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# A Study of the Influence of the Doctrine Upon the Expansion of Christianity in the Ancient Church (A.D.33-312)

Benito Perri

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A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF DOCTRINE  
UPON THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY  
IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH (A.D. 33-312)

by

Benito Perri

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

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INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

The Problem

Statement of the problem and purpose of the study. This study seeks to determine what influence theology has had upon the expansion of Christianity during the ancient period of the church, up to A.D. 312.

It is a general and historically accepted fact that in the history of the Christian church missions have advanced in a series of great waves, like the movement of the ocean rising to the gravitational pull of the moon and sun.<sup>1</sup> Some periods have been missionary-minded while other eras of church history were not. For instance, it is generally regarded that the first two centuries were centuries of great missionary outreach. But the eleventh century was almost devoid of missionary interest. Today the church is in the midst of the so-called "Modern Missionary Movement." Why have the past nineteen centuries seen this advance of missions in a series of great waves? These past ebbs and flows of missionary interest are easily noted but the reasons accounting for these high and low points are not so easily ascertained.

Is it possible that theology may have some influence upon this

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Unquenchable Light (New York: Harper and Bro. Pub., 1941), p. XVIII-XIX.



phenomenon? If so — what influence and what theology influenced what type of behavior? Furthermore does this theology then point to what our stand should be if we too want to be missionary or expansive with the Gospel? Are these ebbs and tides fortuitous or does a common pattern run through all?

If theology has no influence, this fact too must be noted and explained from the facts.

Thus, in short, the problem is that there have been high and low points of missionary activity in the history of the church. Hence, this paper will seek to discover just what part, if any, theology has played in this phenomenon.

Justification of the problem. There are many books on missions, many on history, many on theology, and many on methods, procedure and theory of missions but no work, known to this author, which seeks to see the relationship between missionary expansion and theological beliefs. Therefore, it seems justified that there should be such a study in this field.

Limitations of the study. A complete answer to the stated problem would require an exhaustive study of all the high points of missionary outreach, of all the low points and of the main theological positions influential at the time on both the Christian society and on the individual ambassadors of the Gospel. Then the findings of each of these periods would be compared to see if there is any thread of a relationship between a type of theology and the type of missionary outreach which flowed from it.

This plan of course is too exhaustive for the time limits of this paper. It is observed that Latourette wrote his short book on the five



great waves of missionary advance, The Unquenchable Light, only after he had written his voluminous History of the Expansion of Christianity, upon which the former book's conclusions are based.<sup>1</sup> All that historical study was needed, with all its research, documentations, and facts before he felt able to touch on the subject of the great waves of Christian expansion and the great mystery as to their cause.

Therefore, it has been necessary to limit this paper to the first great wave of missionary outreach -- that period of the ancient church from the death of the Master to the edict of Constantine in A.D. 312. It is fitting to end the study at this year, because the once despised faith was then accepted as the religion of the state and the sign of the cross was affixed to the standards of the legions of the Roman Empire. The initial, illegal, persecuted era had passed and the church was to enter into an era in which she walked hand in hand with the state which had once drained her blood.

#### Definition of Terms

Doctrine. The term "doctrine" in this paper, is being used in its broadest sense -- meaning, at the most, the "belief" of the individuals or the community. The terms "theology", "faith" and "dogma" are likewise used in this broad sense to mean "belief" or the concepts of thought about God and spiritual things.

Missionary. The term "missionary", which is from the Latin, and

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Unquenchable Light (New York: Harper Brothers, 1941), p. XIX.

the term "apostle" which is from the Greek mean the same thing. They both are used to mean "one sent out." Thus anyone who was "sent out" to proclaim the Gospel is a "missionary" or an "apostle." This of course would include Jesus who was sent by the Father to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and to all mankind. The term includes the twelve, or eleven, whom Jesus "sent out" to proclaim the kingdom of God upon the earth and salvation which was nigh.

Christianity. The term "Christianity" used in the title of this thesis refers both to the main body of the orthodox church as well as to some groups considered non-orthodox. The term is used loosely to mean all those who accept Jesus as the Christ or Messiah.

#### Personal Reasons for this Study.

The practical, or personal purpose for the writing of this thesis was (1) to acquaint the author with the missionary movements of history. (2) to aid the writer in determining from the facts just what part theology has played in the movement or non-movement of the Good News. (3) to give this student the material from which he may draw conclusions as to what type of theology is most effective in the spreading of the Gospel. (4) to check the student's own life to see where he comes short in his theology or preparation for being an effective harbinger of the precious truth revealed in Jesus Christ. (5) and lastly, to answer the question — "Is missionary zeal dependent upon theology or is the zeal determined by other factors?"

### Preview of Thesis

The procedure. The procedure used in this paper has been to use both primary and secondary sources in the quest for material. The first chapters include an inductive Bible study of the Book of the Acts and several other select New Testament Epistles. After this initial chapter the thesis follows a historical procedure. The works of the original Fathers, many of the past and recent historians, several of the Histories of Doctrine books, and many books on Missions were gleaned for bits of information on the subject.

