¹¹³ These groups faded into obscurity by the end of the fourth century, and most of the remaining remnants were lost in the advance of Islam.

THE NAZARENES

The Nazarenes were separatist legalistic Christian Jews, who magnified the law of Moses, believed in the Messiahship of Jesus, were Chiliastic, and renounced the Pauline epistles and theology. These did not, however, require the Gentiles to keep the law. The Nazarenes settled in the area of Syria after the destruction of Jerusalem and eventually dwindled into an insignificant sect.

THE EBIONITES

The largest sect of the Jewish Christians were the Ebionites, who took their name from the Hebrew word for “poor” (עֲבִיּוֹן, *eb’yon*, and not from their reputed founder, “Ebion”). This sect spread from Judea throughout the eastern part of the Roman Empire. They are generally classified as the *earlier* and *later* Ebionites, or the *Pharisaic* and *Essenic* Ebionites.

The Ebionites were legalists, holding to the perpetual validity of the Mosaic law, and to the necessity of circumcision and legal obedience for salvation. They held Jesus to be the Messiah, but denied His divinity and virgin birth. They believed that Jesus was a mere man; that He allegedly received the Messianic calling at His baptism in the form of a higher spirit, but this spirit left Him before the crucifixion and He died as a mere man. They considered the apostle Paul to be heretical because of his soteriology and alleged abandonment of the

¹¹³ For a discussion of the Jewish Christian Sects, Cf. the following Church histories: Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, pp. 576–578; *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, pp. 287–288; J. D. Douglas, *Op. cit.*, p. 326; A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 174–180; Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 428–442; H. M. Gwatkin, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 1–18; John Lawrence Von Mosheim, *Historical Commentaries*, I, pp. 396–405, 408–409; J. H. Kurtz, *Church History*, I, pp. 120–126; Augustus Neander, *History of the Christian Religion and Church*, I, pp. 341–365. Also the following histories of doctrine: Louis Berkhof, *History of Doctrines*, pp. 47–49; George P. Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 48–51; Reinhold Seeburg, *The History of Doctrines*, I, pp. 87–91; W. G. T. Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, I, pp. 106–112; Walter A. Elwell, Ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 139–140.

Law. The Ebionites held to a magical form of baptismal regeneration. Some Ebionites were extremely ascetic; others were influenced by Gnostic speculations. Often the names “Nazarene” and “Ebionite” were used without distinction.

THE ELKESAITES

The Elkesaites were named after their founder, Elkesai. They were Jews who were influenced largely by the Christianity of the Judaizers, the asceticism of the Essenes and the speculations of the Gnostics. They held to the major tenets of the Ebionites, but were largely permeated with Gnostic mysticism and theosophy. Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, was reared in an Elkesaite community.

THE MANDAEANS

These were known variously as Madaeans (from *Manda*, knowledge), Sabians (from *sabi*, to baptize, wash), and were an admixture of Judaism, Christianity and paganism. A small sect existed to modern times in Iraq.

GNOSTICISM.

The greatest internal threat to the Christianity of the first four centuries came from Gnosticism, an eclectic or syncretic religio–philosophical system with varied beliefs and schools of thought which infiltrated the early churches.¹¹⁴

DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

The term “Gnosticism” derived from the Gk. γνῶσις [*gnosis*], or “knowledge” that allegedly derived from direct Divine revelation. As a religio–philosophical system, it substituted an esoteric knowledge for faith, and sought to transform the truth of Christianity into a religious philosophy and mystic wisdom.

The beginning of the Christian era was a time of religious and intellectual ferment, with various systems vying for the increasing void left by the old pagan religions. Gnosticism and Biblical Christianity were the major contenders. Seeburg notes:

In order to understand Gnosticism, it is necessary above all to bear in mind the syncretism of that period in the church. The religious unrest of the age eagerly absorbed all possible religious ideas and sought to generalize and harmonize them. Preference was given in this process especially to the oriental wisdom. It was by no means the aim merely to satisfy the thirst for knowledge, but it was sought to realize the upper world in personal experience through religious revelation and through the formulas and forms of the mysteries, and at the same time to secure a sure path for the soul in its ascent to the upper world at death. As the Gnostic religion addressed itself to this undertaking, so Christianity seemed to be seeking—in parallel lines and successfully—to accomplish the same task. And this tendency found support in the universality of Christianity, in the idea that the latter as the absolute religion was to be everything to all men and bring all

¹¹⁴ For a thorough study of Gnosticism, See the following church histories: Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 442–496; Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 180–193; Gwatkin, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 19–72; J. H. Kurtz, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 98–119; Neander, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 366–478; Mosheim, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 405–496; F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, pp. 245–252. Cf. the following dictionaries: McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, III, pp. 890–896; Everett Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, pp. 371–376; J. D. Douglas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 416–418; James, Orr, Ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, II, pp. 1240–1248. Cf. the following histories of doctrine: Louis Berkhof, *Op. cit.*, pp. 49–55 and Reinhold Seeburg, *Op. cit.*, pp. 91–104. Cf. also the following standard works: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*; and Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*.

religions to their consummation. This Gnosticism sought to achieve. It sought to elevate Christianity to the position of the universal religion, by combining in it all the tendencies and energies of the age, thus adapting it to the comprehension of all and satisfying the needs of all. Thus, revelation was to be combined with the wisdom of the world, and Christianity by this means become a world religion. It was the first attempt...to bring the world into subjection to the church by interpreting Christianity in harmony with the wisdom of the world.¹¹⁵

Gwatkin writes along the same lines:

...the movement as a whole is older than the Gospel, and has no necessary connection with Christianity. It is the sort of eclecticism which grows up in every age of religious ferment ...Ancient Eclecticism was at first heathen or Jewish and only takes the particular form of Gnosticism at the point where it begins to be influenced by the Christian belief that the redemption is through Christ. Gnosticism may therefore be provisionally described as a number of schools of philosophy, Oriental in general character, but taking in the idea of a redemption through Christ, and further modified in different sects by a third element which may be Judaism, Hellenism or Christianity.

Here it is to be noted that the Gnostics took over only the idea of a redemption through Christ, not the full Christian doctrine, for they made it rather a redemption of the philosophers from matter than a redemption of mankind from sin.¹¹⁶

Schaff describes Gnosticism as follows:

Gnosticism is...the grandest and most comprehensive form of speculative religious syncretism known to history. It consists of Oriental mysticism, Greek philosophy, Alexandrian, Philonic, and Cabalistic Judaism, and Christian ideas of salvation, not merely mechanically compiled, but, as it were, chemically combined...

Gnosticism is a heretical philosophy of religion, or, more exactly, a mythological theosophy, which reflects intellectually the peculiar, fermenting state of that remarkable age of transition from the heathen to the Christian order of things.¹¹⁷

Latourette also describes the Gnostic system, adding a word about its infiltration into Christianity:

This pagan Gnosticism was protean, taking many forms and drawing from a wide variety of sources. Into one or another of its varieties entered contributions from Orphic and Platonic dualism, other schools of Greek thought, Syrian conceptions, Persian dualism, the mystery cults, Mesopotamian astrology, and Egyptian religion. It was highly syncretistic. When combined with elements of Christianity, Gnosticism proved so attractive that, while no accurate figures are obtainable, the suggestion has been made that for a time the majority of those who regarded themselves as Christians adhered to one or another of its many forms.¹¹⁸

Thus, as Christianity was defending itself from outward assaults in the forms of Judaism, pagan philosophy and state persecution, it also had to defend itself from Gnostic influence and tendencies within which sought to modify its character, pervert its doctrine, and strangle its life.

¹¹⁵ Reinhold Seeburg, *Op. cit.*, pp. 93–94.

¹¹⁶ H. M. Gwatkin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 20–21.

¹¹⁷ Schaff, *Op. cit.*, pp. 448–450.

¹¹⁸ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, p. 123.

