

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Universal and Local

By

Daniel J. Lewis

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The Challenge of Transition

No Christian movement, however modern, has developed in a vacuum exempt from the forces of the Christian history that preceded it. There are those Christians who, more or less, see their contemporary Christian culture stretching backward in an unbroken chain to the early church, but such a vision is mythical. If the modern church is to remain faithful to its roots as well as understand its present character, it must do so through the lense of what has already happened. No one can fail to remember the epitaph inscribed over the pavilion platform at the Jonestown, Guyana massacre: "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it." The present study will begin with the earliest centuries of the Christian church in post-apostolic times. The importance of early Christian history for modern Christians is far more significant than most of them realize. It describes how the Christian church survived, largely without blueprints for the future, in an era that was particularly hostile both ideologically and politically. Furthermore, early Christian history is important because Christianity is an historical faith. Unlike the eclectic, mystical and existential religions, which are grounded in emotive experience and personal expression, Christianity is firmly rooted in history, particularly those events that occurred during the reigns of Augustus Caesar and Tiberius Caesar of Rome and Herod Antipas of Galilee (cf. Lk. 2:1-2; 3:2). From that central set of historical events that focused upon the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian church has progressed through the centuries.

The transition from the apostolic church to the post-apostolic church carried with it some formidable challenges. No extensive blueprints were left by Jesus for the future of his church, but rather, he promised that the Holy Spirit would lead his disciples into the truth. When the apostles began to die, the future of the church was left to their successors, still with no elaborate plan for the next generation. Many questions were as yet unanswered or only partially answered, questions such as:

- 1) What is the relationship of Christianity to Judaism, especially since the Romans tended to see Christianity as a Jewish sect?
- 2) What forms of worship were appropriate to borrow from Judaism? What new symbols could be used?

- 3) What is sacred Scripture for the followers of Jesus? Can any Christian write Scripture, and if not, what is to be accepted as valid, what is to be rejected, and upon what basis are such decisions to be made?
- 4) Who are to be the new leaders in the Christian community when previous ones die? Who is to pass on the authentic Jesus tradition? Is it the twelve apostles, the wider group of disciples, the relatives of Jesus or someone else?
- 5) How are the Christian churches to be organized and governed? How are various local churches to relate to each other?
- 6) How should the church address opposing religious ideas?
- 7) What is the relationship of the Christian church to the Roman Empire, which controlled the Mediterranean world? Should Christians join in the rebellion of the Jewish zealots?

The answers to these sorts of questions had to be hammered out on the anvil of history. In viewing the past, one ought to deeply respect the challenges and responses of our ancestors in the faith. While we may not subscribe to the notion that the decisions and directions of these early Christians were infallible, the struggles of the early church should inform and inspire us. At the same time, all Christian tradition subsequent to the apostles must yield to the authority of the most sacred tradition, Holy Scripture.

The Delay of the *Parousia*

One of the earliest adjustments in Christian thinking occurred with respect to the time of Christ's return. In the upper room discourses just before his death, Jesus promised that he would come back and take the disciples to be with him in the Father's house (Jn. 14:1-3). At the ascension, the angels declared to the amazed disciples that "this same Jesus...will come back in the same way" (Ac. 1:10-11). Thus, in the documents of the New Testament, the imminent return of Christ was held forth consistently with anticipation (cf. Ro. 13:11; 1 Co. 1:8; 7:29; Phil. 1:10; 3:20; 4:5; 1 Th. 4:15-18; 5:6; 1 Ti. 6:14; Tit. 2:13; Ja. 5:8-9; 2 Pe. 3:9-12). Jesus himself implied that his return was always to be considered impending, since the hour was unknown (Mt. 24:36--25:13//Mk. 13:32-37//Lk. 21:29-36). In the Apocalypse of John, there are repeated warnings that the Lord was coming *tachys* [= speedily, without delay] (Rv. 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). *Maranatha* (= our Lord, come!), an Aramaic prayer of the early church (cf. 1 Co. 16:22), cogently expressed this longing and hope. So certain were the early Christians that the *parousia* (= coming) of Jesus was soon to be accomplished that a rumor spread among them concerning John bar-Zebedee that he would not die before the event, though this

proved to be mistaken (cf. Jn. 21:22-23). Certainly there does not seem to be any clear expectation of a centuries-long continuing development of the present world order with the Christian church in its midst (cf. Ro. 16:20; 1 Co. 7:31).

As the decades slipped by, the earliest Christians were forced to cope with the possibility that the return of Christ might not be within their own lifetimes. Many scholars see this adjustment as early as the letters of Paul. Whereas in his earlier letters Paul seems to have counted himself among those who would be living to see the parousia, since he uses the first person plural pronouns "we" (cf. 1 Th. 4:13ff; 1 Co. 15:51), in his later letters he speaks of the eventuality of his own death (Phil. 1:22; 2 Ti. 4:6ff.). Some interpreters read this as a development in Paul's eschatology. Whether such exegesis is correct or not,¹ the fact remains that the early church was obliged to make an adjustment with respect to this perceived delay of the parousia. The Christians were obliged to view the return of Christ as an impending event, but they were also obliged to address the future without any certainty that this event would happen in their lifetimes or even in the relatively near future.

The Churches the Apostles Left Behind

In the theology of Luke-Acts, the progress of the message of Jesus moves in ever broadening horizons. In the Third Gospel, the movement is from Galilee to Jerusalem. In Acts, the movement is from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the Roman world (Ac. 1:8). At first, the Christian church was exclusively Jewish, centering in Jerusalem. In spite of the seeming universality of the great commission (Mt. 28:19; Lk. 24:47), the Christian message did not pass outside of Jewry or even Jerusalem until persecution forced the issue. Eventually, various racial and nationalistic barriers were broken down. Philip proclaimed Christ in Samaria (Ac. 8:4-8), and to confirm the legitimacy of this mission, the Jerusalem church sent apostles to investigate and establish solidarity (Ac. 8:14-17). Peter shared the good news about Jesus with a Gentile God-fearer stationed at the military center of Caesarea (Ac. 10), and later, Peter's action was affirmed by the Jerusalem church (Ac. 11:1-18). After the persecution of Stephen, a church of mixed antecedents began in Antioch, the third largest city in the empire (Ac. 11:19-21), and this outreach also was investigated and approved by the Jerusalem church (Ac. 11:22-26).

With the conversion and calling of Saul of Tarsus, the non-Jewish outreach of the Christian church took on a much more aggressive direction. In a series of church-planting tours, Paul (or Saul) established Christian congregations throughout Asia Minor and Greece, and his mission also gained approval from the Jerusalem church

¹ For arguments against it, see H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 489-492.

(Ac. 15:12-21; cf. Ga. 2:7-9). Thus, by the middle of the first century, there were both Palestinian churches, composed mostly of Jewish Christians and led by various apostles from among the original Twelve, especially Peter and James, and there were Greco-Roman churches scattered throughout the empire, composed of mixed nationalities and largely looking to Paul as their spiritual leader.² With the deaths of Peter and Paul in the 60s, other leaders gained a wider recognition. The Apostle John became the recognized leader in the Province of Asia toward the end of the first century, according to the earliest traditions, and it is probably from there that he published the Fourth Gospel.³ Matthew seems to have become prominent in Antioch, Syria, and it is not unlikely that his gospel was published there (c. AD 80-90).⁴ John Mark became prominent in the church in Rome after Peter's martyrdom, and the second gospel probably was published there (c. AD 65).⁵

If the church at Antioch can be used as a paradigm, then it is appropriate to speak of stages through which the various Christian churches passed with respect to their leaders. Early on, the church at Antioch was led by Barnabas, Paul, and others from about AD 40 to about AD 70 (Ac. 13:1). Peter also figured prominently during this period due to his visits (Ga. 2:11), and James, though he was in Jerusalem, was well-known to the Antiochan Christians (cf. Ga. 2:12; Ac. 15:1, 13). A second stage from about AD 70 to the end of the century can be called the period of Matthew. The third stage, after AD 100, properly belongs to Ignatius, whose seven letters we possess from the early years of the second century when he was on his way from Antioch to Rome after being condemned to death by the state. The same kind of stages and progression of leaders probably occurred in Rome between the time of Peter and Paul (AD 50s and 60s) and the time of Clement,⁶ who wrote in the name of the Roman Church to the Corinthian Church in about AD 95. It can be assumed with some assurance that similar progressions occurred elsewhere.

² To be sure, when Peter began traveling and Apollos became a Christian, some of these churches extended an allegiance to leaders other than Paul, cf. 1 Co. 1:12. Paul both rebuked sectarianism (1 Co. 1:13; 3:4-9) and affirmed the unity of the entire church and all its leaders (1 Co. 3:31-23).

³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.xxii.5; III.i.1; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.xxiii.3; v.xx.4-8.

⁴ R. Brown and J. Meier, *Antioch & Rome* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), pp. 15-27.

⁵ That Peter was martyred in Rome has general consensus, and the idea that Mark's Gospel was published in Rome stems from various early traditions, cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.xxxix.15. Furthermore, the earliest quotations of Mark's Gospel are to be found in *1 Clement* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, both of which are associated with the Roman church.

⁶ Eusebius identifies the author of the document called 1 Clement, which as it stands is anonymous, with a Christian named Clement who was speculated to be Paul's co-worker (cf. Phil. 4:3), cf. *Ecclesiastical History*, III.iv.9; III.xv.1f. Clement of Alexandria even calls this Clement an "apostle," cf. *Stromata*, IV.xvii.1.

The Deaths of the Apostles

Eusebius, the church historian around the early fourth century, said, "The apostles and disciples of the Savior scattered over the whole world, [and] preached the gospel everywhere."⁷ For the most part, however, the details of the deeds and deaths of the original apostles cannot be ascertained with certainty. To be sure, there are abundant materials preserved by tradition, and however uncertain tradition may be, there is probably a root of truth behind much of it. However, extricating historical fact from embellishment is at best a risky business. From ecclesiastical history, we gather that most of the original apostles died by martyrdom, and tradition has preserved accounts of these martyrdoms.⁸

It may be noted that the term apostle was somewhat broader in its application than a reference to merely the twelve as chosen by the Lord. When applied to persons such as Paul, Barnabas, Apollos and so forth, it probably carried a connotation not unlike our modern word "missionary."⁹ Nevertheless, in the post-apostolic period there was a tendency to limit the title to the twelve, not so much to exclude Paul and others like him as much as to exclude pretenders whose fraudulent claims were becoming dangerous (cf. Rv. 2:2).¹⁰

With the deaths of the twelve who had personally known Jesus, the transition to a new form of leadership was necessary. There was no longer that direct continuity with Jesus through those who had known him. By the close of the first century, all the original apostles had died, and if false teachings had sprung up while the apostles were still alive, as is evident in the epistles of the New Testament, the absence of the apostles made the rise of such heresies even more likely.

The *Birkat Ha-Minim* and its Implications

In the earliest period of the church after Pentecost, the Christians were perceived by most outsiders to be a sectarian branch of Judaism. The Jerusalem church and the other congregations in Palestine seemed to have maintained a conformity to the life of the Jewish community. They continued to worship in the temple (Ac. 2:46; 3:1; 5:20-21, 25, 42; 22:17). They still took Jewish vows (Ac. 21:22-26). They continued to use the synagogues (Ac. 13:14; 14:1; 17:1-3, 10, 17;

⁷ This missionary activity is also implied in the title of the early Christian document called *The Didache*, which in its fuller form reads, "The Lord's Teaching to the Heathen by the Twelve Apostles."

⁸ For a collection of the traditions about the deeds and deaths of the original apostles, see H. Lockyer, *All the Apostles of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), pp. 247-260; W. McBirmie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1973).

⁹ The Greek term *apostolos* (= ambassador, envoy, delegate) lends itself easily to such a meaning.

¹⁰ M. Shepherd, Jr., "Apostles," *IDB* (1962) I.172.

18:4, 19, 26; 19:8).¹¹ They scrupulously followed the regulations of Torah (Ac. 21:20). They continued to practice circumcision (Ac. 16:3).¹² Some early Christians still belonged to other Jewish theological traditions, such as the Pharisees (Ac. 15:5; 23:6). They originally preached only to other Jews (Ac. 11:19).¹³ Even the Sanhedrin, while they opposed the apostles' preaching about Jesus, were at least open to the idea that the Christian message might eventually prove to be from God. For them, the Christian message was only one among several other messianic sectarian movements within Judaism (Ac. 5:33-40). The Romans, for their part, viewed the Christians as just another Jewish sect (Ac. 24:5, 14; 28:22).

This somewhat uneasy coexistence between Christianity and Judaism lasted only for a short time, however. While the Sanhedrin was disturbed by the messianic Jesus movement and sought to quell it as a fanatical sect (Ac. 4:1-2, 16-18; 5:17-18, 40), the beginnings of an even greater rift occurred with Stephen's sermon about the transitory role of the temple (Ac. 7:47-50). Stephen was lynched (7:54-60), and a massive persecution broke out against all who agreed with him (Ac. 8:1-3). Christians were extradited for trial from other cities (Ac. 9:1-2), James bar-Zebedee was beheaded (Ac. 12:1-2), and eventually James the brother of the lord was executed.¹⁴ Paul was arrested for allegedly bringing a Gentile beyond the barrier in the temple as well as for teaching against Jewishness, the Torah and the Temple (Ac. 21:27-36).

In AD 66, when the Jewish insurrection broke out against Rome, virtually all of the Jewish sects were drawn into the conflict, including the Essenes. Of all the Jewish groups, the Christians alone did not participate, and consequently, they were viewed by their Jewish fellows as traitors to the Jewish cause. Many Jewish Christians were killed by the Jewish insurrectionists.¹⁵ Following the Jewish wars, probably in about the mid-80s, an addition was made to the Eighteen Benedictions which constituted the daily prayers of all pious Jews and were repeated in every synagogue service. This addition is called the *birkat ha-minim* (= curse upon the heretics), and the *minim* were probably Christians. The addition read, "For the apostates let there be no hope, and let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted

¹¹ The reference to a synagogue in Ja. 2:2 should also be mentioned, and while it is not as clear as the references in Acts, it may well indicate that Christians were at that time still using the synagogue for worship, cf. J. Adamson, *The Epistle of James [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 105.

¹² Circumcision became a primary issue when Gentiles began to experience conversion, and the issue became sharp enough to generate an ecumenical council of the apostles and elders (Ac. 15:1ff.).

¹³ Of course, the great commission of Christ envisioned the preaching of the gospel to the whole world, but the disciples at this time still were operating under the earlier instructions of Jesus that they should only preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (cf., Mt. 10:5; 15:24).

¹⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX.ix.1.

¹⁵ L. Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, trans. R. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), p. 60.

in our days. Let the Nazarenes¹⁶ and the heretics be destroyed in a moment, and let them be blotted out of the book of life and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant."¹⁷ This curse indicates that "an unbridgeable gulf had opened up between the Church and the Synagogue, so that exclusion on the part of the latter is total."¹⁸ The words of Jesus had come to pass that his followers would be expelled (cf. Jn. 16:2). By the 2nd century, Jews were involved in the deaths of Christians by way of denunciation to the Romans. Christians accused Jews of betraying them to Roman inquisitors.¹⁹ Given this widening rift between Christianity and Judaism, the early Christians, even before the end of the first century, were obliged to develop their religion independently of Jewish culture.