The advancement of the church in each period is discussed. The theology of the group under discussion summarized, reasons for the expansion drawn forth and the relationship between theology and missions distilled.

Statement and preview of the organization of the thesis. The reader will notice that half of the body of this paper is devoted to the catholic church during these three centuries and the last half of the thesis deals with three so-called heretical groups. These two divisions cover quite well two sides of the expansion of the church in those ancient times. The first half of the thesis gives the reader perspective and the last half gives the reader cautions and warnings. Both are necessary for a complete study. It will be seen that there were many in the "heretical" groups who could be classed as Christians in the broad sense of the term. They too contributed or hindered the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The first part of the chapter on the Apostolic period includes an inductive study of the theology of Acts and an inductive study of how this

theology made its effect felt on the expansion of the faith as evidenced in some of the Epistles of the New Testament.

The second half of the chapter on the Apostolic Period is a discussion based upon both primary and secondary materials which gives a broad picture of the extent, scope and vitality of the apostolic advancement for Christ.

The chapter on the Post-apostolic period is a continued discussion of the primitive church and how it spread and continued the advance. The changes in theology and the effect on the missionary vitality will be noted.

The last chapter discussing the heretical influence upon Christian expansion, will try to find out what relationship there is between theology and expansion among groups which were "off-center." The three representative groups discussed are the Ebionites, Gnostics, and the Monarchians.

The thesis closes with an evaluation and analysis of the influence of theology upon the expansion of the Christian community during the years up to A.D. 312.

The appendices contain the findings from this student's extensive research into the theology, history, and influence of the three heretical groups which were discussed in chapter four.

## CHAPTER II APOSTOLIC PERIOD



## CHAPTER II

### APOSTOLIC PERIOD

#### 1. BIBLICAL STUDY OF THE APOSTOLIC PERIOD

##### a. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS IN THE BOOK OF THE ACTS

The following study is an attempt to show what were the major beliefs of the early apostles and believers as recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

It was the desire of this author to arrive at the belief of the early Christians as recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles in as inductive manner as possible.

The procedure which was followed was first to collect all the sermons and sayings of the Christians as recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles; secondly, to arrange the facts in accordance with their natural occurrence. For instance what was said about "God" in all the sermons were collected under one heading. This procedure was done for every belief which was expressed in the book. Lastly, from this data this author made a summary of the beliefs of the early Christians as recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

The data was arranged under the following headings: (1) What the Christians believed about God, the Holy Spirit, and God's relation to Jesus. The summaries of Jewish history are noted also. (2) What the Christians believed about Jesus' names, His birth, death, resurrection, post-resurrection

appearances, glorification, status in the final judgment and position in relation to their personal salvation. (3) What the Christians in this period believed was their responsibility as "witnesses" and how they held and used the Scriptures in their witnessing.

The data was organized under these headings because of the need for some choice of organization and not because of any special significance. That which is placed first is not, therefore, of more importance than if it had been listed last. All the data was used and none left out.

The study was done in the Revised Standard Version from which the following passages are quoted.

### God

God is creator. The early Christians believed that God made heaven, earth, men and all that there is. He had need of nothing but desired that men should seek after Him, feel after Him and find Him. They believed that God was very close to every human being. It was He who controlled the rains, seasons, and all of life. This God did not dwell in man-made shrines. It was by this Supreme God that they existed and continued to exist.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"...a living God who made the heaven and the earth. . ."(14:15); "...God. . .gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. . ."(14:17); "...The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything, and he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each of us, for 'In him we live and move and are'. . .being then God's offspring. . ."(17:23-29).

Jesus anointed, appointed, established, attested and foreknown by God's will and purpose. The early Christians believed that Jesus was appointed by God as both Lord and Christ in God's foreknowledge plan. Jesus was attested by signs, wonders, power, mighty works and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit. The Christians, as recorded in the book of the Acts, believed that the Holy Spirit was promised by God to all, Jew and Gentile, who will believe, repent, and obey His Son whom God has anointed with the Holy Spirit and whom the Son pours out upon believers. The early Christians had experienced the personal presence of the Holy Spirit which motivated them to preach repentance of sin and faith in Christ as the necessary prerequisite for others receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Summaries of Jewish history. The early Hebrew Christians, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, were very conscious of their past religious history. In chapter seven, Stephen draws a vivid summary of the

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<sup>1</sup>" . . . Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works, and wonders and signs. . . this Jesus, delivered up according to . . . foreknowledge of God. . ." (2:22-23); " . . . God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus. . ." (2:36); " . . . the Christ appointed for you. . ." (3:20); " . . . Jesus, whom Thou didst appoint. . ." (4:27); " . . . God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. . ." (10:38); " . . . whom he appointed. . ." (17:31).