HISTORY

According to Christian writers and early tradition, Simon Magus was the father of Gnosticism (Acts 8:5–24). Whatever its historical origin, a form of incipient Gnosticism did exist by the middle of the Apostolic era.¹¹⁹

From the second to the fourth centuries Gnosticism infiltrated the churches in its more fully developed forms. By the sixth century only a few distinct traces remained. Gnostic teaching and influence would linger on in Manichaeism and in certain aspects of traditional Christianity. Many modern movements, such as Theosophy and the New Age with its radical environmentalism, feminism, and autosoteriology, are in part the revival of Gnostic teachings.¹²⁰

GENERAL TEACHINGS

There were various schools of thought within the Gnostic systems. There were, however, certain general or common elements:

- The search for a system and the attempt to synthesize all truth into one religio-philosophical system for the world.
- An ontological dualism between spirit and matter, and between eternal male and female principles. Matter was viewed as inherently evil. A dualism also exists between the one true God and the God of the Old Testament, or the *Demiurge*. God was considered remote and inaccessible, separate from creation. The *Demiurge*, a subordinate deity, angel or *aeon* created the universe or matter, which was inherently evil.
- Between God and the material universe are intermediary beings or *aeons*, one of which is the “Christ” or Λόγος [*Logos*]. The combined powers or energies of these *aeons* comprised the “Fullness” or πληρωμα [*pleroma*].
- Christologically, the Gnostics were generally divided: The Cerinthians and others held that Jesus was a mere man. The Christ or Logos came upon him at His baptism and left before the crucifixion. He then died as a mere man. Doceticism, holding that all matter is inherently evil, denied the true humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and held that he only had the appearance of a man.

¹¹⁹ The “Colossian Heresy” was evidently an early form with a possible Judaic emphasis. Cf. the Christology of the Colossian epistle in chapters one and two and esp. 2:9 in the context of philosophy and wisdom, 2:8–9, 23; Cf. the references to the worship of angels and asceticism in 2:15–23; Cf. the reference to true holiness and full knowledge, ἐπίγνωσις, in the context of licentiousness in 3:1–10. Gnostic tendencies and licentiousness are the probable subjects in 2 Peter 2:1–22 and in Jude. It seems certain that the Gospel According to John was written later than the other Gospels and is in part an apology against Cerinthian Gnosticism which denied the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. especially the Prologue in 1:1–18 and the terms Λόγος and πληρωμα borrowed from Platonic thought. The Johannine Epistles were written against the Docetic Gnostics who denied the true humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ and considered Him a phantom being (Cf. 1 Jn. 4:2–3).

¹²⁰ Cf. Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*, for a description of the New Age movement as a revival of Gnosticism.

- Mankind are divided into three classes: “carnal (σαρκικοί, *sarkikoi*),” “soulish” or “natural (ψυχικοί, *psuchikoi*),” and “Spiritual (πνευματικοί, *pneumatikoi*).” The “Spiritual,” or πνευματικοί have within them a Divine spark that must be redeemed from the evil of matter and returned to the πληρωμα. Gnosticism consistently and necessarily denied the resurrection of the dead, as redemption was from matter, which necessarily included the body.
- Reality is guided by an impersonal determinism; none but the “Spiritual” are to be redeemed.¹²¹
- Salvation or redemption is through esoteric knowledge (γνώσις), which exists beyond mere faith and derives from Divine revelation. Associated with such knowledge or mysteries were symbolic rituals, mystic ceremonies, magic incantations, visions and revelations. Many volumes of Gnostic literature circulated throughout the Greco–Roman world of the second to fourth century to attract the popular, educated mind.
- Gnosticism rejected Judaism and the Old Testament, and the New Testament, except for some Gospel fragments and the Pauline epistles.
- The morality and ethic of Gnosticism produced two opposing tendencies: (1) Presupposing the inherent evil of matter, one tendency was toward an extreme asceticism, abstinence from marriage and sex. (2) Presupposing the ontological dualism between spirit and matter, licentiousness was held to have no effect upon the “Spiritual,” and sexual orgies were often practiced as a liberating or purifying rite. Both of these tendencies may be found in the warnings issued in the later epistles of Paul, 2 Peter, Jude and John’s Epistles.

SCHOOLS OF GNOSTIC SYSTEMS

Because of the eclectic and syncretic nature of the Gnostic systems, any attempt to consistently classify them proves difficult. They have been classified according to geographical locality as the Egyptian or Alexandrian and the Syrian; according to their relatively predominant doctrines into three forms: Heathen, Jewish, and Christian; or from an ethical and moral perspective into three: the speculative and theosophical, the ascetic and practical, and the antinomian and libertine.

The major schools and characteristics may be summarized as follows:

- The Simonians (named after Simon Magus) held to an early, crude, form of Gnosticism and were immoral in principles and practice.
- The Nicolaitans, mentioned in the Book of Revelation, were a licentious sect (Rev. 2:6, 15).
- The Cerinthians of the late first and early second centuries derived from Ebionism and Alexandrian Gnosticism.

¹²¹ It was against such Gnostic determinism or fatalism that the early Church Fathers reacted with a tendency toward a strong belief in free will. The doctrine of saving grace was not an issue until the Augustinian—Pelagian debate of the fifth century. The whole compass of salvation by grace was not openly an issue until the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

- Basilides was of the Alexandrian Gnosticism and produced the first well-developed system.
- Valentinus of Alexandria (d. 160) was the founder of the most profound and influential of the Gnostic systems. He established a formal school which exerted a wide influence throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.
- Marcion was a reformer of the second century who sought to restore the truth to Christianity. He became the most practical and most dangerous among the Gnostics. His dualism was concentrated more on the contrast between God and the devil, law and grace, Judaism and Christianity. Marcion was antinomian in doctrine, but personally practiced a rigorous asceticism. His Christology was docetic. He rejected the entire Old Testament and developed his own modified New Testament canon, consisting of eleven books. He was the first “higher” or destructive Bible critic. His followers practiced a baptism for the dead. Some Marcionites existed to the seventh century.
- Tatian of Assyria, a disciple of Justin Martyr and an apologist for the Christian faith, turned to ascetic and Gnostic tendencies in his later life after Justin’s martyrdom. His followers, existing to the fifth century, were known as Encratites, Hydroparastatae, or Aquarians, because they abstained from wine and used water in their observance of the Lord’s Supper, and practiced a rigid asceticism.
- Various other Gnostic schools or sects included the: *Ophites*, or serpent-worshippers; the *Sethites*, who considered Seth as the first “Spiritual” man; the *Peratae*, or transcendentalists, who were astrologists and mystic tritheists; the *Cainites*, who took the name of Cain and honored all the infamous in history; the followers of *Saturninus*, who held to a dualism between God and Satan and were docetic in their Christology; The followers of *Carpocrates*, who were given to the practice of magical arts and licentiousness; the followers of *Justin* the Gnostic, whose distinctives were founded on an sexually-based allegory of the book of Genesis. There were many other minor sects among the Gnostics.

THE GNOSTIC INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIANITY.

Although varied, corruptive and insidious in its influence, Gnosticism failed to overcome and engulf Biblical Christianity and synthesize it into an syncretic world religion. There was, however a two-fold influence upon Christianity:¹²²

A NEGATIVE INFLUENCE

The transition from primitive, New Testament Christianity to the Christian religion of the third and fourth centuries, was due largely to the catalytical nature of Gnosticism. Traditional Christianity, which has always reached beyond *Sola Scriptura* in a pragmatic way, has never freed itself from the taint of Gnostic tendencies.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Roman Catholicism reflects the influence of ancient Gnosticism with its philosophy of a hidden or unapproachable God Who must be approached through intermediaries such as angels, saints and Mary. Maryolatry finds its source in the Gnostic idea of Sophia, or

¹²² Cf. Berkhof, *Loc. cit.*; Gwatkin, *Op. cit.*, p. 68; Newman, *Loc. cit.*

wisdom as the original dualistic female principle and the Mother of God. The Romish emphasis on asceticism and the rise of monasticism have Gnostic roots. The mystery of the sacraments, transubstantiation, and the fondness for liturgy are largely rooted in Gnostic mysteries and ceremonies. The division of men into upper and lower classes or orders as to spirituality finds its basis in this ancient heresy. The worship of images in the Western Church can be traced to the influence of Gnosticism.