Christianity as *Religio Illicita*

With the recognition that Christianity was not merely a sect of Judaism, another serious problem arose. This problem concerned the Roman government itself. Rome recognized Judaism as a legitimate religion, permitted by law. In fact, Judaism was the only religion which was exempt from the worship of the emperor. Normally, any religion which did not permit emperor-worship was unlawful, but since the Jews were so numerous and influential in the empire, the Romans could not easily afford to be intolerant. For about the first thirty years of its existence, Christianity benefited from the perception that it was a Jewish sect. As Christianity spread, however, and particularly as it came to include non-Jewish peoples, the Roman authorities began to distinguish between Christians and Jews. Since Christians also refused to sacrifice to the emperor, Christianity became regarded as *religio illicita* (= illegal religion), and from about the early 60s, Christians risked their lives, their goods, and their freedom.²⁰

Early Growth, Struggle and Development

The historical events of the last third of the first century forced the early Christian church into a new chapter in its history. The persecution by Caesar Nero, the deaths of Peter and Paul as the two most important apostles, the split between the Christians and the synagogue, the catastrophic ending of the Jewish wars, and the marking of Christianity as an illegal religion all combined to shape the immediate

¹⁶ The term Nazarenes probably is a direct reference to Christians, cf. Ac. 24:5.

¹⁷ From the Twelfth Benediction, cf. G. Beasley-Murray, *John [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. lxxvi-lxxvii.

¹⁸ Schrage, *TDNT* (1971) VII.852.

¹⁹ R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciples* (New York: Paulist, 1979), pp. 42-43.

²⁰ H. Boer, *A Short History of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 43-44

future of the Christian movement.

The Early Persecutions

The earliest persecutions against Christianity were conducted by the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem following the lynching of Stephen (Ac. 8:1; 9:1-2). Later, at various places in Asia Minor and Greece, Paul encountered Jewish resistance as well (cf. Ac. 13:50; 14:4-5, 19; 17:5-9, 13; 18:12-17), not to mention local resistance from other religious affiliations (cf. Ac. 16:19-24; 19:23-41). With the marking of Christianity as an illegal religion, however, the persecutions escalated, since Christians were now held to be in opposition to the state. Caesar Nero began the first state persecution against the Christians in Rome in AD 64. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, rumor that Nero himself started the fire that destroyed much of the City of Rome spurred him to shift the blame on the Christians.²¹ Hundreds of Christians were arrested, convicted of anti-social beliefs and arson, and mocked in brutal executions. They were covered in the skins of wild animals, torn to death by dogs, crucified and set on fire.

The central issue behind persecution was Caesar worship. The spirit of the empire had been deified under the name of the goddess Roma, and with the death of Julius Caesar in 29 BC, the worship of the emperor began in earnest, since he was perceived to be the embodiment of the state. Eventually, the worship of Caesar came to be a test of political loyalty. Caligula (AD 37-41) even attempted to force Caesar worship upon the citizenry, and though some emperors resisted the trend, by the time of Domitian (AD 81-96), emperor worship was demanded of everyone. Domitian was proclaimed to be "Our Lord and God," and all persons were obliged to offer the pinch of incense accompanied by the confession "Caesar is Lord."²² The state issued certificates verifying that the state sacrifice had been made, and if individuals were caught without such verification, it meant that they must either offer the state sacrifice or face persecution from the authorities.²³

Christians, for their part, rejected the state and the emperor as gods to be worshiped. To them there was but one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ (1 Co. 8:6). Because Christians would not participate in Caesar worship, they were accused of being *atheoi* (= atheists). Many Christians refused to serve in the army or the government, they declined to attend the public spectacles or theaters, and they refused to send their children to local schools. These convictions earned them the title

²¹ *Annals* 15.44.

²² W. Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), I.16-20.

²³ An example of such a certificate, written on papyri, is preserved in the rare documents library at the University of Michigan.

"haters of mankind."²⁴ Their worship was misunderstood, and they were accused of cannibalism, drunkenness, adultery and incest, largely because they used the words in worship, "This is my body; this is my blood," drank wine in celebrating the Eucharist, called each other brother and sister, and greeted each other with the kiss of peace.²⁵

The intensity of persecution rose and fell. In a famous exchange of letters in about AD 112 between Pliny, the governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, and the Emperor Trajan, Pliny wrote that he did not actively hunt down Christians. However, if he discovered them, he gave them the opportunity to renounce their faith, and if they did so, they were set free. Failure to do so meant execution.²⁶ Thus, periods of persecution along with periods of respite intermingled for the next two centuries. Yet despite opposition, Christianity continued to spread rapidly.²⁷ Tertullian's famous statement bears repeating, "The blood of the martyrs is seed!"

The Early Spread of Christianity

From the earliest period, persecution and growth came simultaneously. When Christians were first persecuted by the Sanhedrin, as Luke stated, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Ac. 8:4). This pattern held true in the post-apostolic period as well. While information is fragmentary, and sometimes it is difficult to tell which data are reliable, traditional accounts indicate that the apostles traveled widely before their deaths. Peter and Paul, of course, ended their careers in Rome, but the Roman church was already in existence before they visited it. Mark, according to more disputed traditions, helped found the church in Alexandria, Egypt, while Thaddeus is traditionally believed to have begun the church in Edessa (about 180 miles northwest of Syrian Antioch). Less certain traditions about Thomas say that he carried Christianity as far east as India. By the middle of the second century, scarcely a century after the death of Jesus, Christian churches flourished in virtually all of the Roman provinces between Syria and Rome, in great cities on the African continent like Alexandria and Carthage, and even in Gaul

²⁴ Boer, 46.

²⁵ Boer, 47.

²⁶ For a full translation of the correspondence, see F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 169-171.

²⁷ Some word should probably be said here about the famous compilation of Christian persecutions called *Fox's Book of Martyrs* by John Fox, an Elizabethan historian (1516-1587). Fox was not an impartial collector of data, and his works attempt to prove that a spiritual war had been raging between Christ and the Antichrist, represented respectively by the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. Christian historians judge Fox's work to be a mixture of both reliable and unreliable traditions, embellishments, myths and tendentious historicizing, so that the reader must treat the accounts with some reserve, cf. A. Kreider, "John Foxe," *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity*, ed. T. Dowley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 19.

(modern France), Ethiopia, Armenia, Iraq and southern Russia.²⁸ Aided by a virtually universal language, Koine Greek, the *pax Romana* (= Roman peace), and an international highway and seaway system, Christians made converts all over the Roman world.

Developments in Worship

Nowhere does the New Testament describe at length an early Christian worship service. Information, even in the apostolic period, is fragmentary. We do know that Christians read the Old Testament Scriptures (1 Ti. 4:13)²⁹ and the apostolic communications (Ac. 15:22-32; Ep. 3:4; Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:17; Rv. 1:3, 11). Their leaders preached to and taught the congregations (1 Ti. 4:13b; 5:17). They sang psalms, hymns and songs (Ac. 16:25; Ep. 5:19; Col. 3:16). They celebrated the Lord's Table (Ac. 2:42, 46; 20:7; 1 Co. 10:16-17; 11:23ff.), and this celebration was sometimes accompanied by a full meal, called an *agape* (= love feast).³⁰ They offered corporate and public prayers (Ac. 4:24ff.; 12:12; 1 Co. 11:4-5; 1 Ti. 2:1). In some churches there were vocalized spiritual gifts, such as tongues of praise and interpretations (1 Co. 14:26). They baptized both individuals and groups (Ac. 2:41; 8:12-13, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5). They greeted each other with a kiss of love (Ro. 16:16; 1 Co. 16:20; 2 Co. 13:12; 1 Th. 5:26; 1 Pe. 5:14). Special Christian vocabulary became significant, such as, *maranatha*³¹, *Abba*³² and *Amen*³³. However, these various practices were not held in a rigid pattern. On one occasion, Paul preached until midnight and then the Eucharist was celebrated until dawn (Ac. 20:7, 11), but we should hardly think that this was the usual format. In the Jerusalem church, congregational meetings were held daily (Ac. 2:46), while in later times they were held on Sunday (Ac. 20:7; 1 Co. 16:1-2). As such, then, there does not seem to have been a standard "church order" in the apostolic period.

By the beginning of the second century, a more defined pattern for public

²⁸ Boer, 24-25; W. Gasque, "The Church Expands: Jerusalem to Rome," *Eerdmans Handbook*, pp. 65-70.

²⁹ This practice was apparently taken over from the synagogue, cf. Lk. 4:16; Ac. 13:15; 15:21; 2 Co. 3:14.

³⁰ The actual term *agape* in this sense is found only once in the New Testament (Jude 12). However, there seems to be sufficient evidence to establish the existence of a common Christian meal or fellowship meal (1 Co. 11:17ff.). How it was related to the Eucharist is debated, cf. H. Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity*, trans. J. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), pp. 52-53.

³¹ An Aramaic expression meaning "Our Lord, come!" It was probably used as a plea for the soon coming of Christ (1 Co. 16:22), J. Hughes, *ISBE* (1986) III.243.

³² *Abba* is the Aramaic child's word for father, akin to our expression "Daddy." Paul presupposes it to be a part of the common Christian vocabulary (cf. Ga. 4:6; Ro. 8:15), cf. J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1971), p. 65.

³³ Transliterated from Hebrew and meaning "so be it." This word was probably used by the early Christians as a congregational response (1 Co. 14:16; Rv. 5:14; 22:20), cf. J. Millar, *ISBE* (1979) I.110.

worship began to emerge. Christian worship was definitely scheduled for Sunday, the "Lord's Day" and the first day of the week.³⁴ Baptism was to be in running water if possible, cold water if available, and by pouring three times over the head in the triune name if immersion was not feasible. Both the candidate and the person performing the baptism were instructed to fast a day or two previous to the event.³⁵ Special prayers, to be concluded with the familiar expressions *maranatha* and *amen*, were set forth for the Eucharist, and those who were yet unbaptized were restricted from participation.³⁶ If some believers were not able to attend, some portion of the eucharistic bread and wine was carried to them.³⁷ Prophets with spontaneous thanksgivings were given permission to speak, though they were restricted from asking for money, even if under the apparent influence of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ Both the Old Testament Scriptures and the writings of the apostles were publicly read and explained.³⁹ Offerings were received and distributed to the needy.⁴⁰ The earliest symbols were the cross⁴¹ and the fish,⁴² though other symbols would be added later.

Pliny, the Roman official mentioned earlier in the context of Christian persecutions, gives an outsider's brief description of Christian worship in about AD 112: "They were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it; after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind."⁴³

Developments in Church Government

In no place does the New Testament set forth an order for church government.

³⁴ *Didache* 14:1; Ignatius, *Magnesians* 9; Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67.

³⁵ *Didache* 7; Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61.

³⁶ *Didache* 9-10; Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65-66.

³⁷ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65.

³⁸ *Didache* 10-11.

³⁹ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67.

⁴⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67.

⁴¹ A cross was discovered on the wall of a home in the ruins of Herculaneum which, along with Pompeii, was destroyed on the west coast of Italy in 79 A.D. by the famous eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, cf. E. Blaiklock, "Herculaneum," *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. E. Blaiklock and R. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 234.

⁴² The fish appears in the oldest Christian catacombs, and it served as an acrostic reference to Christ since the initial letters of the phrase "Jesus Christ God's Son [our] Savior" form the Greek word *ichthus* (= fish), cf. W. McCullough, *IDB* (1962) II.273.

⁴³ Pliny, *Letters* x.96.

Instead, the reader of the biblical documents encounters titles of church offices and practices of church government in a random way and, consequently, is left to piece them together as best he/she can.

The first distinction seems to have been between disciples and apostles. The disciples of Jesus were those who believed in him and followed him throughout his public ministry.⁴⁴ The apostles, on the other hand, were specially chosen from among the larger group of disciples as special leaders and representatives (Lk. 6:13-16). They were gifted with the power to perform miracles, exorcisms and healings, and they were especially commissioned to preach the gospel (Mt. 10:7-8; Lk. 9:1-2; 2 Co. 12:12; He. 2:3b-4). They had personally been with Jesus in his earthly ministry and were eyewitnesses of his resurrection (Mk. 3:14-15; Ac. 1:21-22; 2:32; 3:15; 10:39-40; 13:30-31). In the early period of the church, the term "disciple" continued to be used of Christian believers (cf. Ac. 6:1-2, 7; 9:1, 19, etc.), and it was only later that the term "Christian" was coined (Ac. 11:26). The twelve apostles continued to function as the leaders in the early Palestinian church (Ac. 2:37, 43; 4:2, 33; 6:2; 1 Co. 15:5, etc.). However, in time leaders other than the twelve also came to be called apostles in the secondary sense of missionaries (Ac. 14:4, 14; Ro. 16:7; 2 Co. 8:23; Ga. 1:19; Phil. 2:25; 1 Th. 1:1, 7). Some of them may have known Jesus personally, but for others the question must be left open.

As the church continued to expand, other offices began to emerge. First, there was the appointment of the Seven "to serve tables" so that the apostle might devote themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Ac. 6:2-6). It may be that the Seven were the precursors of what later came to be called Deacons. The title *diakonoi* (= deacons, servants, ministers) begin to appear in Paul's letters (cf. Ro. 16:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Th. 3:2; 1 Ti. 4:6) along with other offices, and they included both men and women.⁴⁵ Eventually, an order for the office of deacons was composed which listed their moral qualifications (1 Ti. 3:8-13).

In addition to deacons, three other titles appear with some frequency—the titles *presbyteros* (= elder), *episkopos* (= bishop, overseer) and *poimen* (= shepherd, pastor). Luke uses the term elders to describe the leaders of the Palestinian church (Ac. 11:30; 15:2), and Paul either appointed or had elected⁴⁶ such leaders to oversee

⁴⁴ The term *mathetes* (= disciple, learner, pupil) occurs about 260 times in the gospels, and while on occasion the term refers to the twelve, over 90% of the occasions either are not limited to the twelve or else are ambiguous, cf. P. Parker, *IDB* (1962) I.845.

⁴⁵ Not only does Paul mention Phoebe as a deaconess, but Pliny, in his letter of 112 A.D., wrote to the Roman emperor indicating that he had put to torture two Christian handmaidens who were called deaconesses, cf. M. Shepherd, Jr., *IDB* (1962) I.786.

⁴⁶ The verb *cheirotoneo* means to choose or elect by raising hands, though in Ac. 14:23 it is not clear how the process occurred. The most likely scenario is that Paul and Barnabas nominated the elders who were then installed, cf. E. Lohse,

his newly formed congregations in Asia Minor (Ac. 14:23; 20:17). In some cases, the titles seem to be overlapping (cf. Ac. 20:28; 1 Pe. 5:1-2), and the term elder is used interchangeably with the term bishop (Ac. 20:17, 28). As such, rigid hierarchical distinctions are difficult to maintain at this early period.⁴⁷ A church order for the moral character of such leaders is found twice in the New Testament (1 Ti. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9).

The first clear indication of a distinction between elders and bishops comes in the letters of Ignatius (c. AD 115). In his epistles to the Asian congregations in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia and to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, he called for obedience and loyalty to the local bishop. Apparently, the local bishop had by that time become the leading elder in a congregation and/or the head of the various congregations in a given city.⁴⁸ Over the next two centuries, the bishop's office continued to expand until eventually the bishop of a church in a capital city of a Roman province came to be regarded as the head of the church in that province.⁴⁹ No one knows for sure how this development of the office of the bishop became the widespread pattern in the churches, and in some parts of the empire, the pattern developed more slowly than in others.⁵⁰ However, by the late 2nd century, the unchallenged leader in church affairs was the bishop.

This emergence of the office of the bishop has been assessed differently in the various Christian traditions. Some Christians, especially those committed to a restorationist viewpoint, insist that the post-apostolic church willfully and sinfully departed from a divinely authorized pattern of the sovereignty of the local church. Others contend that the church was simply exercising its liberty in developing forms of government which were appropriate for its own time, though such forms always

TDNT (1974) IX. 437. However, it is just possible that the expression might indicate that "Paul and Barnabas had elders elected" (NIV mg).