<sup>2</sup>" . . . filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. . ." (2:4); " . . . In last days . . . I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. . ." (2:17); " . . . Jesus. . . received the promise of the Holy Spirit. . . he has poured out. . ." [at Pentecost] (2:33); " . . . Repent. . . in the name of Jesus. . . and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . ." (2:38); " . . . Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. . ." (5:30); " . . . God anointed Jesus. . . with the Holy Spirit. . ." (10:38); " . . . Gentiles should hear the . . . Gospel and believe and God. . . giving them the Holy Spirit. . . just as he did to us. . ." (15:7-8).



past dealings of God with the Hebrew nation. He shows how God had patience with them but that they continually resisted the Holy Spirit and even persecuted the prophets. Stephen then says that Jesus was likewise a prophet, yes the Son of God, whom these same Hebrew people had rejected and killed.

Paul, at Antioch of Pisidia, gave a summary of the Jewish history and related to them how God had led the Jewish nation in the past and had often promised them a messiah.<sup>1</sup> Their own prophets had told them that a Saviour was to come. This Saviour Paul was proclaiming to them -- Jesus.

### Jesus

Names given to Jesus. The names which the early Christians gave to Jesus give hints to their concept of His person and mission. To them Jesus was Lord, Christ, Saviour, Holy One, Leader, Son of God, Lord of All, and the Author of life.<sup>2</sup>

Birth; raised up. The apostolic Christians believed that God had raised up Moses in order that He might deliver His people from wickedness. This Jesus was sent to the Jews first to bless them and turn them away

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 13:16-25, R.S.V.

<sup>2</sup>"Jesus", "Lord", or "Christ" (1:24, 2:32, 2:39, 4:2, 4:11, 4:13, 4:18, 5:40, 7:59, 9:34, 11:20, 17:18, 18:25, 20:21, 21:13); ". . .both Lord and Christ, this Jesus. . ." (2:36, cf. 3:20); ". . .Jesus Christ of Nazareth. . ." (3:6, see 4:10, 6:14); ". . .Holy and Righteous One. . ." (3:14, 7:52); ". . .Author of Life. . ." (3:15); ". . .Leader and Saviour. . ." (5:30); ". . .Jesus as the Christ. . ." (5:42, 9:20, 17:3); ". . .Jesus Christ is the Son of God. . ." (8:37, 9:20); ". . .Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. . ." (10:36); ". . .showing. . .that the Christ was Jesus. . ." (18:28); ". . .Just One. . ." (22:14).

from evil. Thus they believed that all should listen to Jesus because He had a message of eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

Crucifixion, death and burial. The early Christians believed and taught that Jesus died on the cross as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah and other ancient writers. This Jesus was to be betrayed and then murdered by hanging Him on the tree. After his death Jesus was laid in a tomb. He had been killed by the Jewish rulers who had turned Jesus over to the ruler, Pilate. These early believers thought that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and shed his blood for the salvation of souls and the building of the Church of the Lord. It was necessary for Christ to suffer and that by being the first to rise from the dead he would be their assurance of also rising from the dead. Jesus was to proclaim light to all the people and not alone to the Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Resurrection, raised up, not held by death. The book of the Acts

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<sup>1</sup>"...God will raise up for you a prophet. . .you shall listen to him. . ." (3:22); "...God having raised up his servant. . ." (3:25); "...sent him to you first. . .[to Jews] . . .to bless you in turning everyone of you from wickedness. . ." (3:26).

<sup>2</sup>"...Jesus whom you crucified. . ." (2:36); "...Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied. . ." (3:13); "...You denied the Holy and Righteous One. . ." (3:14); "...killed the Author of life. . ." (3:15); "...stone rejected by you builders. . ." (4:11); "...you intend to bring this man's blood upon us. . ." [High priest speaking] (5:28); "...whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. . ." (5:30); "...you betrayed and murdered. . ." (7:52); "...sheep led to the slaughter. . ." [quoted from Isaiah] (8:32); "...his life is taken up from the earth. . ." [quoted from Isaiah] (8:33); "...put him to death by hanging him on a tree . . ." (10:39); "...rulers. . .asked Pilate to have him killed. . ." (13:27,29); "...took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. . ." (13:29); "...necessary for Christ to suffer. . ." (17:3); "...church . . .he obtained. . .with his own blood. . ." (20:28); "...Christ must suffer. . ." (26:23).



shows that the early Christians believed it was necessary for Christ to rise from the dead, as the Prophets had testified, in order that they might also have the hope in God of a future resurrection. They further believed that: Jesus could not be held by death but had loosed the pangs of death; that the resurrection would be for both the just and the unjust; that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead; that his flesh did not see corruption; and that He was not abandoned to Hades. The disciples were convinced that they were to be witnesses of the fact of Christ's resurrection for He had truly risen on the third day and had later appeared to man. They knew that David had foreseen the resurrection, that it was by the power of God, and that it would give them assurance since Christ was the first one to rise from the dead. He would precede them. When the apostles chose a successor to fill the place of Judas, the newly chosen disciple was to have been a witness of the resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"...be a...witness to his resurrection..." [choice of Matthias] (1:22); "...God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death...not...held by it..." (2:24); "...David...foresaw...the resurrection of Christ...that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption..." (2:31); "...This Jesus God raised up..." (2:32); "...God raised from the dead...we are witnesses..." (3:15); "...proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead..." (4:2); "...God raised from the dead..." (4:10); "...testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus..." (4:33); "...God of our fathers raised Jesus..." (5:30); "...God raised him on the third day..." (10:40); "...ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead..." (10:41); "...God raised him from the dead..." (13:30); "...by raising Jesus..." (13:33); "...Thou wilt not let my Holy One see corruption..." [quoted from David] (13:35); "...he whom God raised up saw no corruption..." (13:37); "...necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead..." (17:3); "...he preached Jesus and the resurrection..." [Paul in Athens] (17:18); "...when they heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked..." [in Athens] (17:32); "...with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial..." (23:6); "...having a hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust..." (24:15); "...Jesus..." Paul asserted to be alive..." (25:19); "...why is it thought incredible