The Gnostics renounced the Old Testament. The idea of the Romish priesthood derived from an “Old Testament mentality” and the influence of Judaism and Oriental mysticism (i.e., the Babylonian mystery cult). The idea of vestments with their esoteric significance, however, derived from Gnostic influence.

DEISM–EXISTENTIALISM–NEOORTHODOXY–THEOSOPHY–NEW AGE

Gnostic tendencies can be noted in the nature of Deism with its doctrine of an unknowable or remote God. The schools of rationalistic or destructive Biblical criticism originated with the arbitrary Gnostic approach to Scripture. Existentialism and Neoorthodoxy, with their denial of an objective revelation and pervasive subjectivism parallel Gnostic principles. Theosophy, with its doctrine of direct revelation or higher, immediate knowledge of the Spirit world and a line of savior–revealers, is directly related to Gnosticism. The Modernistic denials of the Deity of the Lord Jesus, His virgin birth, vicarious death and physical resurrection, and the idea that man possesses a “spark of the divine” within him are all Gnostic in principle. The present New Age movement with its radical environmentalism, feminism, and autosoteriology is but Gnosticism re–born. The modern attempt through the ecumenical and environmental movements to synthesize Christianity with ethnic elements into a one–world religion is nothing less than Gnosticism.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND EVANGELICALISM

Even Fundamental and Evangelical Christianity is tainted with Gnostic tendencies: The dualism between God and the devil as an answer to the origin of evil and the doctrine of predestination, which in effect makes Satan equal to God; the dualism of and contrast between Law and Gospel; the idea that sin resides in matter or the material rather than the human personality or mind and heart; the Dispensational teaching and division of men into three classes as “carnal,” “soulish,” and “Spiritual;” the “‘Higher Life’ Movement,” which classifies and separates believers; the “carnal Christianity” heresy of “easy–believism” that separates Christians into two classes or levels, and teaches that one may live in sin and yet be saved, i.e., that spirituality has no relationship to the lifestyle.

A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIANITY

Although devastating in many ways, Gnosticism also had a very positive influence on early Christianity:

- Christian writers were raised up to face the intellectual and religious challenge posed by Gnosticism. To defeat it they were forced to formulate definitive doctrinal statements concerning God, creation, the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, the resurrection of the dead, etc., which became the basis for systematic and dogmatic theology and the first creeds and confessions of faith.

- Confronted with the many apocryphal (from Gk. ἀπόκρυφος, [*apokruphos*] “hidden, secret”) Gnostic writings, Christian scholars had to define the canon of Scripture.
- The early church fathers were driven to the Scriptures and to exegesis for their theology and began to write both commentaries on the Scriptures and doctrinal treatises defending the faith.

Thus, Greek philosophy from without and Gnosticism from within necessarily called forth the intellectual and doctrinal aspects of Christianity.

MANICHAISM

HISTORY OF MANI

Manichaeism began in Persia in the mid-third century with the teachings of Mani, a person of great talent and zeal. He grew up in an Elkesaite community and had an early background in Ebionism and Gnosticism. In his early adulthood he allegedly had religious visions commanding him to develop a universal religion. Through his evangelizing, traveling to and studying in India and China, Manichaeism became an admixture of Zoroastrianism, Theosophy, Buddhism and Gnosticized Christianity. Mani was supported and protected by Shopur I, king of Persia, then by his successor, but under Bahram I, at the instigation of the Zoroastrian magicians, he was arrested and finally martyred, either by crucifixion or being flayed and his skin stuffed and hung on display to terrify his followers.

Schaff notes the nature and significance of this attempt at a universal religion. It was
 ...the latest, the best organized, the most consistent and dangerous form of Gnosticism, with which Christianity had to wage a long conflict. Manichaeism was not only a school, like the older forms of Gnosticism, but a rival religion and a rival church. In this respect it resembled Islam. . . both claimed to be divine revelations, both engrafted pseudo-Christian elements on a heathen stock. . . [and both considered their founder and first leader to be a great prophet sent from God].¹²³

THE MAJOR FEATURES OF MANICHAISM

- An absolute dualism between light and darkness.
- A docetic Christology.
- An esoteric knowledge that led to redemption from “darkness” and matter through self-mortification and extreme asceticism.
- Mani claimed to be the Paraclete (not the Holy Spirit, but another supreme teacher) promised by Jesus.
- A hierarchical organization of the supreme leader, Mani, apostles, bishops and teachers.
- A major division of followers into two classes: The Elect or Perfect, and the helpers or auditors. The perfection of the elect consisted of a three-fold seal: *Of the mouth*, i.e., purity in words and diet; *of activity*, i.e., renunciation of all earthly property and labor; *of sensual activity*, i.e., abstinence from any gratification of sensual desire.

¹²³ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 500.

- Pictorial representations of doctrine. This influence would be evidenced in the pictorial representations of our Lord, Mary, etc., in later Roman Catholicism.

THE INFLUENCE OF MANICHAISM

Manichaeism spread to the east as far as China and to the West as far as Spain. It was most influential in North Africa and the eastern part of the empire. As it moved west, it assumed a more Christian character and attracted many with its mysteries and alleged deeper truths. Augustine, the greatest Latin church father of the Imperial age, was for nine years a Manichaean before his conversion.

Manichaeism was severely persecuted along with Christianity prior to Constantine and also afterward by “Christian” Emperors. It was predominant in the fourth and fifth centuries, and contributed to the ascetic and sacerdotal tendencies in Christianity.

Manichaeism allegedly resurfaced during the Middle Ages in various “heretical” groups, who have been characterized as dualistic in their beliefs. Among them have been classed the Paulicians, Albigenses and the Cathari. There may have been extreme sects among these groups, but two things must be remembered:

- Manichaeism became a favorite heretical term for guilt by association throughout the Middle Ages and into the Reformation. E.g., Martin Luther was accused by Rome of Manichaeism to discredit him. The same was probably true of the Paulicians, Albigenses and Cathari, as they appear in history as closely related to the Waldenses, who were unquestionably orthodox.
- *The Key of Truth*, the doctrinal confession of the ancient Paulicians (Armenian Christians), was discovered in the late nineteenth century and revealed them to have been very orthodox in their faith.¹²⁴

ANTE-NICENE ERRORS

INTRODUCTION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY

As previously noted in the discussions under the headings: *Early Christianity and Greek Philosophy* (VII, A, E) and the introductory remarks concerning the terms: *Error*, *Heresy*, and *Dogma* under *Heresies and Errors of the Ante-Nicene Age* (X), Ante-Nicene Christianity was developing a theology in answer to internal and external challenges. *The errors within Christianity seem to have derived, not only from speculative thought or theoretical, abstract theological thinking, but also from the practical aspects and consistency of the Christian life and worship.*

The formulation of systematic or dogmatic theology was a gradual process. This was true, especially of Catholic Christianity, which became the official state church and religion

¹²⁴ For a thorough discussion of Manichaeism, See Mosheim, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 251–403; Gwatkin, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 69–72; Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 194–197; Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 498–508.

of the Empire.¹²⁵ This gradual process of error, reaction, extremes, and controversies may be summarized in the following survey:

AN HISTORICAL SURVEY

The second century was the age of apologetics and the defining of the fundamental ideas of Christianity (Paganism and Gnosticism).

The third and fourth centuries were given to theological controversies, specifically trinitarian in nature, and so anticipating the later Christological and pneumatological controversies (Dynamic and Modalistic Monarchianism, E.g., Arianism, which denied the absolute Deity of Christ, Semi-Arianism, or subordinationism; and Macedonianism or Pneumatomachianism, which denied the personality of the Holy Spirit).