⁴⁷ Arguments based on the use of singulars and plurals in these titles yield uncertain results. It has been argued, for instance, that since the title bishop appears in the singular and the title elder appears in the plural in the orders of the pastoral epistles that there was a single bishop to a given community but several elders as leaders of the various house-churches. In this viewpoint, the bishop held authority over a wider area than any given elder. Similarly, it also has been argued that since the term elder is used in the plural, each congregation had a plurality of leaders rather than a single one. However, neither of these arguments are conclusive. To be sure, there were several elders in each city, but whether there were several in each congregation is unknown.

⁴⁸ This office, called the monarchical bishop (i.e., rule by one), constituted the highest human authority, and according to Ignatius it represented the authority of God, the Father. The bishop was to be present for the celebration of Eucharist, the performing of baptisms, and the sharing of the *agape* feast. The elders served him as a council of advisors, and the deacons assisted in worship and pastoral visitation, cf. M. Shepherd, Jr., *IDB* (1962) I.441.

⁴⁹ The title for this advance in office was the Metropolitan Bishop (from *metropolis* = mother city). In five cities--Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem--the Metropolitan Bishop became known as the patriarch, i.e., "first father," cf. Boer, 30.

⁵⁰ We know, for instance, that in Alexandria there was no single bishop until about AD 180, B. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), p. 86.

should be open to change and reevaluation. Still others, particularly those who appeal to the orthodoxy of tradition, argue that the Holy Spirit so indwelt the church and guided its decisions that the development was divinely-ordained and should be permanent.⁵¹

The Early Post-Apostolic Literature

Christians are naturally familiar with the documents of the New Testament which, in addition to the Old Testament, form the canon of Holy Scripture. They are generally much less familiar with, and in many cases unaware of, the rather large body of literature which comes from the post-apostolic community. This literature is quite important, however, because it connects us with those Christian leaders who immediately followed the apostles and their disciples—leaders who in some cases had personally known or seen members of the original twelve or Paul. It also makes us aware of sectarian groups who, while not following the orthodox mainstream of Christian thinking, give us insight into the theological issues of the day. It is probably fair to say that at this early period the bounds of orthodoxy and heresy were not yet rigidly established, and so writings that reflect a rather wide range of theological opinions, each claiming some level of support from apostolic tradition, stand side by side.⁵²

The Apostolic Fathers⁵³

The most important group of writings is the collection known since the 17th century as the Apostolic Fathers, a name derived from the belief that the authors of these works were personally associated with the apostles or their immediate disciples.⁵⁴ Several of these writings had a quasi-canonical standing in certain churches as late as the 4th or 5th century and have been preserved in ancient codices of the New Testament.⁵⁵ In general, these documents span about a century, from roughly AD 100 to 200 or shortly thereafter.

⁵¹ Shelley, 87.

⁵² J. Michaels, *ISBE* (1979) I.213.

⁵³ An inexpensive edition of the Apostolic Fathers is available in paperback, cf. J. B. Lightfoot, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (1891 rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

⁵⁴ M. Shepherd, Jr., *IDB* (1962) I. 174.

⁵⁵ The Epistle of Barnabas, for instance, is in Codex Sinaiticus (4th century), and the two Epistles of Clement are in Codex Alexandrinus (5th century). In addition, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, and several other documents held a temporary canonical status in some geographical areas, cf. N. Geisler and W. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), pp. 202-205.

Epistle of Barnabas

This document, an anonymous work traditionally attributed to Barnabas,⁵⁶ the co-worker of Paul, enjoyed great esteem in the early church and held near-canonical status in a number of congregations. It was written after AD 70 and probably before AD 135, the time of the Bar-Kokhba Jewish revolt.⁵⁷ After an introduction (1), the first and largest section of the work addresses the question: Was the Old Testament primarily concerned with the Jews or the Christians, a question that is answered by allegorizing many passages in the Old Testament so that they are interpreted to refer to Jesus (2-17). These include sacrifices, fasting, the covenant, circumcision, dietary prohibitions, the Sabbath and the temple. The second major emphasis consists of moral instruction concerning the two ways, that is, "the way of light and way of darkness" (18-20), and this is followed by a short conclusion (21).

First Clement

This is the best known and probably the earliest of the writings in the Apostolic Fathers, generally agreed upon as being composed in about AD 95-96.⁵⁸ It was written as an epistle from the church at Rome to the church in Corinth. The letter is formally anonymous but traditionally has been attributed to Clement, Paul's co-worker (cf. Phil. 4:3).⁵⁹

The epistle was composed in response to a crisis in which certain younger members of the Corinthian congregation had succeeded in deposing their older leaders. After sketching in the situation (1-3), the author gives a lengthy discourse on Christian virtues (4-36), particularly emphasizing faith, compassion, humility, self-control and hospitality. He warns against factionalism, jealousy, envy, double-mindedness and pride. Bringing these virtues and warnings to bear upon the upheaval in Corinth (37-61), the epistle rebukes the Corinthians for their disloyalty, reminding them that such factionalism once had crippled the church in the days of Paul. However, in the factionalism of Paul's day, the dissidents at least had aligned themselves with other credible leaders, while in this case, "...on account of one or two persons the old and well-established church of the Corinthians is in revolt against the presbyters" (47:6). The letter closes with a summary and some final exhortations

⁵⁶ Though it cannot be proved that Barnabas did not write it, most scholars think this tradition is unlikely, cf. W. Eltester, *IDB* (1962) I.358.

⁵⁷ In 16:4, for instance, the writer mentions that the temple in Jerusalem had been pulled down by the enemies of the Jews.

⁵⁸ M. Shepherd, Jr. *IDB* (1962) I.648.

⁵⁹ This claim can neither be proved nor disproved, but it is generally considered to be unlikely, cf. J. Norris, *IDB* (1962) I.648.

(62-65).

In the letter, the author quotes the LXX frequently, cites the Old Testament Apocrypha, recalls sayings of Jesus (13:2; 46:8),⁶⁰ and quotes from Paul's letters and the Book of Hebrews.

Second Clement

This work represents a homily preached to a group of Gentile converts following the reading of Is. 54:1ff. Written by an anonymous Christian and possibly originating in the Roman church in about AD 140, the document deals primarily with ethical themes such as repentance, self-control and watchfulness in view of the coming judgment. Besides citing the Old Testament, Christian tradition, the "gospel," and several non-canonical sayings of Jesus, the author provides a curious theological speculation concerning the preexistence of the spiritual church before the creation of the universe (14). The preexisting church was then manifested in Christ's flesh.

Didache

The *Didache* (= teaching), known also by the fuller title "The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles" and the subtitle "The Lord's Teaching to the Heathen by the Twelve Apostles," was composed by an unknown author. There is widespread disagreement about the date of composition, largely because it appears that some elements may be earlier than others. Generally, the approximate date of about AD 120 is attached to it, though specific elements which the editor compiled may well go back to the apostolic age and perhaps even to the early days of the Jerusalem church.⁶¹

The work serves as an instructional manual for Christian life and worship. It begins with a teaching concerning the "Two Ways" (1-6), a common method of Jewish catechesis which in this case is based upon the two chief commandments (cf. Mt. 22:37-39; Mk. 12:30-31). It provides directions for baptism (7-8), Eucharist (9-10, 14-15) and the assessment of traveling prophets (11-13). The final chapter addresses the signs of the return of the Lord (16).

Seven Letters of Ignatius

Ignatius, who according to Origen was the second bishop of Antioch (after Peter), wrote these epistles during his journey through Asia Minor to Rome, after he had been condemned to martyrdom near the beginning of the 2nd century. He sent

⁶⁰ These sayings are not identical with any canonical sayings, though they are very similar.

⁶¹ Michaels, I.207.

letters to the churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles and Rome while he was passing through Smyrna. From Troas he sent letters to the churches in Philadelphia, Smyrna and a personal letter to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna.⁶² In his letters, Ignatius exulted in his coming martyrdom at the wild-beast shows in Rome. He strongly advocated the authority and hierarchy of bishops, elders and deacons. He wrote against the threat of Judaizing tendencies in the Asian churches and the heresy of docetism (a gnostic belief that Jesus only seemed to be a real human being), and he was the first one to use the term "catholic church" (= universal or orthodox church). He placed great emphasis on the celebration of Eucharist, and he viewed his own martyrdom as the ultimate expression of the reality of the Eucharist. Much of his language seems to be drawn from early creedal formulations, some of which probably reach back into the apostolic era itself.⁶³

Shepherd of Hermas

This work, the longest of the documents in the Apostolic Fathers, dates from about 100 A.D. and comes from the area around Rome.⁶⁴ It has three sections, the Visions, the Mandates and the Similitudes. The author, according to his own testimony, was a former slave in Rome (1). The work is full of symbolisms and moralistic instructions. Theologically, the work addresses the theme of a "second chance" for baptized Christians in order for them to find repentance for sins, even the sin of apostasy. However, a limiting day had been fixed, and any Christians who had not repented by that time would not be forgiven. In the work, a repeating symbolism depicts the church as a tower being built. Hermas believed that after their deaths, the apostles preached to and baptized those who had died before them. In quoting from New Testament documents, the writer shows knowledge of Matthew, Mark, some of Paul's letters, Hebrews, 1 Peter and Revelation. Many early Christians considered the work to be inspired and canonical, and Irenaeus even quotes from it as "Scripture,"⁶⁵ though his judgment ultimately was not accepted by the church as a whole.

Fragments of Papias

Traditionally believed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John and a companion of Polycarp, Papias was the bishop of Hierapolis, a sister city of Colossae. In about AD 130-140, he wrote a five-volume work entitled "Interpretation

⁶² M. Shepherd, *IDB* (1962) II.678-679.

⁶³ Michaels, I.207-210.

⁶⁴ M. Shepherd, Jr. *IDB* (1962) II.583.

⁶⁵ *Against Heresies*, IV.20.

of the Lord's Oracles," of which only fragments survive giving information about the composition of the gospels, among other things. Mark, for instance, is described as the interpreter of Peter who wrote the second gospel after Peter's martyrdom. Papias claimed that Matthew had put in order the oracles of the Lord in Aramaic which "each interpreted as he was able." He recounts stories and miracles from the apostolic period which were given to him, according to his own testimony, by the daughters of Philip the Evangelist (cf. Ac. 21:8-9). His memoirs of the apostolic period depended upon personal interviews with those who had known Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John and Matthew, for as he said, "I did not think that I could get so much profit from the contents of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice."

Epistle of Polycarp: Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor, stands as a direct link between the apostolic and post-apostolic periods. Irenaeus claims to remember him as a disciple of the Apostle John. Apparently Polycarp wrote several epistles, but only his letter to the Philippians, written about AD 117, has survived. This document is largely a patchwork of allusions to New Testament books, such as 1 Peter and the letters of Paul, as well as to 1 Clement. In his letter, he requests information about Ignatius, asks for copies of Ignatius' letters, comments on the excommunication of a Philippian presbyter named Valens, who was dismissed for dishonesty, and warns against the heresy of docetism.

Martyrdom of Polycarp: Polycarp was burned at the stake in Smyrna in AD 155. A letter from the church at Smyrna to the church at Philomelium, and beyond that to "all the parishes of the holy catholic church in every place," contains an eyewitness account of Polycarp's martyrdom. A number of striking parallels are noted between Polycarp's martyrdom and the arrest and betrayal of Jesus. Since he confessed that he had been a Christian for 86 years, his birth was at least as early as AD 70 the central theological theme is that Jesus Christ, not Caesar, is Lord, and for this confession, Polycarp died.

Heterodox Writings

Eventually, the early church distinguished between several groups of writings at a very early period.⁶⁶ First, there were the apostolic writings, that is, those documents composed either by an apostle or under the authority of an apostle. These were accepted as authoritative for the church and form the New Testament canon.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Goppelt, 125.

⁶⁷ To be sure, there were a few documents which were disputed for quite some time (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation), but the larger body of NT documents were accepted from the beginning, cf. *ISBE* (1979) I.141.

Second, there were other writings nearly as well-known as the first group, though they were not canonized. These are the documents which since the 17th century have been labeled the Apostolic Fathers. Third, there were the writings of the Christian Gnostics. These were evaluated as heretical and destroyed as far as possible by the early Church. Fourth, there were the writings of the Jewish Christians called the Ebionites, and these also were assessed to be heretical and also largely destroyed. Finally, there was a variety of apocryphal literature which to some degree overlapped the Gnostic and Jewish-Christian sectarian literature.

The Nag Hammadi Texts: Gnosticism was an eclectic mixture of ideas similar to **Platonism** (a form of philosophy developed in Alexandria which aimed at uniting Greek philosophy and Hebrew religion), **Zoroastrianism** (Persian religion based on the assumption that there existed two original and independent powers of good and evil), and **Buddhism** (with its characteristic intense asceticism and sense of hopelessness and disillusionment). The actual origins of gnosticism are debated, but its two primary elements were:

- 1) Cosmological dualism consisting of spirit and matter, the one good and the other evil
- 2) Esoteric knowledge, limited to those who have been initiated into the *gnosis* and by which they are able to be "saved," that is, freed from evil material existence so as to enter into pure spiritual life.

With respect to Christianity, gnosticism accepted the concept of the redemption by Christ and in turn attempted to introduce into Christianity its so-called higher knowledge drawn from various other sources. Gnosticism's threat to Christianity reached its peak in the 2nd century. On the authority of Irenaeus, the Apostle John may well have personally met Cerinthus, a famous gnostic in Ephesus, and the book of 1 John certainly attacks gnostic-like ideas. Irenaeus also indicated that the Fourth Gospel was intentionally anti-gnostic in content. Although most of our information about gnosticism largely had been drawn from quotations and allusions in other ancient literature, the discovery near Luxor, Egypt in 1945 of the Nag Hammadi texts, a collection of gnostic scriptures and other ancient texts, vastly increased our body of information.⁶⁸

Possibly the most famous Gnostic text with respect to Christianity is the *Coptic Gospel of Thomas* allegedly by the Apostle Thomas.⁶⁹ Bits and pieces of this

⁶⁸ A. Renwick, *ISBE* (1982) II.484-490.

⁶⁹ Other texts uncovered in the Nag Hammadi library include such works as: Apocryphon of James, Gospel of Truth, Treatise on Resurrection, Prayer of the Apostle Paul, Gospel of Philip, Apocryphon of John, Gospel of the Egyptians, Dialogue of the Savior, Apocalypse of Paul, First and Second Apocalypse of James, Acts of Peter and the 12 Apostles, Apocalypse of Peter, etc.

work had been known in Greek, but the full text became available only after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts. This work, dating from possibly as early as AD 140, contains 114 sayings of Jesus, some of them word-for-word as they are found in the canonical gospels, but some 40 of them entirely new. It has no narratives, no miracles, and no passion story. It represents a tradition of Jesus which is apparently independent of the canonical gospels and written not much later than them.⁷⁰

Literature of Jewish Christian Separatism

While the Christian church was at first Jewish, the church eventually became predominantly Gentile. Jewish Christians either gave up their Jewish way of life and became absorbed into the larger body of Gentile Christians or else remained Jewish but increasingly became more of a minority while becoming further alienated from Gentile Christianity. Some embraced gnostic ideas or the theological viewpoints of some contemporary leader, such as the prophet Elkasai (about AD 100). Some continued to live like Jews although they accepted Gentile Christians. Others became clearly sectarian.⁷¹

The most well-known group of Jewish Christians were the Ebionites,⁷² a sectarian group that developed after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and that found refuge in the transjordan. Theologically, they continued many Jewish practices, including circumcision and Sabbath observance, though they rejected the Jewish priesthood and temple sacrifices. They accepted the messiahship of Christ and practiced baptism as a replacement of the sacrificial system. However, they rejected the virgin birth and the incarnation of Christ, they discounted Paul (because he taught the end of the law), and they required vegetarianism. For them, Jesus was the last of the great prophets who came to purify Judaism.⁷³

Though they used an abridged copy of canonical Matthew, their primary literary work was the Gospel of the Ebionites, sometimes identified with the Gospel of the Nazarenes and/or the Gospel of the Hebrews.⁷⁴ Many scholars believe that some Ebionite works were incorporated into other later literature, such as, the Pseudo-Clementine documents. In their version of the gospel, the Ebionites eliminated the birth narratives, they placed John first among the twelve apostles, and

⁷⁰ "St. Thomas' Gospel," *Time* (Nov. 9, 1959), p. 46; E. Yamauchi, *ISBE* (1979) I.186; D. Cartlidge and D. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 25-35.