Post-resurrection appearances. In regard to the post-resurrection appearances the earliest Christians believed that Christ was raised from the dead by the Father and was made manifest to those who had been chosen by God as witnesses. At first it was those who had seen Jesus, who were the witnesses. The early followers were convinced that Jesus was indeed living because he had appeared to them many times and had come to live in them.<sup>1</sup>

Exalted. The first century Christians, according to the book of Acts, believed that Jesus was exalted and glorified, as Leader and Savior, and that He will sit at the right hand of God until all has been fulfilled which was spoken by God. They believed that Jesus was exalted to the position which was at the right hand of God.<sup>2</sup>

Destruction, judgment. The early Christian belief in regard to the judgment was that God had appointed Christ to be the judge of both the just and the unjust in the future judgment. He was to judge the living and the dead on an appointed day in the future. Those who were believed to be deserving of destruction in the final day were those souls who did

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...that God raises the dead?"(26:8); "...being the first to rise from the dead. . ."(26:23).

<sup>1</sup>"...God raised him. . .and made him manifest. . .to us who were chosen by God as witnesses. . ."(10:41); "...raised him. . .and for many days he appeared to those who are now his witnesses. . ."(13:30-31).

<sup>2</sup>"...being. . .exalted at the right hand of God. . ."(2:32); "...glorified his servant Jesus. . ."(3:13); "...heaven must receive until the time for the establishing all that God spoke."(3:21); "...God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior. . ."(5:31).

"not listen" to the heavenly appointed prophet -- Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Salvation. The book of Acts shows us that the primitive Christians believed that God had appointed Jesus to be the Savior of all men, Jew and Gentile. There was no other name under heaven given among men whereby one might be saved but the Lord Jesus Christ. One was saved by repentance of sin, believing in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and turning from wickedness unto righteousness. Baptism was to follow this confession of the heart which had been cleansed by faith. Salvation freed them from that which the law was unable to free them from, namely death and sin. They believed that "whoever" called upon the Lord in faith could be saved and have their sins blotted out.

Many were healed of sicknesses because of their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The early believers felt that they had been sent to bring salvation to the ends of the earth so that many might come with repentant hearts, turn from their wicked ways, believe in the Lord and be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Forgiveness of sin, they believed, came by faith alone, whereupon God cleansed their hearts and they were empowered to lead a righteous and acceptable life, performing "deeds worthy of their

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<sup>1</sup>"...every soul that does not listen to that prophet[Christ] shall be destroyed from the people. . ." (3:23); "...he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. . ." (10:42); "...he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man [Christ] whom he appointed. . ." (17:31); "...there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. . ." (24:14); "...Paul. . .argued about . . .future judgment. . ." [Before Felix] (24:25).



repentance."<sup>1</sup>

### Disciples

As Witnesses. The early apostles felt they were to be "witnesses" unto all the earth of the historical fact of the life of Christ, the

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<sup>1</sup>"...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. . ." (2:21); "...Repent, and be baptized. . .in the name of Jesus. . .for the forgiveness of your sins. . ." (2:37-38); "...Save yourselves from this crooked generation. . ." (2:40); "...Faith. . .through Jesus has given this man perfect health. . ." (3:16); "...repent. . .and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out. . ." (3:19); "...to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness. . ." (3:26); "...there is salvation in no one else. . ." (4:12); "...no other name under heaven. . .by which we might be saved. . ." (4:12); "...God exalted him . . .as. . .Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins . . ." (5:30); "...they [Samaritians] believed Philip as he preached the good news. . .they were baptized. . ." (8:12); "...Repent therefore of this wickedness. . .that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. . ." [to Simon] (8:22); "...The eunuch believed and wanted to be baptized. He said 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'. . ." (8:37, R.S.V. margin); "...many believed. . ." [Because of the healing of Dorcas] (9:42); "...any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him . . ." (10:35); "...declare. . .a message by which you will be saved. . ." (11:13); "...forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be free by the law of Moses. . ." (13:38-39); "...I have sent you to. . .bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth. . ." (13:47); "...through many tribulations we may enter the kingdom. . ." (14:22); "...he . . .cleansed their hearts by faith. . ." (15:9); "...we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will. . ." [Jews and Gentiles] (15:16); "...Servants. . .who proclaim the way of salvation. . ." [said of Paul and Silas by the slave girl with a spirit of divination] (16:17); "...What must I do to be saved? . . .they said 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. . ." (16:30); "...he commands all men everywhere to repent. . ." (17:23); "...[Paul was] testifying both to Jews and Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. . ." (20:21); "...Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name. . ." (22:16); "...[Felix heard Paul speak on] faith in Jesus Christ. . ." (24:24); "...to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." (26:18); "...declare first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their