The early fifth century was concerned with Anthropological and hamartiological issues (The Augustinian-Pelagian controversy, over sin and grace, predestination and human freedom).

The later fifth, sixth and seventh centuries were the time of the greater Christological controversies (Apollinarianism, which denied the true human spirit of Christ; Nestorianism, which taught an unscriptural separation of the human and Divine natures; Eutychianism, which confounded the two natures of Christ, denied His true, full humanity and so destroyed any true work of atonement; Monophysitism, a revival of Apollinarianism, denying the human nature of Christ; Monothelitism, which held that Christ had only one will, the Divine, denying His human will).

During the Middle Ages, various soteriological controversies over the atonement persisted and during the Protestant Reformation such doctrines as justification by faith were truly and exhaustively considered. Early, Medieval, and late modern Christianity have demonstrated a greater eschatological interest than any other era.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ During the era of transition (100–313), there was, as previously noted, a gradual separation of Catholic and primitive Christianity. This separation was first due to differences in church order and discipline, then later included issues of a more theological nature (i.e., in areas of salvation, baptism and the nature of the church). *By the time of the Constantinian change, one must recognize that there began to exist two church histories: A history of the Catholic state church system and a history of the remnants of primitive Christianity.* The Scriptural orthodoxy of the Pre-Reformation groups that existed apart from the State Church can be traced from their own confessions and manuals of doctrine. This is especially true of the Waldenses and Paulicians.

¹²⁶ James Orr, *Op. cit.* pp. x–xxviii. The work by James Orr reveals the systematic development of doctrine in connection with Church History. E.g., *Chiliasm*, or belief in a thousand year literal kingdom in the Early Churches. A revival of the Chiliastic idea in the 6,000 years since creation led to the preaching of Peter the Hermit and the Crusades to free Jerusalem from Islamic dominion and prepare for the coming of the Lord. The modern Charismatic and other religious movements are at least in part based on the presupposition that our Lord is to return by the turn of the century and thus there is to be a revival of the charismatic gifts just prior to that event. Such views are in part based on 1 Cor. 13:8–10 and especially “that which is perfect,” (τὸ τέλειον), allegedly referring to the return of our Lord. If He is intended, the masc. would have been used (ὁ τέλειος); if referring to the coming (ἡ παρουσία), the fem. The answer seems to lie in the context itself (v. 8–13). τὸ τέλειον is neut. and commonly refers to maturity. According to the context, the spiritual gifts exercised under immediate inspiration were for the infancy or immaturity of Christianity. When the mature state was reached (i.e., the completion of the canon of Scripture and the

The prevalent errors of the Ante-Nicene age were: The Allegorical approach to the interpretation of Scripture, the rise of ecclesiasticism, the anti-trinitarian controversies, asceticism, the worship of martyrs and relics and the beginnings of universalism and purgatory.

THE ALLEGORICAL APPROACH TO THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

The greatest and most far-reaching error within early Christianity is that which literally divorced it from the text of Scripture. The allegorical approach confused interpretation with application. This has been previously discussed under Heading VII, *Early Christianity and Greek Philosophy*, and the section *Philosophy and the Church Fathers*.

ECCLESIASTICISM

The rise of ecclesiasticism has previously been discussed at length under Heading V, and examined under the various aspects of: *The distinction between clergy and laity*, *The rise of the episcopacy*, *The rise of sacerdotalism*, *The rise of sacramentalism*, and *Catholic unity*.

ANTI-TRINITARIANISM

It was not until the third century that the trinitarian controversies began.¹²⁷ Shedd notes: “The early history of the Doctrine of the Trinity shows that Christian faith may exist without a scientific and technical expression of it. This ability comes in only as those heresies arise which necessitate the exact and guarded statements of systematic theology.”¹²⁸

Errors respecting the nature, character, and triunity of God derived, not so much from speculative thought, as from practical Christianity and worship, and the person of Christ. There are two fundamental biblical truths which every true Christian believes: The truth that there is but one God (Scriptural Monotheism), and the truth of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ (Scriptural Christology), or that He is to be worshipped as God. The correlation of these two fundamental Scriptural truths led to the trinitarian controversies: If God is one, and Christ is Divine, do we have two Gods (ditheism) (or possibly three Gods, as the Holy Spirit must at least be considered as equal to Christ); or, If God is one, then is Christ less than Absolute Deity? It is to be noted that these early controversies centered on the Person of Christ and later would include the Deity and personality of the Holy Spirit.

establishment of Christianity doctrinally, historically, socially, and experimentally), there was no further need for such supernatural manifestations.

¹²⁷ For a thorough discussion of the anti-trinitarian controversies, See Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 565–583; A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 197–202; Samuel Green, *Op. cit.*, pp. 136–138; W. G. T. Shedd, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 246–305; Louis Berkhof, *Op. cit.*, pp. 81–97; George P. Fisher, *Op. cit.*, pp. 98–104; Everett F. Harrison, *Op. cit.*, pp. 26, 361, 396–397, 465; Everett Ferguson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 610–612; J. D. Douglas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 13–14, 670–671; Mosheim, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 209–242; Neander, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 571–630; Kurtz, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 174–182; James Orr, *Op. cit.*, pp. 73–102.

¹²⁸ W. G. T. Shedd, *Loc. cit.*

Historically and theologically, these various controversies are summarized by one term, *Monarchianism*.¹²⁹

Monarchianism derived its meaning from the Greek term *monarchia* (μοναρχία [*monarchia*], “one rule or power”), and emphasized the unity of the Divine Being, or the truth of one God. There were two approaches to safeguard the unity of the Divine Being that led to error and eventual heresy concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ:

DYNAMIC MONARCHIANISM

The first was *Dynamic Monarchianism*, the denial of the absolute Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the view that Jesus was not God manifest in the flesh, the eternal Son of God incarnate, but a mere man who received Divine power (*dunamis*, δύναμις [*dunamis*], hence “dynamic”).

Dynamic Monarchianism generally held that Jesus was a mere man who received power from God at His baptism, an anointing of the Christ or Logos (an impersonal principle present in all men, but operative in an unusual way in Jesus). Jesus progressively and gradually became Divine.

This view was close to *Ebionism*, and held in general by *Cerinthian Gnosticism*, The *Alogi* (Those who denied the Johannine Λόγος and rationalistically dealt with the NT canon to exclude those portions dealing with the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ), Theodotus of Byzantium, Theodotus the “Money–Changer” or “Banker” (whose followers were called *Melchizedekians*, because they taught that Melchizedek was the mediator between God and the angels and higher than Christ, Who was merely the Mediator between God and men), Artemon the Syrian, Archelaus, a bishop in Persia, and Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch (condemned at a synod at Antioch in 269, but protected by Queen Zenobia of Palmyra, and not finally deposed until 272 by the Emperor Aurelian.).

This view was also known generally as *Adoptionism* (i.e., Jesus was the “adopted” Son of God, rather than the eternal Son of God), *Subordinationism* (i.e., that Jesus was less than God), and *Humanitarianism* (i.e., that Jesus was merely human). Historically, Dynamic Monarchianism prepared the way for later Arianism, Nestorianism, Socinianism, Unitarianism, and Russellism (“Millennial Dawnists” or “Jehovah’s Witnesses”).

MODALISTIC MONARCHIANISM

The second was *Modalistic Monarchianism*, or the view that because God is one, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are but three manifestations or *modes* of one person. (from the Latin *modus*, “a quantity, measure,” then “way, manner, method.”) Modalistic Monarchianism generally held that God was One Person in three manifestations or modes. This was an attempt to hold the full Deity of Christ, but at the expense of the Triunity of the Godhead.

¹²⁹ There are a variety of names and terms associated with these early controversies: dynamic Monarchianism, modalistic Monarchianism, Adoptionism, Patripassianism, Melchizedekianism, nominal Trinitarianism, Sabellianism, subordinationism, humanitarianism, etc. The controversies can be very generally condensed into two opposing views: Dynamic Monarchianism and Modalistic Monarchianism.