⁷¹ E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 490-491.

⁷² Their name comes from the Hebrew *ebion* (= the poor).

⁷³ Ferguson, 492; M. "Enslin, *IDB* (1962) II.5-6; W. Wessel, *ISBE* (1982) II.10.

⁷⁴ The question has not yet been resolved as to whether or not there is one work with more than one title or three works, cf. E. Yamauchi, *ISBE* (1979) I.184; N. Enslin, *IDB* (1962) II.570-571; M. Enslin, *IDB* (1962) III.524. Scholars generally lean toward the view that there is more than one work, but the debate has not been closed.

they altered Jesus' eucharistic words from a statement to a question more in line with their vegetarian beliefs, e.g., "Have I desired with desire to eat this flesh of the Passover with you?", thus implying that the answer should be a negative.

Apocryphal Works

Various other Christian documents date from the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Many of these are categorized as "apocryphal" works, a designation that meant "hidden," particularly with reference to the claims of some sects to preserve a tradition of secret doctrines about Christ or the apostles otherwise unknown. The larger body of these writings are in the form of "acts," "gospels," or "apocalypses," titles which are obviously take-offs from the canonical Gospels, Acts and the Apocalypse of John as well as the various Jewish apocalypses. Though not recognized by the orthodox church as canonical, these works were more or less popular among early Christians.

The apocryphal "gospels" include infancy narratives of Jesus, stories about Mary and Joseph, accounts of Jesus' passion and resurrection, and various other stories about Jesus.⁷⁵ The apocryphal "acts" include stories from the lives of the twelve apostles. They generally glorify martyrdom, sexual asceticism, and religious enthusiasm, and they promulgate a variety of teachings, some heretical and others closer to orthodoxy.⁷⁶ The apocryphal "apocalypses" were writings that ostensibly disclosed secrets previously hidden in the counsel of God. These works were pseudepigraphical, that is, they were written under the names of important people of the past, such as, Isaiah, Paul and Peter. Usually, the writer depicted himself as being given a revelation through visionary ecstasy and an ascent into the presence of God and his angels. There he viewed the regions of heaven and hell and then exhorted his readers toward repentance, conversion and correction. The imminence of the end of the world and the final judgment of God figure prominently in such works.⁷⁷

The Preservation of the Orthodox Faith

The term "orthodoxy" technically refers to "right belief" in contrast to error or heresy.⁷⁸ Though not a biblical expression, the word became important in Christian thought in and after the 2nd century, first in the conflict with Gnosticism, and later, in the controversies concerning the Divine Nature and Christology.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ E. Yamauchi, *ISBE* (1979) I.181-188.

⁷⁶ A. Findlay and A. Walls, *ISBE* (1979) I.165-173.

⁷⁷ A. Walls, *ISBE* (1979) I.173-181.

⁷⁸ The word is derived from the Greek *orthos* (= right) and *doxa* (= opinion).

⁷⁹ J. Packer, *EDT* (1984) 808.

The Early Heresies and Sectarians

Several distortions of the Christian gospel appeared which threatened to change or even extinguish the faith of the apostles. Following are the most significant of these deviations.

Gnosticism

The influence of Gnosticism upon Christianity reached its peak in the latter half of the 2nd century. Christian Gnosticism began with a belief in a God, called the Unknown Father, who, along with a female companion named Silence, produced two divine beings (Aeons) called Mind (a male) and Truth (a female). These in turn produced other couples, World/Life and Man/Church, which together with the Unknown Father made up the *pleroma* (= fullness). World/Life produced another ten Aeons, and Man/Church produced twelve, altogether making up a total of thirty Aeons. The last of the thirty Aeons born from Man/Church was a female named Wisdom. Eventually, other Aeons were produced called Christ and Holy Spirit, and yet another one called Jesus, who was born of the virgin Mary through the power of Wisdom. At the crucifixion, the Aeon Jesus left the earthly body in which he had lived.

Gnostics believed that those persons who received secret knowledge of the *pleroma* would be freed from evil matter at death. The greatest Gnostic teacher, Valentinus, who considered himself to be a Christian, died in about AD 160.⁸⁰

Orthodox Christianity rejected the Gnostic world view, especially because Gnostics taught that knowledge of the Supreme God is impossible, the creation of the world was by an inferior deity, and the world of matter is evil. Even worse, the Redeemer was neither God nor human, he did not truly die on the cross and thus was not truly raised from the dead. He only seemed to be human. Furthermore, only some humans can be saved (those born with a divine spark), and there was no future bodily resurrection for believers.

Marcionism

About AD 140, a Christian named Marcion traveled from Sinope, Asia Minor to Rome, where he encountered a Gnostic thinker named Cerdo. Though he did not become a Gnostic, Marcion did adopt the idea that the God described in the Torah and prophets of the Old Testament was not the Father of the Lord Jesus. He read both the Old Testament and the New Testament accordingly, believing the Old Testament

⁸⁰ Boer, pp. 55-58.

to be inspired by an inferior God and the New Testament to be the revelation of the good Father through Jesus Christ. The God of the Old Testament was only interested in justice. He was vengeful and the author of evil. The God of the New Testament, by contrast, was loving and gracious. Consequently, Marcion rejected the Old Testament entirely, because he perceived it as Jewish Scriptures exclusively. Yet for Marcion, even the New Testament was not a pure teaching. He dismissed New Testament documents that favored Jewish readers, such as Matthew, Mark, Acts and Hebrews, along with 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. He omitted the nativity stories in Luke, because he believed that Jesus appeared at Capernaum in AD 29 as a grown man, but he kept the remaining ten of Paul's letters, holding that Paul was the only apostle who had not been corrupted.

When Marcion was excommunicated by the Roman church, he formed his own set of churches with its own clergy and rituals. Their ideas spread throughout Italy, Arabia, Armenia and Egypt, though their adherents decreased until they disappeared in about the 7th century. While Marcion did much damage to the church, it at least can be said that he stimulated the Christians to examine the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, with the resulting firm conclusion that both Testaments make up the Christian Bible.⁸¹

Montanism

In the mid to late 2nd-century, a charismatic young Christian named Montanus began to attract attention in Phrygia, Western Asia Minor. Unlike Gnosticism and Macionism, Montanus' basic theology of God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer was sound, but he over-emphasized the ecstatic dimension of the Holy Spirit. Two prophetesses soon joined him, Prisca and Maximilla. They claimed to be the mouthpieces of the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit) and believed that God spoke through them directly in the first person. Prophecy, speaking in tongues, and intense religious excitement characterized the movement. While this in itself was not heretical, Montanus taught that through his ministry the Age of the Paraclete had arrived. He held that the New Jerusalem would soon descend from heaven to the nearby town of Pepuza. In preparation, Christians should spend their time fasting; they should leave their jobs and go to Pepuza to wait. They were to relish persecution, and martyrdom was to be encouraged. Montanism spread rapidly throughout Asia Minor, Europe and North Africa. In North Africa, Tertullian, a famous Christian theologian and scholar, became a Montanist in AD 207.

Reaction to the Montanists was mixed. Some advocated avoiding any severe

⁸¹ H. McDonald, "Marcion," *Eerdman's Handbook*, pp. 102-103; Boer, pp. 60-63.

action so as not to quench the Spirit. Others decided that the prophetesses were demon-possessed, and they attempted to exorcise them (unsuccessfully). Eventually, a synod of bishops in Asia excommunicated the Montanists. Various Montanist groups survived into the 5th century in Africa and somewhat later in Phrygia, but by the mid-6th century, all traces disappear.⁸²

The Novationists

The Novatianists were a small group that split off from the Roman church in the mid-3rd century. Novatian, their leader, had been defeated in the election for bishop in AD 251, and consequently, he set up a rival congregation. Novationists called themselves *cathari* (= puritans), and their congregations spread into Carthage, North Africa, as far west as Spain, and as far east as Asia Minor. Theologically, they were orthodox, but they maintained a rigorist position toward those who had denied the faith under persecution. Though much of the church was willing to grant repentance to such weaker Christians, the Novationists considered this attitude to be too lenient and refused to accept them back again. They also extended the ban on forgiveness for any major sin committed after baptism. They considered all other Christian churches to be polluted because of their leniency, and they demanded rebaptism for any Christians who wished to join them.

Because of their separatism, Novatianists were often treated as heretics, though officially they were tolerated and were able to send a bishop to the Council of Nicea in AD 325. References to them disappear in the 7th century, and it is assumed that they eventually were reabsorbed into the mainstream of the churches.⁸³

The Manichaeans

Mani, a Persian thinker in the mid-3rd century who had been reared in a Christian-Jewish group, claimed to have received the final, universal revelation. He called himself an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he claimed to be the Paraclete who was promised by Christ.⁸⁴ He taught that there were two independent eternal principles, light/God and darkness/matter. Jesus and other religious leaders like himself had come so that the souls of light might be released from the prison of their material bodies. Theologically, Mani combined various features of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity, and the thought-system was obviously quite similar to Gnosticism and not unlike modern scientologies, since it claimed to be the truly scientific

⁸² Bruce, pp. 218-220; Boer, pp. 63-65; D. Wright, "The Montanists," *Eerdman's Handbook*, p. 74.

⁸³ Bruce, pp. 212-213, 258-260; M. Smith, "Novatianists," *Eerdman's Handbook*, p. 78; J. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) I.241-244, 247-249.

⁸⁴ The same claim, incidentally, was later made by Mohammed, and more recently, by the founder of Bahá'ism.

theology of the times. Manichaeism spread from Persia to Syria and Palestine and then to North Africa. By the 6th century it was in decline, though remnants of Manichaeist thought can be found later in the Paulicians (Armenia), the Bogomils (Bulgaria) and the Albigensians (France). The final heirs of Manichaeism were not suppressed until the inquisitions of the 14th century.⁸⁵

The Response of Orthodoxy

If the various sectarian movements and heresies that arose during the first two centuries of the post-apostolic period threatened to permanently distort the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, just as Paul had warned (2 Ti. 4:3-4; cf. Ac. 20:29-30), the transfer of the apostolic tradition to faithful leaders who in turn would be able to pass it on to succeeding generations was also nurtured (2 Ti. 1:13; 2:2). The orthodox defense and preservation of the faith is to be found in the writings of the apologists and early theologians, the development of the Rule of Faith, the formation of the earliest creeds, and the establishment of the New Testament canon.

The Apologists

As Christianity became a compelling force within the Greco-Roman world, many of the intellectuals of the day also became Christians. A series of Greek writers defended the apostolic faith against the various outside popular accusations as well as the more sophisticated attacks. These writers, called apologists (= defenders), often dedicated their works to the Roman emperor, though their real audience was the educated public. Their goal was to change the negative public opinion about Christianity, and they also hoped to point out the inherent weaknesses of paganism. Not all the works of the apologists have survived, but the most important of them can still be read.⁸⁶

The work of *Aristides*, the oldest of the apologies (about AD 138 or earlier), attempts to demonstrate that the barbarians, the Greeks and the Jews all have followed religions that are contrary to sound reasoning—the barbarians because their gods are powerless, the Greeks because their gods are like themselves, and the Jews because they have substituted angels and the law for God himself. Over against these groups stands Christianity, which is superior because of its ethic of love.

Justin Martyr, usually assessed as the most important of the apologists, wrote a *First Apology* (about AD 150), a *Second Apology*, a *Dialogue with Trypho*, the Jew

⁸⁵ E. Yamauchi, "Manichaeans," *Eerdmans Handbook*, pp. 48-49; Bruce, p. 288; P. Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, ed. C. Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 106-107.

⁸⁶ The general description of the following apologists follows the remarks of J. Gonzales, I.100-122 and O. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) I.57-65.

and a treatise *On the Resurrection*. He claimed that in Christianity he had found the true philosophy. Reasonable persons, if they loved the truth, would abandon their other systems. The two basic problems which Justin addressed were the relationship between Christianity and culture, and the relationship between faith and the Old Testament.

Tatian (late 2nd century) severely criticized Greek religion, asserting that even barbarian religion was superior. The central element in his defense was the nature of God and the Logos. He is famous because of his attempt to weave the four gospels into a single narrative called the *Diatessaron* (lit., “through four”).⁸⁷

Athenagoras, a contemporary of Tatian, refuted the charges of atheism and incest which had been leveled against the Christians. He also defended the reasonableness of bodily resurrection.

In about AD 180, *Theophilus of Antioch* wrote three works addressed to his friend Autolytus, attempting to persuade him of the truth of Christianity. He has the distinction of being the earliest traceable writer to use the term "Trinity."⁸⁸

The Early Theologians

In the early part of the 3rd century, at least three different geographical schools of theology are recognizable, each with important theological thinkers.⁸⁹

The two most important theologians in *Asia Minor* were Irenaeus (died c. AD 200) and his pupil Hippolytus. Irenaeus, unlike the apologists, was opposed to philosophical speculation about matters of faith. God is not known to us through speculation but by revelation. As the Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, Irenaeus stressed the fundamental doctrines of Christianity that were being challenged by Gnosticism, such as, the oneness of God who created the world, the atoning death of Jesus, and the resurrection of the body. He argued for the purity of Christian doctrine which had been handed down faithfully since apostolic times. Hippolytus, a presbyter in Rome, also wrote against the Gnostics as well as against the modalism of Noetus. (Modalism was the idea that the Father, Son and Spirit were not God's essential being but three temporary modes of existence).

Clement of Alexandria and Origen are the two most important theologians of *Egypt*. Here, theology and philosophy were thought to be very compatible, Clement being a pagan philosopher before becoming a Christian. Origen, his pupil, produced the greatest scholarly work in the early church, the *Hexapla*, in which he placed in

⁸⁷ Bruce, pp. 285-286.

⁸⁸ Autolytus, II.15.

⁸⁹ The following summaries are based on Heick, I.106-139 and Gonzales, I.160-233.

parallel columns the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, a Greek transliteration, three other Greek translations, and the Septuagint. Theologically, Origen attempted to express the Christian faith in terms of the prevailing Platonic philosophy of the times. He is famous for championing a strong allegorical and typological method of interpreting Scripture, though in his younger years he took Mt. 19:12 so literally as to castrate himself.

Tertullian and Cyprian, his disciple, were the leading theologians in *North Africa*. Tertullian was the first major Christian author to write in Latin. He lived in Carthage, and his works reflect three main concerns: Christianity's attitude to the Roman State and culture; the defense of orthodoxy against heresy; and the moral behavior of Christians. In about AD 207, he joined the Montanists because of their emphasis on purity. Two of his famous quotable quotes are, "The blood of the martyrs is seed," and "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" He defended the Christian use of the Old Testament against Marcion, he argued against the modalism of Praxeas (whom he said had put to flight the Paraclete and crucified the Father), and he criticized the baptism of children. Cyprian (AD 200-258), reared in the home of a wealthy family in Carthage, dedicated himself to celibacy, poverty and the study of the Bible. Against the schisms of the Novatianists, he argued that the unity of the church was in its bishops, not in its theology, and this viewpoint became particularly influential in the Middle Ages. Among his famous statements are, "He is not a Christian who is not in Christ's church," and "He cannot have God for his father who has not the church for his mother," and "There is no salvation outside the church."