crucifixion, the resurrection, the exaltation and the forgiveness wrought through Jesus. This was the message by which men could be saved, thus it was "good news" and should be proclaimed. These early Christians felt the compulsion of God was upon them to be witnesses to all men of the Christ-event. They were to speak of that which they had seen and heard. They were to give personal witnesses to the resurrection, crucifixion, exaltation and forgiveness of sins. This was stressed again and again in the book of the Acts. The early "witnesses" preached boldly in the name of Jesus because they knew that they had been "chosen by God as witnesses" and had been commanded to preach and testify that Jesus was the one whom God had ordained to be the savior and judge. They proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ and sought to give Jew and Gentile the "whole counsel of God" in regard to the person of Christ, the Godhead and the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

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repentance."(26:20); ". . .Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles."(26:23).

<sup>1</sup>". . .You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. . ." (1:8); ". . .[Choice of a successor to Judas was to be] one of the men who had accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us -- one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. . ." (1:21-22); ". . .This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. . ." (2:32); ". . .whom God raised. . .to this we are witnesses. . ." (3:14-15); ". . .we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. . ." (4:19); ". . .apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection. . ." (4:33); ". . .we are witnesses to these things. . .[Resurrection, crucifixion, exaltation and forgiveness] " see 5:30-31 (5:32); ". . .did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. . ." (5:42); ". . .devote ourselves to. . .the ministry of the word. . ." (6:4); ". . .Philip. . .proclaimed to them the Christ. . ." (8:5); ". . .testified and spoken word of the Lord. . ." (8:25); ". . .proclaimed Jesus. . ." (9:20); ". . .preached boldly in the name of Jesus. . ." (9:27); ". . .we are witnesses to all that he did. . ." [hanging on a tree, resurrection] (10:39); ". . .chosen by God as witnesses. . ." (10:41); ". . .commanded us to preach. . .and testify that he is the



Use of prophets or the word. The early disciples knew the Old Testament and quoted from the Law and the Prophets frequently to prove that Jesus was the Christ promised from of old times. The Old Testament told of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ making His enemies His footstool, that Christ would suffer, be condemned, rise from the dead, and provide salvation for all, Gentiles included. All this was foretold to be through Christ's sacrifice. The early witnesses of Christ used the scriptures in both teaching and preaching. The early believers quoted from many parts of the Old Testament to prove the messiahship of Jesus. For instance, in Acts they quoted David, Joel, the Psalms, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Habakkuk, Amos, and Jeremiah directly while referring to many other Old Testament books and writers indirectly or generally. The statement was made that "all the prophets" proclaimed that the Christ was to suffer. This no doubt does not mean every single prophet but "all" in the sense of

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one ordained by God to be judge. . ." [and through whom we have forgiveness of sins - verse 43] (10:41); ". . . appeared to those. . . who are now his witnesses. . ." (11:13); ". . . we bring you the good news. . . promised. . . by raising Jesus. . ." (13:32); ". . . preached the Gospel. . ." (14:7); ". . . bring you good news. . ." (14:15); ". . . preached the Gospel. . ." (14:20); ". . . this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ. . ." [see also 17:8 and 17:23] (17:3); ". . . Paul was. . . preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. . ." (18:5); ". . . testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. . ." (20:21); ". . . testify to the gospel of the grace of God. . ." (20:24); ". . . declaring to you the whole counsel of God. . ." (20:26); ". . . you will be a witness for him to all men. . ." (22:15); ". . . testify . . . about me. . ." (22:17); ". . . testifying both to small and great. . . that the Christ must suffer. . . first to rise. . . proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles. . ." (26:22-23); ". . . testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus. . ." (28:23); ". . . preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (28:31).



all types and during all ages of Hebrew prophecy.

The preaching of the early church was cast in the shadow of the Old Testament. Paul, Stephen, Philip, Apollos and no doubt most of the other Christians of this period appealed to the Old Testament scripture to prove that Jesus was the Christ who had been promised from ancient times.

The Hebrew prophets had even foretold that the Messiah would bring light to the Gentiles also and not only to the Jews.