In the Western Empire this view was known as *Patripassianism* (lit: The “Father suffered”), because if God that Father and God the Son were one and the same Person or identical, then the Father suffered on the cross.¹³⁰

In the Eastern Empire Modalistic Monarchianism was known as *Sabellianism*, after its major representative, Sabellius, who taught a successive trinity of revelation (i.e., That God was the Father in creation and the Law or old dispensation; That He was the Son as the Mediator and Redeemer; and that He was the Holy Spirit in the new dispensation.). Other representatives of this view included Noetus of Smyrna, Epigonus, Cleomones, Beryllus of Bostra, and Callistus, a Bishop of Rome.

Modalistic Monarchianism has been echoed by those who have denied the Triunity of the Godhead, such as the modern Apostolic Church or the United Pentecostals. There are also some who deny the *Ontological Trinity*, and claim the Trinity of the Godhead exists only with regard to creation, i.e., the *Economic Trinity*. These deny the eternal Sonship of Christ and hold that He is only the “Son” in relation to creation or His present exaltation.

The major opponents of Monarchianism were: Novatian, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen and the unknown author of the *Little Labyrinth* (a refutation of Artemon).

ASCETICISM AND MONASTICISM

The tendency toward and the practice of both asceticism and monasticism began very early in Christianity. A basic study of these phenomena must include: Basic terms and definitions, the goal or object in view, the causes or reasons for such practices, sources, their early history, and their subsequent effect upon Christianity.¹³¹

DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

The basic terms and definitions of Asceticism. The word *asceticism* derived from the Gk. ἀσκέω, ἀσκήσις [*askeo, askesis*], meaning “exercise, practice, training or self-discipline.” The term was transferred from the physical and mental training of athletes to the life-style of the philosophical schools and religious sects. Thus, it connotes rigorous bodily self-denial in various forms.

Ascetics are generally designated as the *ubstinentes*, or those who abstained from wine, meat, and other foods; and the *continentes*, or those who abstained from marriage and sexual activity. Within the latter group, some had *spiritual marriages*, i.e., marriages without sexual contact. Common to both groups were usually the distinctions of poverty and simplicity of life-style with often extreme denial of bodily comforts. A further term that was used to designate certain groups of early Christian ascetics was *Encratite*, from the Gk. ἐνκρατεία [*enkrateia*], which meant “continence,” or “self-control.”

¹³⁰ When Praxeas, an early promoter of this doctrine, convinced Victor, Bishop of Rome, to ban the Montanists for their alleged spiritual gifts and accept Patripassianism, Tertullian wrote that he had “put to flight the Paraclete; and crucified the Father.”

¹³¹ For a discussion of asceticism and monasticism, Cf. the following: Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 378–414; Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 51, 175, 184–186, 196, 203–205; Everett f. Harrison, *Op. cit.*, pp. 68–69, 361; Everett Ferguson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 46, 104–107, 612–619, 673–674.

The basic terms and definitions of monasticism. The word-group derived from the Gk. μόνος [*monos*], meaning “alone,” hence, μόναχος [*monachos*], “a solitary one,” or *monk*. The Gk. μονηστήριον [*monasterion*], or the individual hermit’s cell or cave, and later the cloister, became the *monastery*.

Monasticism is generally divided into two distinct forms: *anchoritic monasticism*, from the Gk. ἀναχωρήτης [*anachoretēs*], “to retire, a hermit, recluse;” and *cenobitic monasticism*, from the Gk. κοινόβιον [*koinobion*] (κοινωνία and βίος), or “communal life.”

THE GOAL OF ASCETICISM AND MONASTICISM

The goal of ascetic or monastic practice was separation from the world and spirituality or closeness to God. When does spiritual separation from the world become asceticism? When:

- Mortification of the deeds or members of the body becomes mortification of the body itself (Rom. 8:12–13; Col. 3:5).
- Matter or material things are considered to be inherently evil (Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:1–5).
- Sin ceases to be a matter of the inner personality and becomes associated with the body or merely outward entities. (Jer. 17:9).

THE CAUSES OR REASONS FOR ASCETICISM AND MONASTICISM

The reasons for or the causes of asceticism and monasticism are varied:

- The culture of the Greco–Roman era seemed to possess an ascetic mentality. This was evidenced in pagan religious practices and almost every school of philosophy.
- The persecution of Christians often caused them to both give up their worldly possessions and comforts and flee into the desert or wilderness to survive.
- Many alleged “converts” were merely “baptized pagans” by the middle of the third century onwards, and spiritual laxity in the churches caused many to absent themselves from even Christian society and find solace in ascetic and monastic practices.
- A misunderstanding of the Scriptures. There is a Scriptural asceticism associated with a heightened spirituality, but such is only temporary in nature and non-contradictory in principle.

THE SOURCES OF ASCETICISM AND MONASTICISM

The sources of ascetic and monastic practices are also varied:

- Most pagan religions of the Greco–Roman era held to some form of asceticism, mysticism and occultism, especially for their priests or leaders.
- Many of the pagan philosophical schools held to ascetic practices as a way of life, notably the Stoics, Cynics and Neopythagoreans.

- Neoplatonic thought and Gnosticism were major catalysts for much asceticism in early Christianity, through their dualistic tenet that all matter was inherently evil. Tatian, an early Church Father, was seduced into the Gnostic teachings and established an ascetic following, the first *Encratites*.
- The strong ascetic tendencies of Manichaeism, as it sought to become the synthesis of world religions.
- Judaism, especially among the Pharisees and then the later Essene or Qumran communities, the Nazarenes, the Ebionites and the Elkesites. These began with a legalistic approach to asceticism.
- Early Christianity. Many of the early Church Fathers possessed an ascetic mentality, including such influential personalities as Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. It was a chief characteristic of the Montanist movement because of their eschatological orientation (the imminent end of the world).
- Biblical. An ascetical philosophy was derived from a misunderstanding of the Scriptures: Sexual abstinence was commanded by God before the giving of the Law (Ex. 19:15); The law of the Nazarite (Numb. 6:1–21); The record of prayer and fasting on the part of both Old Testament and New Testament personalities such as Elisha, Daniel, Our Lord and the Apostles; John the Baptist was an ascetic (Matt. 3:1–4); Both our Lord and the Apostle Paul advocated celibacy for spiritual reasons (Matt. 19:12, 29; 1 Cor. 7: 32; 9:27); The command of the Apostle Paul for Timothy to “*endure hardness*,” 2 Tim. 2:3., etc.¹³²

THE EARLY HISTORY OF ASCETICISM AND MONASTICISM.

Ascetic practices paralleled the Apostolic Age and the Ante-Nicene Era. Monasticism is the logical progression of asceticism. The Jewish Essenes had their *cenobitic* communities by the Dead Sea and in Egypt. Christian monasticism began during the Decian persecution (249–251) when many believers fled into the deserts and wilderness areas. Early monastics included Anthony, an Egyptian (c. 251–356) and Pachomius, the traditional founder of cenobitic monasticism (c. 292–346).

Early monasticism changed with the formation of the State church under Constantine. During the era of persecution, *the martyr* was the Christian hero. After that era, *the monk or ascetic-monastic, the interior martyr, living the life of self-denial* and separate from the world, became the spiritual hero of Christianity. The monastic movement spread from the East to the West very early and by the end of the fourth century, there were monasteries in Italy and France, and in Britain by the sixth century. The first western order was organized by Benedict of Nursia (480–540).

The subsequent effect upon Christianity has been great and varied. Asceticism has repeatedly surfaced in almost every form of Christianity. The practice of celibacy led quickly to the degradation of women in Christianity that would characterize State religion to the time of the Protestant Reformation. Monasticism became one of the great institutions of

¹³² Misunderstandings arose when Christians failed to see that such practices were not an end in themselves, that there were no patent rules, and that these were exceptions, not the general rule for true, spiritual Christianity. The Apostle Paul wrote against ascetic practices concerning diet and other matters (e.g., Col. 2:16–23; 1 Tim. 4:1–5).

the Middle Ages and the proto-type and precursor to the modern University. Asceticism continues in principle in all legalistic and ritualistic Christianity in which the physical is substituted for the spiritual.