Early Statements of Faith

Particularly in the face of heresies and distortions, the early Christians came to summarize what they believed to be central. One finds this tendency even in the New Testament in passages such as Ac. 8:37; 1 Co. 15:1-4; 1 Ti. 3:16; and 1 Co. 12:3. Later, Christians became more elaborate in their formulations.⁹⁰ Outsiders, also, frequently called for statements of what Christians believed, much as today one will ask for a particular church's statement of faith. Eventually, the consensus of the orthodox faith came to be called *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* (= that which has been believed everywhere, always, by all).⁹¹

⁹⁰ Aristides, for example, wrote the following in his defense of Christianity: "They [Christians] trace their origins to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is confessed to be the Son of the most high God, who came down from heaven by the Holy Spirit and was born of a virgin and took flesh, and in a daughter of man there lived the Son of God... This Jesus... was pierced by the Jews, and he died and was buried; and they say that after three days he rose and ascended into heaven... They believe God to be the Creator and Maker of all things, in whom are all things and from whom are all things," cf. D. Wright, "What the First Christians Believed," *Eerdmans' Handbook*, p. 113.

⁹¹ Vincent of Lerins (died ca. AD 50).

The Rule of Faith

One of the most important outlines which summarized early Christian belief was called the "Rule of Faith."⁹² This outline was believed to be handed down unbroken and unaltered from the apostles, and while there were several variations, depending upon which heresy was being combatted at the time and in what place, the Rule of Faith was intended to describe the basic essence of Christian belief. More than likely, it was used as a profession of faith at Christian baptisms, and in fact, it was customary to pose questions to the candidate at the time of his/her baptism. Hippolytus' account of Christian baptism near the beginning of the 3rd century, for instance, is instructive. The question was posed, "Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?" The candidate responded, "I believe," and the confession was followed by the first immersion. The next question was, "Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the death?" The candidate responded, "I believe," after which followed the second immersion. Finally, the question was asked, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and the resurrection of the body?" Upon responding the third time, "I believe," the candidate was then immersed again.⁹³

Notice the kinds of things that the Rule of Faith sought to protect. Against the Gnostic notion of creation by an inferior deity, the Rule of Faith affirmed that the universe was created by God, the Father. Against the Ebionites who rejected the virgin birth and deity of Jesus Christ, it affirmed both to be true. Against Gnostics who doubted the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, it affirmed that he truly died and truly arose. Against the sectarians who divided the church, it affirmed the catholicity of the church. Against the Manichaeans who denied the resurrection of the body, it affirmed the hope of resurrection. Thus, the Rule of Faith was largely shaped as an orthodox response to the distortions of Christian teaching that were developing all around.

The Apostles' Creed

The Rule of Faith was not a creed with fixed wording, but eventually, creeds with fixed wording were adopted as adaptations of the baptismal questions and the Rule of Faith. The most significant early creed, dating from about the mid-4th century in its earliest form, is the Apostles' Creed. This creed summarizes the central

⁹² Or alternately, "The Faith," "The Tradition," "The Preaching," or "The Rule of Truth."

⁹³ Wright, p. 115; Heick, I.85-92.

confessional teachings of the apostles (cf. Mt. 28:19; Ac. 8:37; 16:31; Ro. 10:9; 1 Co. 8:6; 15:3-4; 2 Co. 13:14; Ep. 4:4-5; Phil. 2:10-11; 1 Ti. 2:5-6; 3:16; 6:13-14; 2 Ti. 2:8; 1 Pe. 3:19; 1 Jn. 5:1), though of course, it was not written by the apostles.⁹⁴

The creed is constructed around affirmations concerning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This was especially important as the gospel moved outward in Gentile circles. Among Jews, the Almighty God as the Creator of the universe and the Holy Spirit as the active inspiration of God through the prophets could be assumed. It was the messiahship of Jesus Christ which was paramount. However, for Gentiles, with their background in pagan deities and pagan spirit worship, the affirmation of the one true God as the Father, Jesus Christ as God's Son, and the Holy Spirit, was a much more complete confession.⁹⁵

The Canon of the New Testament

Jesus did not commission his apostles to write Scripture, and it was not until approximately two decades after his ascension to the Father that this writing process formally began. As was shown earlier, the written documents of early Christians were very diverse, and the canon of New Testament Scripture was fixed by an historical process in which the most important criteria were inspiration and apostolicity. Were the documents inspired by God, and did they carry the authority of an apostle, either because an apostle wrote them or because they came from the close circle of an apostle? Today, every branch of Christianity agrees upon the extent of the New Testament canon, even though the earliest traceable official recognition of the full twenty-seven books of the New Testament was not until AD 367 by Athanasius of Alexandria in his 39th Easter letter.

The earliest recognition of New Testament writings as Scripture was spontaneous and instinctive, and it began even before the final documents of the New Testament were completed (cf. 2 Pe. 3:15-16). With the death of the apostles, the living voice of authority as to what was or was not the gospel had been removed. Their teachings lived on in both oral and written traditions, but the heterodox groups claimed this tradition as well (e.g., Gnostics, Marcionites, etc.). Marcion's severely truncated canon was unacceptable, and by the late-2nd century collections of recognized documents came into being.⁹⁶ It is probable that the Gospels were

⁹⁴ For slight variations in the development of the Apostles' Creed, see H. Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford, 1963), pp. 23-24.

⁹⁵ This triadic confession and the triadic baptismal formula which accompanied it may very well have become popularized in Gentile Christianity. The shorter baptismal formula (Ac. 2:38) was quite acceptable for Jews, but the longer formula (Mt. 28:19) was better for Gentiles, cf. Heick, I.87.

⁹⁶ Irenaeus, for instance, names as authentic the four gospels, the letters of Paul (except the pastoral letters and Philemon), 1 Peter, 1 John and Revelation, cf. Geisler and Nix, p. 193.

collected separately and also the Pauline letters. Eventually, they were brought together into the larger collection of what we know as the New Testament. For the most part, the early canon lists were very similar,⁹⁷ though there was disagreement about some books which eventually were included,⁹⁸ and furthermore, some lists included books which were eventually excluded.⁹⁹ Over the succeeding years, a growing unanimity led to the final agreement by the whole church as to the extent of the New Testament canon as published by Athanasius in AD 367. Various other Christian leaders have reaffirmed this same canon repeatedly.

The Questions About the Divine Nature

As we have already seen, questions about the nature of God loom large in post-apostolic Christianity, especially when the gospel penetrated the Greco-Roman world. The Gnostics propounded a theosophy of various divine beings (the Aeons), Marcion advocated different Gods in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Manichaeans mixed Christian ideas of God with those of Persian thought, and the Ebionites rejected the idea of the incarnation. Though the apologists and theologians tried to keep the church loyal to the orthodox faith, various competing ideas concerning the Divine Nature continued to proliferate, and this situation was exacerbated by the fact that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament sets forth a systematic doctrine of the divine nature. The strict monotheism of the Old Testament raised the question of Christology, for if Christ is God, what is his relationship to God the Creator, the God of Israel? Equally vexing was the problem of spirit and matter, especially for the Greeks. If God was pure Spirit, how could he create a world of matter and then himself become material in the incarnation? Tertullian certainly speaks for the whole church when he says that the common Christian confession was, "God is not, if He is not one,"¹⁰⁰ and he poses the question, "How, therefore, can two great Supremes co-exist, when this is the attribute of the Supreme Being, to have no equal—an attribute which belongs to One alone, and can by no means exist in two?"¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ The earliest canon list discovered, the Muratorian Fragment, comes from about 200 A.D. It differs from our own NT in that it omits Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter and 3 John. On the other hand, it includes the Apocalypse of Peter and the Wisdom of Solomon. It rejects as forgeries the Epistles to the Laodiceans and the Alexandrians (purported to be by Paul), and it restricts the Shepherd of Hermas to only private use, cf. L. Hurtado, *ISBE* (1986) III.433-434.

⁹⁸ I.e., Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. These were called *antilegomena* (= spoken against, disputed).

⁹⁹ The most important of these are the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, the *Didache*, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Wisdom of Solomon and the Acts of Paul.

¹⁰⁰ Against Marcion, I.iii.

¹⁰¹ Tertullian, of course, is here arguing against the "two God" theory of Marcion, an Old Testament God and a New Testament God, but the force of the argument is equally applicable to the question of God the Father and the Lord Jesus

The Theological Problem

If the Old Testament uniformly asserted that God was one, the New Testament equally asserted that Jesus was his unique Son, the Logos and Wisdom of God incarnate on earth as the Messiah. In the Synoptics, Jesus acts as the Savior, and his knowledge and power put him on the same divine level with the Father. Paul calls Jesus the image of God, the Lord, the Son of God, Christ and the Savior who preexisted in the form of God and is equal to God. Both Paul and John clearly indicate the preexistence of Christ before the creation of the world, showing that Christ was in fact the divine agent in creation. He was in the beginning with God, and he was God! Yet at the same time, he was sent into the world by the Father, and Christ himself testifies that the Father is greater than him. Thus, while the New Testament did not contain any explicitly formulated doctrine of the Divine Nature, it did contain the data out of which such a doctrine could be formed.

The Orthodox Answer

In the Apostolic Fathers as in the New Testament, there is frequent reference to what can be called the "triadic formula," that is, the pattern of referring to God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁰² The apologists and theologians follow this same pattern.¹⁰³ To try to describe Christ's relationship with God, they used the concept of a pre-existing Logos somehow originating in yet inseparable from the Godhead, a Logos which was generated or emitted for the purposes of creation and revelation. As such, they had what might be called a "two-stage" theory of the preexistent Logos, a Logos *endiathetos* (= immanent) and a Logos *prophorikos* (= uttered).¹⁰⁴ The various writers speak of God as "one" and "three," but while they confessed "one God," they had not yet answered the question, "Three what?" Origen introduced the terminology of three *hypostases* (= persons), and he also abandoned the "two-stage" theory. Instead, he argued for the eternal generation of the Son in the same sense in which light is constantly generated from its source.¹⁰⁵ Tertullian taught that there was one Divine Nature or Substance but three distinct Persons. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in a single and undivided Substance, but this does not prevent them from being three distinct Forms.¹⁰⁶

Christ.

¹⁰² 1 Clement 42:3; 46:6; 58:2; Ignatius, *Ephesians* 9:1; *Magnesians* 13; *Didache* 7:1.3; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:3; 22.

¹⁰³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 60, 61; Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians* 10, 12, 24; Aristides 15; Theophilus, *Autolytus* II.15, 22; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I.10.1; IV. 20:1; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 2.

¹⁰⁴ E. Fortman, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), pp. 49, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Origen, *Commentary on John* II.6; Fortman, p. 55.

¹⁰⁶ Boer, p. 113; Gonzales, I.182-190.

Other Answers

Everyone did not agree with the apologists and the theologians. The Theodotians, followers of Theodotus (about AD 195), espoused a doctrine of *adoptionism* and claimed that while Jesus was born miraculously of the virgin Mary, it was at his baptism in the Jordan that the Christ-Spirit came upon him.¹⁰⁷ Because of his complete obedience, God therefore adopted Jesus as his Son.¹⁰⁸

Another solution, *modalism*, was expounded by three theologians in Rome in about AD 200, Noetus, Praxeas and Sabellius.¹⁰⁹ This explanation was that Christ was, in his essence, indistinguishable from God, and the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit were merely modes or stages through which God passed. He was the Father as Creator, but when he undertook the work of salvation he ceased to reveal himself as the Father and took up the mode of the Son. When the work of the Son was completed, God took up the mode of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁰ Thus, in a sense the Father himself suffered and died while he was in the mode of the Son.¹¹¹

The most widespread challenge to orthodoxy was without doubt *Arianism*. In Alexandria, an aged cleric named Arius (early 3rd century) claimed that Christ was indeed more than a human, but less than God. In his view, there was a very real difference of essence between the deity of the Father and the deity of the Son. The Son was a created Being, and in fact, he asserted that "there was a time when the Son was not." Furthermore, he believed that the Son could not have direct knowledge of or communion with the Father, since they were of a different essence. Finally, the Son was liable to change and sinfulness.¹¹²

The tension over the theology of the Divine Nature became so hectic between the Arians and the orthodox party that there were even riots.¹¹³ In fact, one bishop described Constantinople as literally seething with theological discussion over this issue. "If in this city you ask anyone for change, he will discuss with you whether God the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you ask about the quality of bread, you will receive the answer that 'God the Father is greater, God the Son is less.' If you suggest that a bath is desirable, you will be told that 'there was nothing before God the Son was created.'"¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Also called dynamic monarchianism

¹⁰⁸ Boer, pp. 111-112.

¹⁰⁹ Also called Sabellianism and Modalistic Monarchianism.

¹¹⁰ W. Placher, *A History of Christian Thought: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), p. 72; Boer, p. 112.

¹¹¹ Hence, those holding this view were sometimes called Patripassians (= the Father suffers).

¹¹² J. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 226-231; Bruce, pp. 302-304.

¹¹³ R. Bainton, *The Church of Our Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), pp. 42-43.

¹¹⁴ Shelly, p. 113.

The Council of Nicaea

The threat of doctrinal cleavage was so severe that Constantine, the Roman Emperor (now a Christian), feared possible political repercussions. After sending letters to Arius and Alexander, Arius' bishop, in an unsuccessful attempt to act as mediator between the two feuding clerics, he called for a general council of representatives from all Christendom to resolve the issue. The council met at Nicaea in northwest Asia Minor in May, AD 325, and it has since come to be known as the first ecumenical council of the Christian church, that is, the first Christian council to which Christian representatives from all over the known world were called. Nearly 300 bishops attended, some from as far away as Persia and Scythia, as well as representatives from Gaul, Carthage and, of course, the Eastern and Western sides of the Empire.¹¹⁵

At the Council of Nicaea, a creed was drafted to which all the bishops were required to give their signature.¹¹⁶ Its primary aim, as is obvious, was anti-Arian. The Son is "begotten, not made," and he is "true God" (i.e., not God in some secondary degree). Anyone who taught that he was a created being subject to change and/or that there was a time when he did not exist was formally declared to be a heretic.¹¹⁷

The Nicene Council did not end the controversy, however. Though Arianism had been driven underground, debate continued over the meaning of the expression *homoousion to patri* (= of one substance with the Father). For another half century,

¹¹⁵ Bruce, p. 304,

¹¹⁶ The Creed of Nicaea reads as follows:

"We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge living and dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

And those that say 'There was when he was not,'

And, 'Before he was begotten he was not,'

And that, 'He came into being from what-is not,'

Or those that allege, that the son of God is

'of another substance or essence'

or 'created,'

or 'changeable'

or 'alterable,'

these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes." Cf. H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University, 1963), p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Arius and five other delegates refused to sign the creed.

the controversy raged, exacerbated by the intrusion of politics into theology, but in the end, the theology of Nicea stood. A final version of the Nicene Creed was accepted by the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, and it was later reaffirmed by the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.¹¹⁸ Ever since, this version has been taken to be the embodiment of Christian orthodoxy.¹¹⁹ In the West, an additional phrase was eventually added, the *filioque* clause (= and the Son) so that the creed states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. This addition was categorically rejected in the East and eventually contributed to the schism between the Eastern and Western churches.¹²⁰

The Medieval Church

Popularly known as the Dark Ages”, the period of the medieval church was a time for survival as well as development. Of the many events that formed the prelude to the medieval church, several stand out as especially significant. First, the era of persecution ended with Emperor Constantine’s Edict of Milan in AD 313, which granted Christians freedom of worship. Over the next several years, the emperor issued various other edicts that favored the Christian church, including the restoration of confiscated church property, government subsidies to the church, exemption of the clergy from state service, and recognizing Sunday as a public holiday for rest and worship.