The Christians seemed to be keenly interested in the Word of God (the Old Testament) and some, like Apollos, were "well versed" in the sacred writ. They also used the words of Jesus, in their preaching holding them, it seems, as of the same authority as the Old Testament writings.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"...scripture had to be fulfilled. . ." [In regard to Judas] (1:16); "...spoken by the prophet Joel. . ." [Peter at Pentecost] (2:16); quotes from David concerning the "Holy One" (2:25); "...David. . .fore-saw. . .resurrection. . ." (2:31); quotes David about the Lord making his enemies his footstool (2:34); "...The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob . . ." (3:13); "...God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ should suffer. . ." (3:18); "...God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. . ." (3:21); quotes Moses as saying every soul should listen to the new prophet to come. (3:22); "...all the prophets . . .from Samuel. . .also proclaimed these days. . ." (3:24); "...sons of the prophets and of the covenant. . ." (3:25); "...devoted to. . . ministry of the word. . ." (6:4); Stephen knew his Old Testament (7); "...announced beforehand. . ." (7:52); "...those scattered. . .went about preaching the word. . ." (8:4); Philip began with the scriptures in talking to the Eunuch. (8:35); "...prophets bear witness. . ." (10:43); "...proclaimed the word of God in the Synagogues. . ." (13:5); "...utterances of the prophets fulfilled there by condemning him. . ." (13:27); "...fulfilled all that was written by him. . ." (13:29); quoted David (13:33-36); quoted Habakkuk (13:41); quoted Isaiah (13:47); "...The prophets agree. . . [quotes Amos, Jeremiah and Isaiah as saying] . . .the rest of the men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name. . ." (15:15); "...teaching and preaching the word of the Lord . . ." (15:35); "...spoke the word of the Lord to him and all that were in his house. . ." (16:32); [at Thessalonica in a synagogue] "...Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. . ." (17:1-3); [Beroeans] "...received

### Summary

A summary of the beliefs of the early church, as received from the words recorded in the Acts, may be stated as:

God is the creator of everything, needs nothing and yet desires that man seek and find Him. Thus, God appointed Christ from the beginning and annointed and empowered Him with the Holy Spirit. The Jewish history points out God's leading of men in the direction of obedience to Him.

Jesus is called not only "Christ" but "Lord." The name "Holy One" ties Him to Old Testament prophecy. Jesus was brought forth by God, killed without cause by those He was seeking to deliver, and was buried. Jesus rose from the dead, with many witnesses to the fact. His post-resurrection appearances sealed this fact in the minds of more followers. God exalted Jesus to his right hand from where He will execute judgment. Through Jesus, Jew and Gentile now have access to God if they will put their trust in Him, repent, turn from evil ways, be baptized and do deeds fit for righteousness. Salvation is for all through faith, and we are freed from all that the law was unable to free us from, namely sin and death.

The disciples were motivated not so much by a creed or doctrine but

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the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. . ."(17:11); quotes Isaiah (17:29); ". . .Apollos. . .well versed in the scriptures. . ."(18:24); [Apollos] ". . .powerfully confuted the Jews. . .showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. . ."(18:28); ". . .remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'. . ."(20:35); Paul uses the law in answering the council in Jerusalem (23:3,5); ". . .believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets. . ."[Paul before Felix] (24:14); Based his defense before Agrippa on his belief being in accord with the Prophets and Moses and what they spoke concerning the Christ. He pressed home - "Do you believe the prophets?"(26:22,27); In Rome Paul tried to convince the Jews about Jesus as being the Christ, from the "Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (28:23); quotes from Isaiah and Psalms (28:26-27).



by the glorious fact that they had "witnessed" the Christ Himself. They felt an inner compulsion to preach the Christ-event to all who would listen. Personal experience meant much to them as witnesses. For instance, Paul repeats his conversion experience over and over. He had met the Lord personally! They were so overcome by the total Christ-event that almost all of their preaching revolved around the historical event of Christ's life, death, resurrection and message of salvation. Yet it was not the historical events alone which gave the early church its dynamic. It was not until the Christ had been enthroned in their hearts by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that their vitality became noticeable. It was only after Christ was in their hearts that they were able to be bold witnesses to the far corners of the empire. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit they had been frightened, disillusioned men.

Their inner compulsion was the presence of the living Christ in their hearts and lives. This was a rational certainty to them because of the change wrought in their own lives and attested to by signs and wonders wrought at their hands. Men were healed, souls were saved and demons cast out. The peace of God filled their own lives. It was also fortified by the total historical Christ-event. Their faith cannot be divorced from the historical event. They brought this truth of Christ home to the Jews by appealing to their own scriptures and prophets. They bore it home to the Gentiles by declaring the Creator-God who was not made with hands and did not need anything from man but had died to save them all.

## b. A STUDY OF SELECTED NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

### Introduction

In the study of the Book of the Acts the teaching of the new-born church was discussed but not its expansion. This section will deal with the letters written to two of the churches which were founded by the missionaries who held the doctrine already described.

It was not possible to take all the letters of the New Testament and give them an exhaustive study. It was necessary to be selective. It is assumed that in the main the basic doctrine was the same as that already described, even though in many of the letters the doctrine is somewhat advanced and expanded.

The main interest in this section was to see just how this doctrine or teaching affected individual churches to be expansive or non-expansive with the Good News.