THE VENERATION OF MARTYRS AND RELICS

DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

The word *martyr* derives from the Gk. μάρτυς [*martus*], “witness,” or the vb. μαρτυρέω [*martureo*], to “witness” or “testify.” *Martyrs were those who sealed their testimony to the Christian faith with their blood.* Two groups of sufferers were distinguished: *Confessors*, who lived through their ordeal or examinations,, and *martyrs*, who did not, but voluntarily gave up their lives for the faith. The great age of the martyrs extended from the New Testament or Apostolic era to the Edict of Milan (313). *Relics* included the remains, bones, or objects associated with the martyrs. “Veneration” (Lat: *venerare*, to worship) meant looking upon such relics as something exalted or hallowed, paying honor to them by an act of reverence.

SOURCES

The veneration of martyrs and relics finds its source in paganism, Jewish tradition and early Christian tradition:

- Pagan religions, myths and philosophy had their hero worship, political martyrs (e.g., Odysseus and Socrates), and household gods. This veneration or hero worship was transferred to the traditional Christianity of the second to early fourth centuries.
- The Jews of the Maccabean era had their military heroes and religious martyrs. Judaism taught a celestial reward for its pious martyrs.
- Early Christian tradition set the martyrs apart and attached great significance to their deaths and remains. See below.

THE BELIEFS OF MARTYROLOGY

Martyrology became prominent in the second century with the martyrdom of Polycarp (c. 160). By the end of the Era of Transition, the theology of martyrs or Martyrology held to the following:

- Martyrdom was a special grace ordained by God.
- The sufferings of a martyr were in imitation of and a participation in the sufferings of Christ.
- The Holy Spirit filled and inspired the martyrs with holy eloquence.
- Because the martyrs possessed the special grace of the Holy Spirit, they had the power to forgive sins and to intercede for the penitent.
- At death, martyrs entered immediately into heaven and presence of God, unlike other believers, who would only enter at the resurrection, remaining until then in an intermediate state.
- Martyrdom was a “baptism by blood,” and so was spoken of in sacramental terms.

- The anniversary of a martyr’s death was celebrated, as it was his or her “heavenly birthday.” This celebration, borrowed from paganism and its hero-worship, included (rather than the pagan family meal) the celebration of the Eucharist and a *panegyric* or proper, formal eulogy of the martyr’s life and death.
- Relics of the martyrs were regarded as possessing power over demons and power to heal.

As the age of the martyrs passed, there was a greater shift to interior martyrdom, or asceticism and monasticism, as a substitute for the ordeal of death. The worship of saints and relics was the next logical step after the veneration of martyrs and their relics. At the Council of Gangra in 340, those who despised the relics of the martyrs were decreed excommunicated.¹³³

UNIVERSALISM, PURGATORY, AND PENANCE

The eschatological thinking of *Origen* caused him to anticipate ἀποκατάστασις [*apokatastasis*], or the restoration of all things. In this, *he became the father of universalism*, or the ultimate restoration of all creation and the ultimate salvation of all men.

Clement and Origen of the Alexandrian school, following elements of Platonic thought, viewed the wicked in the fires of purification, and punishment as remedial, rather than eternal and punitive. Cyprian followed with thoughts of a purifying fire after death. The Romish dogma of purgatory would be finally developed in the time of Gregory the Great (c. 590).

The idea of penance follows that of baptismal regeneration. What was to be done about post-baptismal sins? Some of the early Fathers held that there was no pardon for post-baptismal sins; others, that there was at least one penance. Penance was held to be a good work and replaced the truth of repentance as the gift of free grace.¹³⁴ Except among those pre-Reformation evangelical groups that existed apart from Rome, the truth of repentance would be lost until the Protestant Reformation.

X THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

The English Bible contains 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These books are held to be canonical, i.e., these 66 books, and these alone are believed to be the very Word of God inscripturated. Orthodox Christians hold the Bible to be the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God in written form.¹³⁵

¹³³ Cf. Everett Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, pp. 575–579, 778–779; Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 82–84; J. D. Douglas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 638–639.

¹³⁴ Cf. Everett Ferguson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 62–63, 310–311, 418, 700–701, 708, 711; Seeburg, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 159, 197.

¹³⁵ For a thorough discussion of the canon of Scripture, Cf. the following: Norman Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 127–207; R. Laird Harris, *The Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, pp. 87–152; E. J. Young, “*The Canon of the Old Testament*,” and Herman Ridderbos, “*The Canon of the New Testament*,” in Carl F. H. Henry, Ed., *Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 153–168 and 187–201. See also Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 516–524.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CANONICITY OF SCRIPTURE

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The issue of canonicity raises vital, essential questions:

- If the Bible is the very Word of God inscripturated, How did it get from God to us?
- If it is inspired, what is the relation between inspiration and canonicity?
- What exactly is canonicity? If only 66 books out of the many hundreds or thousands of religious and Christian writings are the inscripturated Word of God, who determined this?
- Did early Christianity establish the canon of Scripture, or did the canon of Scripture determine the character and authority of early Christianity?
- Was canonicity decreed by early Church Councils, or did early Church Councils appeal to the canon of Scripture for their authority?¹³⁶
- What process was used to determine the canonical books from those that were spurious and non-authoritative?
- Is it possible that some non-canonical books are included in our Bible and that some canonical books have been omitted or lost?
- When and how was the process of canonization completed in the history of early Christianity?

The significance of the canon is stated by Schaff:

The question of the source and rule of Christian knowledge lies at the foundation of all theology...

...This source and this rule of knowledge are the holy scriptures of the Old and New Covenants. Here at once arises the inquiry as to the number and arrangement of the sacred writings, or the canon in distinction both from the productions of enlightened but not inspired church teachers, and from the very numerous and in some cases still extant apocryphal works ...which were composed in the first four centuries, in the interest of heresies or for the satisfaction of idle curiosity, and sent forth under the name of an apostle or other eminent person.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ The Roman Catholic Church commonly teaches that the infallible Church produced the canon of Scripture. This statement is based on the assumption that the "Church" of the first three centuries was the Roman Catholic Church. However, the Vatican Council of 1870 officially states:

And these books of the Old and New Testaments are to be received as sacred and canonical, in their integrity, with all their parts, as they are enumerated in the decree of the said Council [of Trent], and are contained in the ancient Latin edition of the Vulgate. These the Church holds to be sacred and canonical, not because, having been composed by mere human industry, they were afterwards approved by her authority, nor merely because they contain revelation, with no admixture of error; but because, having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author, and have been delivered as such to the Church herself. (*Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council concerning the Catholic Faith and the Church of Christ. A.D. 1870*, as quoted in Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, II, pp. 241–242.).

¹³⁷ Philip Schaff, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 516.

CHRISTIAN THEISM PRESUPPOSED

The existence and validity of a scriptural canon necessarily presupposes Christian theism. Only if it is presupposed that the Self-revealing God of Scripture has spoken, and that this revelation has been inscripturated under Divine superintendence, can the issues of canonicity be settled in a positive manner. Upon the presuppositions of Christian theism, the Scriptures are self-authenticating as the inspired, infallible, inerrant, and therefore authoritative Word of God inscripturated (Heb. 1:1–2; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; 2 Tim. 3:16). Thus, the Bible itself defines and determines canonicity.¹³⁸

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

There are three major issues that need definition and explanation: the definition of inspiration and its relation to the authority and canon of Scripture, the meaning of the term *canon*, and the various classes of religious writings contained in or excluded from Scripture.