Second, there were considerable developments in Christian worship, especially the elaboration of the liturgy in more precise forms and the development of the Christian year along with scheduled lectionary readings. Languages other than Greek

¹¹⁸ For this reason, it is sometimes called the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, and while it is similar to the Creed of Nicea, it is not identical, cf. G. MacGregor, *The Nicene Creed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. xiii.

¹¹⁹ The Nicene Creed reads as follows:

"I believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified together, who spake by the prophets. And I believe in one catholic and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen," cf. Bettenson, p. 26; MacGreggor, p. ix (Greek text), p. xi (Traditional English Translation).

¹²⁰ On the Eastern side of the argument, Jn. 15:26 speaks only of the Spirit proceeding from the Father. Also, the addition never had any ecumenical approval. On the Western side, the phrase safeguards the belief that the Son is consubstantial with the Father. Also, the Son as well as the Father sends the Spirit in Jn. 15:26, and the Holy Spirit is in fact the Spirit of Christ (Ro. 8:9; Ga. 4:6), cf. G. Bromiley, *EDT* (1984) 415.

became used in services. In the western churches, the form of worship retained somewhat more flexibility, but in the east, the style of worship became increasingly more uniform.

Third, the architecture of churches, also, developed along a more-or-less uniform model. The basilica style church had a *nave*, often divided by rows of columns and side aisles (for the congregation), and an *apse* (for the clergy).

Fourth, the monastic movement became a recognizable force. Christians embracing self-denial and renouncing the world withdrew into the desert both as individuals (hermits) and in groups (communes). The temptations of the outer world (marriage, wealth, status) were replaced by the temptations of the inner world (pride, rivalry, extremism). In a sense, monastic life as a sort of living martyrdom replaced the actual martyrdoms that had flourished during the period of persecution.

Finally, the political collapse of the west left the Christian church as the most powerful surviving institution. The tribes from Gaul and central Asia who invaded the western Roman empire from the 3rd to the 5th century—the Goths, Vandals, Burgundians, Lombards, Huns and others—left an empire that was weak. By AD 476, the last Roman Emperor in the West was deposed.

Development of Roman Christianity

Rome had long been an important center of Christianity, dating all the way back to the period of the apostolic church. Not only was Rome the imperial seat of the empire, the church in Rome was by all accounts the largest and wealthiest in the west. It was believed to have been founded by Peter and Paul (though this tradition is not entirely accurate).¹²¹ After the conversion of Constantine, the Roman church's influence naturally continued to grow as Christians adopted the structure of the empire for the church. Provincial seats in the government became the episcopal seats of the bishops. Rome became the most important religious metropolis for Italy, Carthage for North Africa, Alexandria for Egypt, Antioch for Syria, and so forth. The metropolitan bishops or archbishops in these important cities were variously called popes or patriarchs or metropolitans.¹²² By the fourth century, the first mention appears of the “primacy of the Roman Church” based on Jesus' statement to Peter

¹²¹ That Peter and Paul both came to Rome and were martyred there is not in any significant doubt. However, it is apparent that the church at Rome already existed before either apostle visited the city, as is clear from Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul had not been there yet, and Peter would hardly have been neglected in the personal greetings of the letter had he been there when Paul wrote in the late 50s. So, the claim that Peter and Paul were the founders of the Roman church is highly unlikely, cf. E. Harrison, *The Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 220-221.

¹²² The term pope derived from *pappa*, an ancient Greek term of endearment for father. The term patriarch is much the same, while the term metropolitan derived from the cities themselves.

(cf. Mt. 16:18).¹²³ When Leo became the bishop of Rome (his office extended from 440-461), he laid the groundwork for the idea that the bishop of Rome was the Supreme Head of all Christendom succeeding in the office of Peter. He appropriated the pagan title *pontifex maximus* (= high priest), a title once used by the Roman emperors as head of the Roman state religion. While his claim was in significant tension with some of Jesus' sayings in the gospels (e.g., Mt. 20:25-28; 23:8-12), the uncertainty of Rome's future as it faced the barbarian attacks from the north left a need for religious stability in a politically unstable world.

Roman Christianity continued to develop its leading role within the church. As the empire fell, the political structure of Europe changed significantly, since now it was broken up into smaller, competing dynasties. The church, for its part, made missions a priority. Many of the barbarian invaders had been converted to Arian Christianity, but they had no use for the teachings of Jesus about meekness and turning the other cheek. Others, like the Angles and Saxons in Britain and the Irish and the Scots, were still barbarians. Only Celtic Christianity, now forced into Wales, could claim Christian continuity back to the days of the Roman Empire. Missionaries, like Patrick in Ireland, went to evangelize these northern pagans. The western church continued to be the strongest bond between the rougher populations of northern Europe and the more refined people of southern Europe.

The consecration of Gregory I as the bishop of Rome in AD 590 often is considered a watershed between the ancient church and the medieval church. Gregory ushered in a new era of power for the western church. Renouncing great wealth, he devoted himself to asceticism, becoming a monk. After ascending to the office of bishop in Rome (he disclaimed the title of pope), he expanded the power of his office by claiming universal jurisdiction over Christendom and contending against the Patriarch of Constantinople's claim to the title of Ecumenical Patriarch. He also laid significant groundwork for medieval theology, including an emphasis on the cult of saints, relics, demonology and ascetic virtues. He accepted the idea of human merit standing alongside divine grace and the belief that souls would be purified in purgatory. He also supported the equal authority of tradition alongside written scripture.

The Medieval Theologians

Several thinkers stand out above the rest during the thousand or so years comprising the Middle Ages. These men, both in written and institutional work, have

¹²³ Shelley, p. 153.

influenced the church ever since.

Anselm

One of the great archbishops of Canterbury, Anselm (1033-1109) was part of the Norman conquest of England (1066). He is primarily known as a philosopher and theologian, teaching that faith must lead to the right use of reason. His famous statement, “I believe, in order that I may understand,” addresses the relationship between faith and reason, a question that would dominate intellectual life for the next several centuries, including the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

Anselm was the first to put forth the argument that God’s existence could be proved by reason alone (the ontological argument). He also developed the juridical theory of atonement in his work *Cur Deus Homo?* (Why did God Become Man?), this view that sin runs up a debt that humans could never repay. Christ’s death more than satisfied this debt. Because the merits of the cross went beyond what was necessary for making satisfaction to God’s wounded honor, Christ could provide salvation to humans as a gift or reward on account of these extra merits. This theology of merit and reward would loom large in later medieval thought.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard (1090-1153), by all accounts, was the most influential Christian of his era. He lived during the transition between feudal values and the rise of towns and universities. Leading the life of an ascetic, Bernard emphasized prayer, self-denial and the mutual love between God and Christian believers. One of his most enduring sentiments is preserved in a traditional hymn:

*Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.*

As a leader among the Cistercian monastics, Bernard influenced many to devote themselves to the ascetic life. His sermons on the *Song of Solomon* and *Why and How God is to be Loved* are powerful devotional compositions that endure to this day.

Peter Abelard

Though highly controversial, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) was the major Christian thinker of his era. A brilliant lecturer and debater, crowds of young students flocked to hear him preach and teach. His most famous work, *Sic et Non* (Yes and

No), explored the relationship between faith and reason by collecting statements from the Bible and the church fathers that fall on both sides of some 150 theological questions. He urged that true Christianity was both reasonable and consistent, and he decried the fact that established traditional authorities often disagreed. His aim was to demonstrate that the highest authority was the Bible itself, which he believed to be self-consistent.

However, Abelard's arrogant debating style made him many enemies. When he had an affair with a young woman whom he was tutoring, her uncle had him castrated, while the young woman became a nun. Abelard then took up the life of a monk, but even then his combative personality and unusual ideas brought upon him a charge of heresy and a condemnation by a church council in 1141. His enduring influence was to set the stage for medieval scholasticism, the system in which the classical philosophy of ancient Greece, the Bible and the teachings of the church fathers were combined into a logical system.

Francis of Assisi

Though as the son of a wealthy Italian merchant he led a carefree life as a youth, Francis (1182-1226) was converted through an illness and a vision of Matthew 10:7-10. Consequently, he left home wearing only a ragged coat and a rope-belt from a scarecrow to beg from the rich, give to the poor, and preach the gospel. He began a movement of followers, the Franciscans, who subscribed to his simple rule of poverty, preaching and caring for the sick. The famous "Prayer of St. Francis" survives as a popular Christian devotional plea:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled,

as to console;

Not so much to be understood as to understand;

Not so much to be loved as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we awaken to eternal life.

Along with the Dominicans (founded by St. Dominic in 1216), the Franciscans worked together with the papal monarchy in a mutually supportive relationship. The popes helped the friars establish themselves, and the friars combated heresy, helped proclaim the merits of the papal crusades, performed missionary work and undertook special missions for the pope.

Thomas Aquinas

All historians agree that Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was the greatest theologian of the medieval era. Though nicknamed “the dumb ox” because of his size, he excelled in the universities at Naples, Paris and Cologne. Altogether, his writings amount to eighteen large volumes, and they include commentaries on most books of the Bible as well as philosophical writings interacting with Aristotle and other thinkers.

The most famous of his works were his *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, which explore Christian thought through both revelation and reason. He firmly believed that faith could be defended by reason and that “nature” complements “grace.” His acceptance and use of Aristotelian logic in subordination to basic Christian principles enabled him to develop an internally-consistent system of thought, and his influence in later Roman Catholic theology has been retained up until the present. In 1879, the pope declared Thomism (Aquinas’ theology) to be eternally valid.

The Great Schism

The partition of Christianity into east and west, especially augmented by the barbarian invasions, meant that Christianity developed somewhat differently in each area. In the first place, Latin was the language of the church in the west, while Greek prevailed in the east. Politically, the west was left with a number of independent northern European states, while the east enjoyed the continuation of Greco-Roman culture sustained by the eastern empire. Later, of course, the east, and to a lesser degree the west, faced the daunting conquests of the followers of Mohammed beginning in 622. In general, the east was more wealthy and educated than the west. The Iconoclastic Controversy erupted over what religious objects were sufficiently holy to be venerated. One side contended that only the most traditional Christians symbols were truly holy—the cross, the Bible and the elements of the Lord’s supper. More popular, however, was the proliferation of images and icons of saints, martyrs

and heroes as protectors of cities and intercessors for living Christians. In the end, the western church came to allow three-dimensional religious art while the east allowed only two-dimensional art. Yet another difference was the addition of a clause in the western form of the creed indicating that Spirit proceeds both “from the Father and from the Son,” a statement intended to buttress the belief that the Son is consubstantial with the Father and that the Holy Spirit is in fact the Spirit of Christ. The east contended that this phrase was not in the original creed, was not in harmony with John 15:26, was not authorized by an ecumenical council, and therefore was to be rejected.

Other controversies, some as petty as whether to use leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist, exacerbated the alienation of west and east, and by 1054, the tension had become so sharp that each side excommunicated and anathematized the other. Since that time, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church have remained separate.

The Crusades

No discussion of the medieval era would be complete without some attention to the famous crusades. The underlying situation behind the crusades was the successful conquests of the Muslims, especially when they took Jerusalem and threatened Constantinople. Pope Urban II called for a crusade (= war of the cross) in 1095, which began a series of military expeditions in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries to win back the Holy Land. In contrast to early Christianity, which had been decidedly pacifistic,¹²⁴ the crusades officially were justified and blessed as appropriate steps to gain “right order in the world.”

Several goals fell under this rubric. One was to bring the defecting Orthodox Church back into the fold under the primacy of the Roman pope. Another was to embarrass the pope’s greatest enemy, the German emperor (all western Europeans were called to the First Crusade except the Germans). Yet another was to secure peace at home in western Europe between warring factions. If Christians must fight, let them fight against the pagan Turks! And of course, Jerusalem itself, the most sacred shrine of Christendom, must not be abandoned to Islam. On a crusade, a soldier could both participate in holy war and gain the spiritual advantage of a pilgrimage at the same time.

Altogether, there were probably about 100,000 soldiers in the first crusading army, and recruitment was surely aided by the pope’s promise that the soldiers of the cross would be free from all penances imposed by the church and, according to some

¹²⁴ Consider, for example, the statement by St. Martin in the 4th century, “I am Christ’s soldier; I cannot fight.”

preachers, even all punishments in purgatory. If they died in the crusade, their souls would go straight to heaven! Convinced they were chosen by God to cleanse the world of unbelievers, they charged off to the east, slaughtering any unbelievers in their path, especially Jews. They captured Antioch, most of Syria and Jerusalem.

The Christians were unable to hold the western coast of Palestine for very long, so other crusades were organized in the ebb and flow of military superiority between the crusaders and the Muslims. Hence, there was a Second Crusade, a Third, and then a Fourth, the latter never even reaching Palestine (the soldiers were contented to seize Christian Constantinople). Others followed so that after about 1150 there was an almost constant stream of soldiers from west to east. By 1244, however, Jerusalem was captured once again by the Muslims and would never be regained by the West until World War I. The crusades had failed.

Cathedrals

Church architecture flourished in the medieval era. Romanesque, with its origins in the 10th century, aimed at structures to manifest the glory of God. It included a rounded arch, massive stone walls, enormous piers, small windows and the predominance of horizontal lines.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, Romanesque was edged out by Gothic architecture, the most intricate of cathedral styles with the pointed arch, ribbed vaulting and flying buttresses. This style permitted a much higher structure and the entrance of more outside light than the older Romanesque. Gothic cathedrals were huge stone skeletons enclosed by enormous stained glass windows.

The original purpose of the cathedral was to house the bishop and his household of priests. The floor plan included the *chancel* with the high altar, the bishop's seat and choir stalls, the *nave* as the main room for the worshipping congregation, a *font* for baptisms and a *pulpit* for sermons. Eventually, wings or *transepts* were added to the nave so that the floor plan reproduced the outline of a cross. Since most lay people could not read, the depictions in the stained glass became a primary educational tool to instruct the people in the stories of the Bible and church history.

Issues and Leaders of the Reformation

The reformation tradition can briefly be summed up in four succinct Latin expressions, *solus Christus* (= Christ alone), *sola gratia* (= grace alone), *sola fide* (= faith alone), and *sola scriptura* (= Scripture alone). Karl Barth made the observation that Roman Catholicism is characterized by a "both/and" theology, whereas Evangelical Protestantism stresses an "either/or" position. The Roman Church

affirms both Christ and Mary, Christ and the saints, Christ and the church, and so forth. Evangelicals look to Christ alone. The Roman Church affirms both grace and free will as operative in bringing one to God, both faith and works as effective in bringing salvation, and both Scripture and the tradition of the church as authoritative for faith and practice. Evangelicals assert that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, based on the authority of Scripture alone.¹²⁵

Christ Alone

The first of the key Reformation expressions, Christ alone, points toward the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Savior, the only mediator between humans and God, and the only one who has been exalted to the highest place and who stands ready to help and aid his people in their times of need. This emphasis, which seems so familiar to evangelicals today, spearheaded the Reformation as it arose out of the background of medieval theology. The general position of the Medieval Church, from as far back as the 5th century, was that the Holy Roman Church took precedence over all other churches, because it was given primacy by the famous declaration of Jesus to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (cf. Mt. 16:18).¹²⁶ Because church tradition pointed to Peter as a founder of the church in Rome, the conclusion was reached that the authority of Peter lived on in the Roman Church and was passed down through the Roman bishop, who was the supreme head of all Christendom. The papal office was perceived to be the channel of God's will and the foundation of Christian society on earth.

About a century before the Reformation proper, two courageous Christians dared to object to the notion that the church is something other than a human organization headed by the pope. John Wycliffe, an Englishman, and Jan Hus, a Czech, paid dearly for their beliefs.