When the student turns from the Gospels to the rest of the New Testament he becomes aware that it consists of little else than the accounts of missionary journeys, letters from missionaries to their converts, and a prophecy of the complete triumph of the Gospel. It was seen from Acts that the substance of the missionary message that had power to win the world was the message of: Jesus Christ, crucified, risen from the dead, and now living in vital union with His believers who were saved by Christ's sacrifice for them. It is realized that just more than a correct theology was needed in order to give Christianity its powerful dynamic. The rest of this Apostolic section will seek out what this "extra"

was in the lives of the early believers.

This section on the letters to two New Testament churches will attempt to show how the teachings of the early church helped or hindered individual groups or congregations in their commission of carrying the gospel into the Roman world.

The two letters to the church at Corinth were chosen because they present a church which appears to be "non-missionary" in its main emphasis.

The two epistles to the church of the Thessalonians are discussed because this author feels that this church represents a "missionary" type of church. The Thessalonians seemed to be growing-outward while the Corinthian church seemed to overly concerned with internal problems so that they were greatly hindered in the spreading of the message to others.

#### Church of Corinth

The two epistles to the Corinthians give an inner view of a church which seemed to be stymied in their attempt to spread the Gospel. Paul and his company had planted the church by "testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus."<sup>1</sup> The Jews reviled and opposed them so that then Paul turned to the Gentiles. Paul stayed among them and taught the Word of God for a year and a half yet without imparting to them, it seems, the same passion which controlled his life.

Perhaps the main reason the Corinthian church was not expanding was that it was too involved with internal problems. In the first letter

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 18:5, R.S.V.

of Paul to the Corinthians it is learned that there was "jealousy and strife among"<sup>1</sup> them. Paul still calls them "babes in Christ" and said he had to feed them with milk and not solid food for they were not ready to receive it.<sup>2</sup> Paul says that some of the Corinthians were "arrogant,"<sup>3</sup> some were practicing immorality of a base type,<sup>4</sup> and they boasted about this sin.<sup>5</sup> He also gave the church instruction in how to deal with grievances so that they would not be lead into lawsuits,<sup>6</sup> marriage problems,<sup>7</sup> food offered to idols,<sup>8</sup> Lord Supper problems,<sup>9</sup> and problems in connection with spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps a very important internal problem was that of the divisions which were among them. For they surely had missed the spiritual message of the Gospel when they split up into parties, some claiming "I belong to Paul" others claiming "I belong to Apollos", others "I belong to Cephas" and still others "I belong to Christ."<sup>11</sup> They surely had missed the message of the Lordship of Christ which Paul had preached to them.

The second letter to the Corinthians likewise notes their pre-occupation with internal problems. In chapter six he deals with the problem of not being mismated with unbelievers. In chapter eleven verse

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<sup>1</sup>I Corinthians 3:3, R.S.V.    <sup>2</sup>I Corinthians 3:1, R.S.V.

<sup>3</sup>I Corinthians 4:18, R.S.V.    <sup>4</sup>I Corinthians 5:1.

<sup>5</sup>I Corinthians 5:6.    <sup>6</sup>I Corinthians 6.    <sup>7</sup>I Corinthians 7.

<sup>8</sup>I Corinthians 8.    <sup>9</sup>I Corinthians 11.    <sup>10</sup>I Corinthians 12 & 14.

<sup>11</sup>I Corinthians 1:12, R.S.V., cf. 3:5 and 11:18.



thirteen Paul states that false prophets had crept into the church. He indicates that some "have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced."<sup>1</sup>

These passages show that the Corinthian church was spending most of its energies on divisions, arguments, marital and theological questions. Of course missionary zeal would flag in such situations. They would have to learn to stop quarreling and to center their affections on Christ again if they ever hoped to be an effective witness of the Gospel to needy mankind.

Paul's missionary zeal, nevertheless, remained hot. These two epistles give us some clues as to the motivating force behind his concern for the lost. Paul testified that:

"... Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."<sup>2</sup>

Paul found out that it pleased God to save those who believed through the folly of what he preached and that which was folly was the preaching of the cross. For Paul states that he preached "Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles."<sup>3</sup> Further, Paul states that:

"When I came to you. . . I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God. in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>II Corinthians 12:21, R.S.V.    <sup>2</sup>I Corinthians 1:17, R.S.V.

<sup>3</sup>I Corinthians 1:23 cf 1:18, R.S.V.    <sup>4</sup>I Corinthians 2:1-2, R.S.V.

Paul says that it is the Holy Spirit which reveals the truth to men.<sup>1</sup> He shows the total uniqueness of Christ by stating that "No other foundation can one lay that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> This is the foundation upon which Paul sought to build, rather than on other men's foundations.<sup>3</sup> He had received a commission from God to build on that foundation alone.<sup>4</sup>

Paul felt that he was a steward of the mysteries of God<sup>5</sup> and he felt compelled to preach the Gospel. There was laid upon him a great necessity to get the Gospel out to lost men and he felt a terrible "woe" upon him if he did not preach the riches of Christ. This, perhaps, is a clue. Men during this age were zealous when they personally felt the responsibility of the commission with which they had been intrusted.<sup>6</sup>

The preaching of the Gospel was to them a burning inner passion which had to be satisfied with action. Paul did not consider himself just another "peddler" of the word of God but was a sincere man "commissioned by God" to speak of Christ.<sup>7</sup> Their sufficiency was from God who had qualified them "to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit;. . .the Spirit gives life."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I Corinthians 2:10.    <sup>2</sup>I Corinthians 3:11, R.S.V.