INSPIRATION

The Divine *Inspiration* of the Scriptures is both *verbal* (extending to the very words, grammatical intricacies and syntax, etc.) and *plenary* (fully, equally inspired throughout). Inspiration is “...a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness.”¹³⁹ An extended explanation is given by H. S. Miller:

Inspiration...is the inbreathing of God into men, thus qualifying them to receive and communicate Divine truth... God speaking through the Holy Spirit through men to men. It is the work of God through the Spirit in men, enabling them to receive and give forth Divine truth without error. It makes the speaker and writer infallible in the communication of this truth, whether this truth was previously known or not. It causes the message to go beyond human power and become Divinely authoritative.¹⁴⁰

AUTHORITY

Because the Scriptures are the very inspired Word of God inscripturated, they are authoritative, i.e., authority derives from inspiration.¹⁴¹ *Canonicity* is the recognition of this authority. Mark the statement by Norman Geisler and William Nix:

¹³⁸ E. J. Young, *Op. cit.*, pp. 155–156.

¹³⁹ B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, pp. 77–78.

¹⁴⁰ H. S. Miller, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ The importance and nature of biblical authority can be noted in the following:

- The authority of Scripture is *necessary*. Man needs special revelation [an authoritative word from God] to lead him to truly and rightly know God, be reconciled to Him and live in the context of His revealed will.
- The authority of Scripture is *comprehensive*. It encompasses the whole of life and reality. There is to be no part of our minds, hearts, lives or concept of reality that is to be apart from or contrary to the Word of God and its authority. There can be no selective obedience or submission to the Word of God—there can be only obedience or disobedience (Deut. 6:4–5; Matt. 4:4).
- The authority of Scripture is *executive*. The Word of God comes to us as command, not merely suggestion or information—we must read, study and conform to it as such.

The first link in the chain of revelation “From God to Us” is inspiration, which is concerned with *what* God did, namely, that He breathed out (spirated) the Scriptures. The second link in the chain is canonization, which relates to the question of *which* books God inspired. Inspiration indicates how the Bible received its *authority*, whereas canonization tells how the Bible received its *acceptance*. It is one thing for God to give the Scriptures their authority, and quite another for men to recognize that authority. Canonization, then, concerns the recognition and collection of the God-inspired, authoritative books of the sacred Scriptures.¹⁴²

CANON AND CANONICITY

The word *canon* is derived from the Gk. κανὼν [*canon*], and originally signified a measuring staff or straight rod. It was probably a derivative of the Heb. קֶנֶף [*kaneh*], *reed*, an Old Testament term for a measuring rod (Ezk. 40:3; 42:16). In pre-Christian Greek it also had the connotation of *rule* or *standard* by which a thing is measured. This usage occurs in the New Testament several times (e.g., Gal. 6:16).

The metaphorical use as *standard* or *norm* is found in the early Church Fathers from the time of Irenaeus. They referred to the κανὼν [*kanon*, rule] of Christian teaching which they called the “κανὼν [Rule] of the Truth,” or the “κανὼν [Rule] of Faith.” By the time of Athanasius (c.350), the term *canon* was applied to the Bible, both as the Rule of faith and practice and as the body of inspired and authoritative truth.

CLASSIFICATION OF WRITINGS

Both the Old and New Testaments existed as unique within a larger body of literature. Even within the body of sacred writings, there were books that were questioned. The Old and New Testaments each had or existed within four classes of writings:

- The *Homologoumena*. (Gk. ὁμολογοῦμενα [*homologoumena*], “saying the same thing”). These were books that were accepted or acknowledged by all.
- The *Antilegomena*. (Gk. ἀντιλεγόμενα [*antilegomena*], “speaking against”). These were the books disputed for various reasons, but later received into the canon of Scripture. The existence of such *Antilegomena* demonstrates the care and concern the early churches exercised in their recognition of Scripture.

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- The authority of Scripture is *legislative*. It is to be our rule of both faith and practice. God legislates morality—note the Decalogue in Ex. 20:1–17 and also Matt. 22:36–40; 1 Tim. 1:8–10.
 - The authority of Scripture is *judicial*. It is the ultimate and absolute standard of what is right or wrong, manifesting the moral Self-consistency of God (Cf. Ex. 20:1–17; Matt. 22:36–40; Heb. 4:12–13).
 - The authority of Scripture is *perpetual*. Mark the constant reference in the New Testament, “It is written,” when referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. The connotation is that the Scriptures as the very Word of God remain wholly authoritative.
 - The authority of Scripture is *ultimate*. Because the Scripture derives from God Himself, there is no other criterion or authority to which it can be subjected or by which it may be judged. If there were, then logically and necessarily, the Word of God would itself be relative and subordinate to such a standard or criterion. It is self-authenticating, intelligent and absolute. All other criteria or authorities are relative to the Scriptures. (Psa. 138:2; Isa. 46:9–11; Matt. 24:35; Heb. 1:1–3).

¹⁴² Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

- The *Apocrypha*. (Gk. [ὁ] ἀπόκρυφος [*apokruphos*], “that which is hidden, concealed, secret, esoteric”). These were books that were accepted by some, but never included in the canon of Scripture.
- The *Pseudopigrapha*. (Gk. ψευδοπίγραφα [*pseudopigrapha*], “false writings”).¹⁴³ These were spurious books or forgeries that claimed prophetic or apostolic authorship and were universally rejected.

THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

The Old Testament *Homologoumena* contained 34 books. The *Antilegomena* contained five books: Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezekiel and Proverbs. The Old Testament *Apocrypha* was comprised of books written after the close of prophetic inspiration that lacked authenticity and authority. It contains 14 books, which were included in the Septuagint (LXX) or Greek Old Testament. The Roman Catholic Church has declared 11 of these Apocryphal books to be canonical. The Protestants, as the early Christians, hold to the Hebrew canon of 39 books, omitting the Apocrypha. The Old Testament *Pseudopigrapha* contained 26 books.

THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

The New Testament *Homologoumena* contained about 20 books: The four Gospels, Acts, The epistles of Paul, 1 Peter and 1 John. The *Antilegomena* contained seven disputed books: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation. The New Testament *Apocryphal* and *Pseudopigraphical* books number in the hundreds. These were rejected as forgeries and non-authoritative, their contents often contradicting Scripture or containing fantasies. Some of the writings of the early Church Fathers belong to this group and were considered as edifying, but not accepted as inspired Scripture.

DETERMINING FACTORS

What led to the formation of the canon of Scripture? There were various determining factors:

THE NECESSITY OF A SCRIPTURAL CANON

A fixed, authoritative body of Divine truth was and is essential to Christianity. Without such, no parameters could exist for faith or practice. The need for a recognized canon or body of Divine, authoritative truth arose from the following:

First, *the existence of both written and oral tradition*. The Christians of the early to mid-second century had either heard the apostles personally or had been taught by those who had. There existed, not only the Apostolic writings, but a whole body of oral traditions and sayings allegedly from both the Lord Himself and the Apostles which maintained a great influence over Christian faith and practice.¹⁴⁴ The oral traditions were in great danger

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–178, 195–207; H. S. Miller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 106–121, 142–149.

¹⁴⁴ Before the writing of the New Testament books, Divine truth had been revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Life and teaching of our Lord had been preserved by oral tradition and was vouchsafed through catechizing [repetitive oral instruction]. Cf. Luke 1:1–4. Luke’s Gospel record was written to enforce the truth that Theophilus had already received through catechizing [“has

of being changed by time. The truth had to be established by the written Word, all the written Word and only the written Word.

Second, *a consistent evangelistic and missionary effort*. Versions of the Scriptures were made in the early second century and onward (e.g., Old Syriac or *Peshitta*) in various languages. There was an urgent need to define the body or library of inspired writings.

Third, *intellectual assaults against Christianity from pagan Greek philosophy*. The early Christians appealed to the Scriptures for their arguments and proof of the Divine origin of Christianity. Appeal to Scripture logically placed the writings of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Apostles on the same level. Melito of Sardis (c. 170) journeyed to Palestine to affirm the Old Testament canon of the Hebrew text, as there existed some question as to the canon because the LXX contained the Apocrypha. The Hebrew canon was then established for Christians. As the Old Testament canon was established and upheld by the witness of the Lord Himself and the Apostles, it was left to the early Christians to recognize the writings that would comprise the New Testament canon.