John Wycliffe (ca. 1330-1384)

Though generally categorized as a pre-reformer, and heralded by some as the "Morning Star of the Reformation," John Wycliffe's ideas were certainly in the spirit of the Reformation to follow. He criticized the prevalent views of the church and its authority, contending that the true church is the congregation of those chosen by God, not the hierarchical institution that visibly exists. He argued that the basic law

¹²⁵ D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) I.10.

¹²⁶ The medieval church generally followed Cyprian's contention that the unity of the church was not theological but episcopal, that is, oneness was to be found in the union of the college of bishops. Disassociation from the bishops was *ipso facto* separation from the true church. The bishops, as successors to the apostles, manifested this unity. Cyprian's famous dictum was, "There is no salvation outside the church," cf. C. Blaising, *EDT* (1984) pp. 290-291. By the 5th century, "the church" was decidedly defined in terms of the headship of the Roman bishop.

of the church was not the word of the pope, but rather, the Bible. While he felt that it was permissible to have a pope, it was not necessary.¹²⁷ Wycliffe proceeded to denounce the wealth and corruption in the church, calling the pope an anti-Christ.¹²⁸ He believed that the Bible had been given by God as his word to his faithful people, not to the clergy so that they might monopolize it. Hence, he began the work of translating scripture from Latin into English. Furthermore, he believed that divine lordship was the ground for all other lordship, for it was God alone who had the rightful and necessary dominion over others.¹²⁹

By 1377, his views led to his condemnation by a series of papal bulls (= official documents), which indicated that Oxford University, where Wycliffe taught, should put a stop to such teaching. The opposition drove Wycliffe to even more extreme positions. By 1382, his followers were forced from Oxford, and Wycliffe himself retired to his parish in Lutterworth, where he died of a stroke in 1384.¹³⁰

Jan Hus (ca. 1372-1415)

The ideas of Wycliffe were not confined to England. They spread to Bohemia, where they emerged in a somewhat modified form under Jan Hus and his followers. Hus, the rector of Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, was favorably impressed with Wycliffe's theology. Though generally more moderate than Wycliffe, he also denounced the gap between the clergy and ordinary Christians as well as the moral corruption of a church where priests could use the offerings of the poor to pay for prostitutes.¹³¹ He adopted Wycliffe's view of the church as an elect company with Christ, and he viewed Christ, not the pope, as its true head.¹³² He believed that only Christ could forgive sins, and he preached against the veneration of the pope.¹³³

Eventually, Hus was excommunicated. The whole city of Prague was placed under a papal interdict (which excluded all its citizens from participation in the sacraments and Christian burial). Hus agreed to appear before the Council of Constance, hoping to present his views to the assembled authorities. He was promised safe conduct, but instead, he was imprisoned in Constance and placed on trial for heresy. He was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. At the place of execution, he knelt and prayed, "God is my witness that the

¹²⁷ P. Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968) pp. 203-209.

¹²⁸ W. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) p. 173.

¹²⁹ J. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) II.326-330.

¹³⁰ R. Clouse, *EDT* (1984) p. 1197.

¹³¹ Placher, p. 174.

¹³² B. Shelley, p. 249.

¹³³ P. Kubricht, *EDT* (1984) p. 538.

evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. In the truth of the gospel I have written, taught, and preached; today I gladly die."¹³⁴ Tradition says that he died singing.

The Supremacy of Christ

Many themes resonate in the lives and teachings of these thinkers and their attempts at reformation, but the centrality and supremacy of Christ intermingles with them all. The profound question was raised in their minds as to who was truly the head of the church. The papacy, with its claims of being Peter's successor and the vicar (= substitute, agent) of Christ, considered itself to be the infallible guide for the church, holding authority over all Christians. Wycliffe and Hus, contending for the message of the New Testament, maintained that Christ alone was the head of the church (cf. Ep. 1:20-22; 4:15-16; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). The pope was dispensable. When the Reformation began in earnest a century later, Wycliffe and Hus were not forgotten.

Grace and Faith Alone

Perhaps more than any other, the two Latin phrases *sola gratia* (= grace alone) and *sola fide* (= faith alone) exemplify the spirit of the Reformation. To understand why, it is first appropriate to point toward two major themes within Christendom, the theme of evangelicalism, where the emphasis is on the gospel, and the theme of catholicism, where the emphasis is on the universal church. Both of these themes arise out of the New Testament witness, for while the New Testament stresses that there is only one gospel, and anyone is accursed who preaches any other (Ga. 1:8-9), the New Testament also stresses that there is only one church, and all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are part of the same body (1 Co. 12:12-13). Ideally, these two themes should be complementary, but in fact, they often existed in tension. "Evangelicals" were more concerned about the primitive message of the apostolic church; "catholics" were more concerned about the institution and rites of the church.

The exponents of evangelicalism and catholicism clashed in the Reformation, evangelicalism being the emphasis of the reformers and catholicism being the emphasis of the Roman church. In the development of Roman theology, particularly in the Middle Ages, the Reformers saw a pressing need to emphasize certain biblical truths that they felt had been obscured or diluted. Particularly, they feared that a religion of works-righteousness was swallowing up the gospel, that is, a religion

¹³⁴ Kubricht, p. 538; Shelley, pp. 248-251.

which grounded salvation in what a person could do to earn merit with God rather than in what Christ had done once and for all at Calvary. What began as an effort to purge the church of a distorted gospel ended as a movement which split Western Christendom. Today, Roman Catholicism continues to be characterized by a "both/and" theology, whereas evangelical Protestantism is characterized by an "either/or" theology. Roman Catholics affirm both grace and free will in coming to Christ, and both faith and works for salvation. Evangelical Protestants, on the other hand, stress that one comes to Christ by grace alone, apart from one's own powers; one is saved by faith alone, without works of merit.¹³⁵

Martin Luther¹³⁶

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is unquestionably the most well-known figure of the Reformation. He studied law at the University of Erfurt, but later, he joined the Augustinian Hermits after making a dramatic vow to St. Anne in a thunderstorm. He was ordained in 1507, and his order sent him to the University of Wittenberg to teach moral theology. By 1512 he had become a doctor of theology and a professor of biblical studies. It was at Wittenberg that the spark of the Reformation began when, on the eve of All Soul's Day in 1517, Luther announced a debate on indulgences by posting on the church door an argument against them called the *95 Theses*. These *95 Theses* were not intended as a call for the Reformation, but rather, as an invitation to discuss the theological errors and abuses regarding forgiveness for sins that had grown up over the centuries. Nevertheless, whatever Luther's intentions, news of his arguments spread over Europe like wildfire, augmented by the new technology of Gutenberg's printing press. The Reformation had begun!¹³⁷

Luther's Spiritual Crisis and Discovery

Luther had entered monastic life in order to prepare for death. His terrible fright in the thunderstorm was not so much from death itself as from the prospect of dying without being prepared for it in the sight of God. Entering a monastery was one pathway by which to assure himself of salvation. So he plunged into the ascetic life with abandon, fasting frequently and in many other ways making available to himself the merits of the church. After visiting Rome and observing the abuses of relics there, he began to doubt whether the church could indeed offer the means of salvation. At

¹³⁵ D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) I.9-10.

¹³⁶ A popular and readable biography of Martin Luther can be found in R. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950). For an excellent discussion of Luther's theology, see P. Watson, *Let God Be God* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1947).

¹³⁷ T. Dowley, ed., *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 360-362.

Wittenberg, he began to have misgivings about confession, since he deemed it impossible to confess all his sins. Sin was such a deep and permeating thing that it seemed nigh impossible to even remember every sin, let alone catalogue every aspect of it in confession. By 1517, Luther was lecturing on Romans and Galatians. Here his problem with sin became focused in the writings of Paul. His question was how God, who was altogether holy and righteous, could forgive a man like himself, who was so thoroughly unrighteous and unholy.

Luther's spiritual discovery came in his studies, and in his own words, it went like this:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God...

As last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith... Here I felt I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally new face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.¹³⁸

The Problem with Indulgences

Indulgences in Roman Catholic thought are the means by which the church claims to give remission to persons before God of the temporal punishment due to sins, persons whose guilt has already been forgiven. Basic to this concept is the distinction between eternal and temporal punishment for sin. Roman Catholic

¹³⁸ J. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) III.28-29.

theology held that in absolution, given by a priest at confession, the sinner received the removal of guilt and eternal punishment for sins. A temporal punishment, however, would still be forthcoming unless it was removed by penitential acts and effort. It is here that indulgences were believed to function so that they also removed the temporal punishment for sin and eliminated the necessity of penitential acts. If an indulgence was granted to a soul in purgatory—the intermediate realm in which imperfect Christians were thought to undergo penal and purifying suffering until they were perfected—then that soul would immediately receive the intercession of the saints for the remission of such punishment. Associated with the notion of indulgences was the corollary that the church contained a treasury of merits of which the pope could make use in granting such an indulgence.¹³⁹

Luther's newly discovered theology of "faith alone" ran head-on into the sale of indulgences by John Tetzel, a Dominican who was commissioned by Rome to raise funds on behalf of the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. In exchange for a contribution, Tetzel preached that he would provide the donors with an indulgence that would apply beyond the grave and free souls from purgatory. Tetzel's jingle was, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Luther's *95 Theses* were written as a direct reaction to Tetzel's preaching.¹⁴⁰

Grace and Faith

The idea that salvation was by grace and faith alone was not unique to Luther. It had been voiced in varying ways by both Wycliffe and Hus a full century prior to Luther, before that by Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th Century, and even earlier, by Augustine in the 5th Century. But it was especially Luther, in his direct challenge to the tradition of the Medieval Church, who became its most ardent spokesman.

While much could be said about grace and faith in the Old Testament, it is in the teachings of Jesus that one first meets the clearest explication that God's forgiveness is offered freely to sinners, not because they deserve it or have done anything to earn it, but because of God's redemptive love which they merely reach out and accept. Early in his ministry, Jesus was known as the friend of tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners, a man who ate with disreputable people as a sign of God's forgiveness and acceptance (Mk. 2:16-17; Mt. 21:31-32, Lk. 7:39; 15:1-2; 19:7). The message of Jesus was good news to the poor—not only the penniless poor and the powerless poor, though it included them as well, but especially the spiritually poor, those whose spiritual accounts were empty (Mt. 5:3). In giving salvation to

¹³⁹ P. Toon, "Indulgences," *EDT* (1984) p. 558. It may be noted that since Vatican II, the Roman church has made efforts to revise and improve this whole system.

¹⁴⁰ B. Shelley, p. 258.

Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10) and in rescuing the adulterous woman from condemnation and execution (Jn. 8:1-11), Jesus illustrated the message of grace and faith in real life. In the parable of the tax collector and the publican (Lk. 18:9-14), in the story of Lazarus and Dives (Lk. 16:19-31), and in the trilogy of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Lk. 15), he illustrated the same message.

Jesus was quite clear that no one could receive anything from God except as a gift of divine grace (Jn. 3:27; 6:44; 10:27-30). Furthermore, what God really required as the response to grace was faith (Jn. 3:14-18; 20:30-31). Jesus' message of redemptive hope to a dying felon was a climactic interplay of grace and faith (Lk. 23:39-43).

Paul, similarly, is universally recognized as the theologian of grace and faith. Salvation comes by grace through faith as God's gift (Ep. 2:8-9). It comes not as the result of righteous things one does, but as the result of God's mercy (2 Ti. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). It does not depend on human effort or desire, but on God's mercy (Ro. 9:16). Religious works cannot merit the favor of God; otherwise the very definition of grace would be changed (Ro. 11:6). Instead, acquittal by God comes because of faith in Jesus Christ (Ga. 2:16). The gift of the Spirit comes when one believes the good news (Ga. 3:2), and the confession of Jesus as Lord is only possible as one is empowered by the Holy Spirit (1 Co. 12:3). Everyone is a sinner deserving the just judgment of God; nevertheless, those who have faith in Jesus Christ have been declared righteous before God (Ro. 3:22-24; 5:1-2). Righteousness is not a matter of doing, but a matter of believing (Ro. 1:16-18). Those who are sons of God belong to his family by faith (Ga. 3:26-28). As such, Paul can say, "What do you have that you did not receive" (1 Co. 4:7)?

Scripture Alone

Besides the themes of *solus Christus* (= Christ alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone), the theme of *sola Scriptura* (= Scripture alone) completes the quartet of central Reformation issues. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the appeal to mystical experience and church tradition alongside Scripture for the faith and practice of the church became emphasized more and more. Some late medieval theologians came to speak of a source of truth parallel to the Bible—the tradition of the church—and Scripture and church tradition were held to be in equal esteem. Since the church authenticated Scripture, it was believed that the church held a certain primacy over Scripture. The general view was that the teaching office of the church provided the authoritative interpretation of Scripture. To go against church tradition or theological

tradition, then, was *ipso facto* a violation of revealed authority.¹⁴¹

Against this prevailing opinion, the Reformers stubbornly maintained that there was only one source of revelation and authority for the faith and practice of the church—Scripture alone. The Bible was the supreme and final authority in all theological matters, and it stood above the authority of the church. Official guides to the interpretation of Scripture were unnecessary.¹⁴² This high view of the authority of Scripture was common to Hus, Luther, Wycliffe and Tyndale. The authority of Holy Scripture, particularly when coupled with the idea of the priesthood of every believer, created the theological impetus for the translation of Scripture into the common languages.

William Tyndale

William Tyndale (ca. 1494-1536) is properly called the father of the English Bible. The movement toward reform was well under way before Tyndale became famous. A century earlier in England, Wycliffe had begun the process, and his influence had not died. The writings of Luther were legally available in England until they were condemned in 1521, but even afterwards, judging from the reports of attempts to destroy them, they were still circulating.¹⁴³ How much Tyndale might have been influenced by them is not known, though when Tyndale eventually left England, he spent nine or ten months at Wittenberg with Luther.¹⁴⁴ In any case, the authority of Scripture alone certainly marks the theology of Tyndale as well as the other Reformers.

The English Bible

The translation of the Bible in English did not begin with Tyndale. Wycliffe had published a Bible translated from Latin into English, and various parts of the Bible had been available in English for several centuries. However, Tyndale and his friends were the first ones to make a translation of the full Bible from the Greek and Hebrew texts, and it is this work which earned him the title "father" of the English Bible.

After Tyndale was ordained, he became appalled at the ignorance of the clergy. When a fellow priest resented this observation, he retorted, "If God spares my life, before many years pass I will make it possible for a boy behind the plow to

¹⁴¹ D. Bloesch, *The Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) I.57-58.

¹⁴² B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), pp. 53, 55.

¹⁴³ J. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) III.163.

¹⁴⁴ B. Edwards, *William Tyndale: The Father of the English Bible* (Farmington Hills, MI: William Tyndale College, 1982) 78.

know more Scripture than you do." Soon, however, Tyndale discovered that translating the Bible in English was not a welcome occupation. After studying at Oxford and Cambridge, Tyndale was forced to flee England, where he continued his translation work in secrecy, hiding out in various cities of Germany, Holland and Belgium, all the while trying to avoid agents sent from England to apprehend him. Early in 1526 he began smuggling the first copies of his New Testament back into England. Merchants adroitly distributed them, and Tyndale began work on the Old Testament. During the next ten years, he revised his work on the New Testament and produced translations of varying parts of the Old Testament.¹⁴⁵

In 1536, agents of the church caught up with him in Europe. A long list of charges were brought against him, which resulted in him being declared a heretic. It was charged that:

"...he had maintained that faith alone justifies"

"...he maintained that to believe in the forgiveness of sins and to embrace the mercy offered in the Gospel, was enough for salvation"

"...he denied that there is any purgatory"

"...he asserted that neither the Virgin nor the Saints should be invoked by us"

After seventeen months in prison, he was strangled and burned at the stake in the Netherlands. His dying prayer was "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"¹⁴⁶

The Question of Authority

The basic question underlying the work of translating the Bible into the common languages was the question, "Can the Bible stand by itself?" Is it necessary to have some external authority which determines the way in which the Bible is to be understood? The Reformers said, "No!" They contended for the perspicuity of the Bible, that is, the belief that the Bible was sufficiently clear in content to yield its meaning to the believer.¹⁴⁷ By this they did not intend to suggest that careful exegesis was unnecessary. In fact, they pursued literary, historical, cultural, and linguistic

¹⁴⁵ B. Shelley, p. 286.

¹⁴⁶ Edwards, pp. 148-170.

¹⁴⁷ Ramm, p. 55.

studies rigorously. At the same time, they contended that if the reader of Scripture follows the normal "laws of language," he/she can know what the Bible means. To be sure, there were obscure passages, and the Reformers had no illusions that one could know everything in Holy Scripture. But the medieval church had taught that the Scriptures were so obscure that only the teaching ministry of the church could make sense of them and uncover their true meaning. With this the Reformers disagreed. The church must always be a servant of the Word, not its master.

Some Modern Implications

To hold to the authority of Scripture alone has implications beyond just the rejection of the authority of medieval ecclesiastical tradition. *Sola Scriptura* also means that Scripture has primacy over *all* religious tradition, Protestant tradition included, as well as all religious experience. It means that neither human intellect nor human emotions are authoritative, but both must bow to Scripture. In the 21st century, the authority of Holy Scripture is threatened as much by the perceived authority of religious experience as it is by tradition. Conscience, experience, intellect and emotions are only trustworthy when they are anchored in the divine revelation given in the Bible. Otherwise, they become shifting sand.¹⁴⁸

The authority of Holy Scripture must not be overpowered by either the scholars, theologians, church leaders or laypersons who study it. The contributions that each make may be truly noteworthy. Scholarship is necessary if one is to have the Bible in his/her own language and if the impact of culture, history, literary form, and linguistics are to be properly assessed. Theologians are important to explore the depths of the Bible and to assist in making its meaning clear. Church leaders must be respected for their character, wisdom and teaching office. Laypersons often gain valuable insight in the Bible that others have missed. At the same time, none of them stand in authority over Holy Scripture. The authority for the faith and practice of the church is Scripture alone, because only Holy Scripture is God-breathed. All other sources are prone to human error and distortion.

Roman Catholics and Protestants

Since the Reformation the three major branches of Christianity have remained separate, *Eastern Orthodoxy*, *Roman Catholicism* and *Protestantism*. Due to its fidelity to the idea that normative Christianity is primarily to be defined by the church fathers and because of its cultural and geographical isolation from the west, Eastern Orthodoxy has changed little during recent centuries. The Roman Catholic Church,

¹⁴⁸ D. Bloesch, *Faith & Its Counterparts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981), pp. 60-72.

while also maintaining a concentrated devotion to tradition, at the same time has followed a more progressive trajectory, with gradual developments in doctrine and theology, especially concerning those areas of debate with Protestants. Protestants, with their allegiance to the Bible alone and their freedom to interpret Scripture apart from long-standing traditions, have proliferated into many denominations. By the end of the 20th century, altogether there were more than 20,000 denominations and self-contained churches in the world.¹⁴⁹

Early Reformation Protestantism

Fairly early, Protestantism began to fragment along geographical and theological lines. In general, Protestants continued to agree on the basic principles of *solus Christus*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*. Beyond that, however, there was considerable variety. Luther in Germany was able to agree with Zwingli of Switzerland on only fourteen of fifteen doctrinal propositions (the exception being the nature of the Eucharist). This lack of full consensus kept Lutheran Christianity distinct from the developing Reformed tradition. Luther's support of the princes and nobles against the peasants during the German peasant revolt drove many to more radical forms of reformation in the Anabaptist movement. In England, the Reformation followed a trajectory that was unique due to the heavy involvement of the English monarchy in the process. Hence, four distinct Protestant traditions began very early: Lutheranism, the Reformed Church, the Anabaptists and the Anglican Church. Later, other diverse movements broke off from the more established Reformation traditions, yielding even more Protestant denominations.

Lutheranism became the state religion for large portions of Germany. It spread to Scandinavia, where eventually it became the primary church in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The Reformed Church, especially under the tutelage of Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich and John Calvin of Geneva, spread from Switzerland and France into Holland, England and Scotland. What would come to be known as Calvinism, the view of divine sovereignty that championed limited atonement, became the hallmark of the Reformed Tradition.

Besides the state churches of Lutheranism and the Reformed Tradition, a third force of "free churches" began in the Anabaptist Movement. The Anabaptists (literally, "rebaptizers") were intent on reforming the Reformation, and they rejected

¹⁴⁹ David Barrett identified 20,780 denominations as of 1980 and projected 22,190 by 1985. The splits are as follows: (1) Roman Catholicism (223 denominations), (2) Protestant (8196 denominations), (3) Orthodox (580 denominations), (4) Non-white Indigenous (10,956 denominations), (5) Anglican (240 denominations), (6) Marginal Protestant, which includes Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, New Age groups and the cults (1,490 denominations), (7) Catholic, non-Roman (504 denominations), cf. D. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World A.D. 1900-2000*, ed. D. Barrett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

the practices of paedobaptism and any baptismal form other than immersion, often at the cost of their lives. They also rejected the state-church alliances that were developing in Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia and the Lowlands. In their view, the community of Christians was a voluntary association, not a state controlled institution. Genuine Christians were radical believers, not nominal adherents. Today, the direct descendants of the Anabaptists are the Hutterites, the Amish, and the Mennonites, and the somewhat more indirect descendants are the Baptists, the Quakers and the Congregationalists.

The fourth of the great Reformation traditions developed in England. In one sense, the English church had roots even older than Roman Catholicism, and through Celtic Christianity this tradition extended back to before the fall of Rome. However, though many in the English church had long been uncomfortable with the pope's claim of absolute authority, it was King Henry VIII who provided the occasion for a formal split. Henry wanted an heir, his wife Catherine of Aragon had provided no son who survived beyond infancy, and he wanted to annul his marriage in order to marry Anne Boleyn, a lady-in-waiting. Pope Clement VII refused to grant the annulment, so Henry had his marriage annulled in an English church court and married Anne anyway. The pope excommunicated Henry, and Henry broke with Rome. Because the English Reformation did not follow the trajectory of the European Protestant movements, the Anglican Church has always remained more similar in its liturgies and forms to the medieval church, and hence, to the Roman Catholic Church.

Later Protestant Movements

Following the early centuries of Protestantism, several other movements have helped shape the present day ethos of Protestant evangelicalism. They include Pietism, the Great Awakenings, the Missions Movement, the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy, and the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.

A century or so after Luther, *Pietism* was born in Germany as a reaction against the formalism of theology and church order in the Lutheran Church. Philipp Spener and his pupil, August Francke, worked toward moral reform and spiritual renewal among Protestants. Their emphases were the experiential character of true faith, the biblical focus from which to derive standards and goals for Christ-like living, the serious effort toward Christian perfection and holy living, and the revival of spiritual life over against the coldness and sterility of established church forms and practices. Pietists were “people of the heart”, suspicious that the human mind could not fathom the mysteries of true spiritual life, and willing to affirm that feelings rather than intellectualism more adequately carried the meaning of faith. Their influence spread from Germany into Scandinavia, Russia, England and the Americas. Their basic stance of anti-traditionalism, individualism and practical Christianity

were embraced by Moravians, Puritans and Methodists, and beyond them, to more recent forms of evangelical spirituality, such as, the American holiness movement and Pentecostalism.¹⁵⁰

The two *Great Awakenings* of the early 1700s and early 1800s were both thoroughly American. The first was a spiritual revival among Calvinists, such as, the Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards and the itinerant Anglican George Whitefield. The second moved further westward and carried a more Arminian tendency among Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Both, however, were movements of spiritual renewal, and their emphases included themes of holiness, revivalism, subjective spiritual experience, and democratic theology. With the emphasis on the Bible alone as the standard for Christian life, free from traditional interpretation, the two Great Awakenings contributed to the further proliferation of various Protestant denominations, each with their own emphases and concerns.¹⁵¹ In fact, the word “denomination” came into vogue about 1740 during the First Great Awakening,¹⁵² and it has remained the standard term describing the theory that the true church cannot be identified with any single ecclesiastical expression. Alongside the Great Awakening in American churches was the work of John and Charles Wesley in the Anglican Church. Methodist societies began to appear all over England, Wales, Ireland and the Americas, and though Wesley resisted the idea that he should break from the Church of England, when the Anglican church was reluctant to ordain ministers in America among Wesley’s followers, the Methodists took the necessary steps toward separation.

When the 19th century began, Protestant Christianity barely existed outside Europe and America. Roman Catholic Christianity had made significant inroads into Latin America and parts of Asia during the heyday of Spanish and Portuguese imperialism, while Eastern Orthodoxy continued to be the dominate Christian expression in Russia, eastern Europe and the Near East. The man who began to change this picture was William Carey (1761-1834), appropriately titled the father of modern Protestant missions. His missionary vision included whole countries, not merely small pockets of Christianity surrounded by the masses of paganism. Carey in India, Adoniram Judson (1788-1855) in Burma, Robert Moffat (1795-1883) in South Africa, David Livingstone (1813-1873) in central Africa, and Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) in China are a few of the notable names of missionaries who spent their lives preaching among those who had never heard the gospel of Christ. Missionary societies, many of them interdenominational, organized overseas efforts for

¹⁵⁰ M. Noll, “Pietism,” *EDT* (1984) 855-858.

¹⁵¹ M. Noll, “The Great Awakenings,” *EDT* 483-484.

¹⁵² Shelley, p.324.

evangelism, the translation of the Bible, and educational and medical services. Missionaries were sent out by the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and many other denominations until, by the beginning of the 20th century, Protestant missions had circumnavigated the globe. The ideal of giving one's life for the cause of the gospel is nowhere more vividly displayed than in the picture of David Livingstone who was found dead on his knees in a hut in Northern Rhodesia in 1873.¹⁵³

Intellectualism springing from the Enlightenment created new challenges for Christianity. The gradual acceptance of Darwinian biology in scientific circles, new forms of literary criticism of the Bible in the German universities, and new developments in philosophy by Descartes, Kant, Hume and others created a new intellectual climate. More liberal minded thinkers tried to incorporate the new thought into Christian theology, but they often did so at the expense of the orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith. More conservative minded churchmen tried to plug the dike, but often they were perceived as socially backward, anti-intellectual and under-educated. The contention reached a climax in America with the so-called "Scopes Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee, 1925. Here, in a battle pitched in an American courtroom over the issues of biblical creationism versus Darwinism, conservative Christianity staked its claim against modernism. Largely due to the media spin on the trial, traditional Christians came out the losers in the general public opinion (even though technically they "won" at the Dayton trial). Because of a series of tractates named "The Fundamentals", which conservative theologians and scholars composed and disseminated widely in America, conservatives came to be billed as "fundamentalists." Essentially, the "fundamentals" consisted of central orthodox Christian doctrines, such as, the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of the cross, the bodily resurrection of Jesus on Easter, the genuineness of the biblical miracles, and the personal return of Christ at the end of the age. For each of these doctrines, Protestant liberalism had new interpretations that differed from the faith handed down by the early church. Since that time, conservatives and liberals have coexisted in an uneasy tension, often within single denominations.

Yet another significant movement, Pentecostalism, helped shape the face of American Protestantism. With roots in the American holiness movement and African-American Christianity, the Pentecostals championed a theology of the baptism in the Spirit with the accompanying sign of speaking in other tongues. Due to the fact that their constituency largely was among the economically poor and educationally deprived as well as because they tended toward emotional extremes, Pentecostals were often culturally disinherited from the established denominations.

¹⁵³ J. Thiessen, *A Survey of World Missions*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1961).

They responded with a call to “come out” of the “dead” churches of orthodoxy into the “living” churches guided by the Spirit. Today, Pentecostal denominations, both White and Black, rival the numbers and influence of many older, established Protestant denominations. In the 1960s, yet another spin-off similar to Pentecostalism began in the charismatic movement. Though the theology of the Charismatics was largely the same as the Pentecostals, their ethos was different, since they arose within the larger, mainline denominations (the Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church, etc.), and they did not call for an exodus, preferring to co-exist within their mother denominations without rupture. By the end of the 20th century, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement had contributed significantly to the experiential component of public worship, the development of a much wider range of church music, and an aggressive outreach in missions, especially in the third world.

Developments in the Roman Catholic Church

Alongside Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church continued to remain the largest single denomination in Christendom. The first official response to Luther had been to excommunicate him and declare him an outlaw. Within the Roman church, however, there were others who saw some validity in Luther’s challenges and began to work toward internal reform, now known as the Catholic Reformation. This internal reform affected the papacy, prompted the founding of new orders, such as, the missionary Society of Jesus (Jesuits), and led to a council at Trent that clarified Roman Catholic doctrine over against the emerging Protestants.

Other notable occurrences in Roman Catholic Christianity include the loss of the Papal States in the Franco-Russian War in 1870 (which had belonged to the church for over a thousand years) and the declaration of the infallibility of the Pope, a doctrine that when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* (i.e., “from the chair”, that is, from his position as Peter’s successor) in matters of faith and morals, his decision is infallible and immutable.

A continuing development of Mariology also characterized Roman Catholic Christianity in the 19th century. Though Mary as *Theotokos* (= God-bearer) was acknowledged as far back as the 4th and 5th centuries, the role of Mary had been greatly enlarged over succeeding centuries. By the 12th century she was believed to be co-redemptrix along with Christ as well as the intercessor for sinners. In 1854, Pius IX declared the official dogma that Mary was wholly free from sin from the moment of her conception (the doctrine of the immaculate conception). Thus, she possessed “fullness of grace” and was immune to sin during her lifetime. Further, she was a perpetual virgin (doctrine of Mary’s eternal virginity), first *in partu* (= Jesus was born without opening any part of her body) and second in that her virginity continued throughout her life. Finally, the teaching that Mary was assumed bodily

into heaven (Assumption of Mary) was promulgated by Pius XII in 1950.¹⁵⁴

The most recent major development in Roman Catholic Christianity has been Vatican Council II, the deliberate effort to renew and bring up to date all aspects of the church's faith and life. Convened in 1962 by John XXIII and reconvened by his successor, Paul VI, Vatican II held four annual sessions in which the council aimed at promoting the unity of all Christians and involving the Roman church in the work of peace, justice and well-being in the world. For the first time, Protestants and Anglicans were explicitly regarded as Christians ("separated brothers") and Eastern Orthodoxy was treated as a direct descendant of the apostles. The mutual excommunications between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, in effect since AD 1054, were abandoned. Though the council continued to affirm that the Roman Church was the means of salvation, it also refused to demand a return of all churches to Rome, but rather, affirmed an open future "tending toward that fullness with which our Lord wants his body to be endowed in the course of time." Reversing centuries of Roman Catholic precedent, Vatican II declared the church to be the whole people of God, both clergy and laity, rather than merely the hierarchy of clerics. It also affirmed a single source of revelation—God in his Word to humans in Christ—as opposed to the two-source theory of Scripture and tradition. The declarations about divine revelation included permission to engage in the historical-critical study of Scripture, the use of the Bible by laypersons, and the use of the vernacular in the mass. Finally, Vatican II affirmed a "hierarchy of truths," as opposed to the longstanding view that all Roman Catholic dogma was at an equal level. This, in turn, made possible new dialogue between Catholics and Protestants which has been ongoing ever since.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ T. Finger, *EDT* (1984) 686.

¹⁵⁵ C. McIntire, *EDT* (1984) 1135-1137; J. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Vatican II* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 491-497.