Fourth, *the abundance of heretical literature that sought to pervert Christianity*. Many books were written by Gnostics and others who perverted the truth. Appeal to authoritative writings necessitated a fixed canon of Divine truth.

Fifth, *sectarians began to make changes in various apostolic writings to suit their peculiar views*. Many books were also forged under the names of the apostles.

Sixth, *the canon of Marcion the Gnostic* (c. 140). Marcion was the first “higher critic,” and established the first “New Testament canon” on Gnostic principles. He excluded everything except the Gospel of Luke in a mutilated form and 10 epistles of Paul. Reaction to the canon of Marcion hastened the formation of the New Testament canon.

Seventh, *persecution*. Early Christians took great precautions to protect the Scriptures during periods of persecution when the government demanded that all the sacred Christian writings be confiscated and destroyed. Those writings recognized as Scripture were protected at the risk of lives while other writings might be given up under duress.

THE TESTS OF CANONICITY

How did the early Christians recognize certain books as Scripture and reject others? The criterion was not antiquity, as though books written in a given period were considered scriptural. Many books were in existence which were contemporary or even antedated some Scripture, e.g., *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* (Numb. 21:14), *The Book of Jasher* (Josh. 10:13), An epistle by Paul (1 Cor. 5:9), *1 Clement* was written during the lifetime of the Apostle John. The answer lies in the application of various principles gathered from early Christian writings which detail the process used by the early Christians and churches:

First, *is the book authoritative?* Does it possess Divine authority? This includes either immediate prophetic or apostolic authorship, or authorship by an amanuensis or understudy and close companion of an apostle who wrote or interpreted under his authority

been instructed” is κατεχρήθης, *katechetes*]. For this type of necessary oral, repetitive instruction, See. also Acts 18:25; Gal. 6:6; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2.

and influence (e.g., Peter and Mark, or Paul and Luke). God inspired the Scriptures through the prophets and apostles.

When the Word of God was written it became Scripture and, inasmuch as it had been spoken by God, possessed absolute authority. Since it was the Word of God, it was canonical. That which determines the canonicity of a book, therefore, is the fact that the book is inspired of God.¹⁴⁵

Second, *is the book authentic?* Does it agree with the rest of Divine revelation and with the rule or *Analogy of Faith*?¹⁴⁶ Does it contradict the truth in any way?

Third, *is the book dynamic*, i.e., does it possess the power of God to evangelize and edify? Does it manifest the witness of the Spirit?

Fourth, *is the book recognized by the Fathers?* Is it quoted or referred to as Scripture and undisputed?

Fifth, *is the book received by the people of God?* Does it have universal acceptance? Is it a book that is to be read in all the churches? Some later works, as the Epistles of Clement, Barnabas, Hermas, et. al., were read in some churches for a time, but were eventually discarded. There was a great and recognizable distinction between the apostolic writings and those of the early Fathers.

THE HISTORY OF THE CANON

The recognition of the New Testament canon was a gradual process, due to state persecution, the existence of oral Christian tradition, the slowness of copying the Scriptures by hand, the relative isolation of churches throughout the empire, and the existence of other early Christian writings.

The earliest recognition of New Testament writings as Scripture comes from the Apostle Peter in referring to the writings of Paul, implying the existence of a canon or body of New Testament truth at that time (2 Pet. 3:14–16).

¹⁴ Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. ¹⁵ And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; ¹⁶ As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of

¹⁴⁵ E. J. Young, *Loc. cit.*

¹⁴⁶ The “Analogy of Faith” refers to the perspicuity of Scripture, i.e., Scripture is self-interpreting. The more obscure passages are understood by clearer passages. This presupposes that the Scriptures, as the very Word of God inscripturated, are not self-contradictory, but complementary. The Analogy of Faith is the expression of the total or inclusive, unified teaching of Scripture as it bears on any one given point of doctrinal truth.

NOTE: The terminology “Analogy of Faith” was originally based on a misunderstanding of Rom. 12:6, “...according to the proportion of faith” (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως), i.e., the measure of personal faith—not going beyond what God has given by way of personal gifts of ministry and faith personally or individually receives. The term “faith” was taken by the Church Fathers in an objective sense as the doctrinal teaching of Scripture rather than a subjective sense of personal, experimental faith. Thus, the “Analogy of Faith” came to have its present meaning. It has become an acceptable theological term, although it was misappropriated from Rom. 12:6.

these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

The closest Church Fathers to the Apostles, i.e., the writers to 170 A.D. refer to the apostolic writings as Scripture and held them as being far superior to their own writings and wholly authoritative: Clement of Rome (95), Ignatius of Antioch (117), Polycarp (118), Papias (140), Justin Martyr (150).

*By the year 170, the New Testament canon was complete, with the exception of 2 Peter. The Antilegomena had finally been recognized as Scripture and the objections answered. The *codex Bezae Cantabrigiae* (206) includes 2 Peter, but omits Esther and Revelation, implying that by the early third century the question of the canon was almost completely settled.*

The Eastern or Greek Church had fully recognized the full or present canon by the letter of Athanasius in 367. The Western or Latin Church recognized the full canon by the Council of Hippo in 393 and the Council of Carthage in 397.

The subsequent history of the canon remained relatively unchanged until *the Council of Trent* recognized the Old Testament Apocrypha as Scripture for the Church of Rome in 1545–1547. *Luther* rejected James on his Christocentric principle of the canon and its alleged disagreement with the Pauline writings. The rise of *modern rationalistic criticism* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries called for a reconsideration of canonicity. *Neoorthodoxy* has lately raised the issue again with its doctrine that the Scriptures are a mere vehicle for the Word of God, and not the very Word of God inscripturated.

XI A SUMMARY OF THE ERA OF TRANSITION

This Era of Transition lasted 213 years and witnessed greater changes in Christianity than any other time–period except the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Christianity was transformed from a persecuted, predominantly Jewish sect to the predominantly Gentile, favored religion of the Empire.¹⁴⁷

Christianity permeated the Roman Empire and extended beyond from Britain to India, from the northern Germanic tribes south into the continent of Africa. It had largely transformed the cultures of the ancient world and signaled the demise of the old pagan religions. Christianity gained the intellectual respect of and then superiority over the ancient pagan philosophies. No pagan writer could equal the greatest Church Fathers of the Ante–Nicene age. The canon of Scripture was fully recognized. Copies, translations and versions were dispersed throughout the Empire and beyond.

By its conflict and close association with the ancient world, Christianity itself experienced a great transformation:

- *As the purity and simplicity of Apostolic or New Testament Christianity became changed by innovation, tradition, worldliness, and pagan influences, two distinct*

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Robert A. Baker, *Op. cit.*, p. 25, and A. H. Newman, *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 291–302.

trends became evident: (1) a return to or continuance in New Testament principles, as noted among the Montanists, Novatians, Donatists and others; (2) a transition to a sacerdotal and ecclesiastical system that mirrored the Roman Empire. This Catholic majority would under Constantine become the Roman Catholic or state church.

- As Christianity sought to challenge the intellectual world and develop its own theology, it was from the beginning *influenced and modified by Greek thought*. Philosophy and theology were joined together in a permanent and necessary relationship. The philosophical element gave to Christian theology its speculative nature.
- *The allegorical approach to Scripture* largely separated Christianity from the *text* of Scripture itself. This approach confused application with interpretation. The loss of the grammatico–historical method of interpretation meant fanciful and arbitrary interpretations. This approach would dominate state Christianity until the time of the Protestant Reformation.
- *Various errors and heresies developed* because of the influence of pagan intellectual and religious thought. Some of these erroneous and heretical principles would permanently affect Christianity.
- *The canon of Scripture was largely recognized during the Ante–Nicene era*, a remarkable fact, given the persecution of the Roman State, the existence and abundance of heretical literature, the lack of extant copies, and the remoteness of many churches.

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