<sup>3</sup>In Romans 15:20, R.S.V., Paul had stated that he wanted "to preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named lest I build on another man's foundation."

<sup>4</sup>I Corinthians 3:10.    <sup>5</sup>I Corinthians 4:1.    <sup>6</sup>I Corinthians 9:16-17.

<sup>7</sup>II Corinthians 2:17, R.S.V. cf., I Corinthians 9:17, Galatians 2:7, and I Thessalonians 2:4 on "Commission" or "Entrusted."

<sup>8</sup>II Corinthians 3:5-6, R.S.V.



Paul states that he and his company preach, ". . .not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake."<sup>1</sup> They were able to do this because:

"The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."<sup>2</sup>

Paul was acutely aware that he had been reconciled to Christ and that he had been given this ministry of reconciliation as a divine task.<sup>3</sup>

"So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on the behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>4</sup>

Paul gives us an interesting statement in II Corinthians 10:15 where he says that as their (the Corinthians) faith increases, so Paul's field of ministry among them would be greatly enlarged. He here suggests that the success of the expansion of his ministry is contingent upon their faith. He hoped to preach in lands beyond them to other peoples. Paul's vision was always "beyond." Yet he sought to have the present flock built up in the faith and have them back him and get fully engaged in the Gospel advance.

Paul would "most gladly spend and be spent" for their souls.<sup>5</sup>

Looking, in summary, at the Corinthian church it can be seen that they had been diverted from the external proclamation of the Gospel to the

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<sup>1</sup>II Corinthians 4:5, R.S.V.    <sup>2</sup>II Corinthians 5:14, R.S.V.

<sup>3</sup>II Corinthians 5:18    <sup>4</sup>II Corinthians 5:20-21, R.S.V.

<sup>5</sup>II Corinthians 13:15, R.S.V.

internal problems of a lesser character. Yet Paul stood among them as the Spiritual Father seeking to bring these "children" into full maturity and wished to have them carry their responsibilities in the Lord. Paul's missionary zeal was seen in these books as never before. He preached the same Christo-centric message as was seen in the Book of the Acts and yet there was something more than that. Correct theology was needed, indeed, but he had a life, a vitality, a spirit, and inner compulsion that gave power, relevance and pointedness to his orthodox theology. What was this intangible something? It is hard to identify. Nevertheless, it was real to Paul. It was closely tied up with his personal encounter with the Lord. He always fortified his messages with his personal testimony. In Second Corinthians Paul again tells of his Damascus Road experience (he told it three times in the Book of Acts and repeated it in several other epistles). Second Corinthians is all bound up with the personal experiences of Paul. Theology was correct in his life but the existential encounter with the Risen Lord seemed to be his dynamic.

Raymond Frame gives us his view of the motivation of Paul in his little tract, How to Test Your Missionary Motives:

"Paul declared that the thing which motivated his missionary work was the constraining love of Christ. It was not so much his love for the lost — though Paul did have a great love for men — but it was Christ's love for men that drove him to such tireless efforts to get the message of reconciliation out to the ends of the earth. He regarded himself as a voice only, a voice crying out in Christ's stead. The One who was really concerned about men's lost estate was Christ himself; Paul was only His messenger."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond Frame, How to Test Your Missionary Motives (Philadelphia: China Inland Mission, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, n.d.), p. 3.

The impression that Paul's ministry made upon those who heard him speak was not so much of Paul's love for them as it was of the fact that Christ loved them. This seemed to be the message of Paul -- he wanted all men to know that Christ loved them and had given Himself for them.

### The Thessalonian Church

When Paul had founded the Thessalonian church he had caused a great upheaval in the city. For he argued with the people from the scriptures "for three weeks, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ'."<sup>1</sup> Many devout Greeks and leading women believed the Word but the Jews rejected the Gospel. Paul was finally chased from the city for proclaiming Jesus as the King.

Nevertheless this church continued to grow even after its founder had left them. When one studies the two letters of Paul to the Thessalonians he is impressed by the many words of commendation which Paul gives them for the way in which they have continued to spread the Good News. Yes they had internal troubles, just like the Corinthian church, but they did not let these overcome their main love and passion for righteousness. The church was bothered with busybodies, fanatics and loafers.<sup>2</sup>

Their faith was of such a character that they became an example to the neighbouring areas and regions. Paul could say of them that: "Not

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:3, R.S.V.

<sup>2</sup> I Thessalonians 4:11 and II Thessalonians 3:11.



only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere. . ."<sup>1</sup> The Thessalonians loved "all the brethren throughout Macedonia"<sup>2</sup> because the word of the Lord had first run its race and won in their own hearts. It had sped on and triumphed among them and Paul was seeking their prayers that the Gospel might have an equal success in other communities.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons why this church triumphed over its internal problems and became so expansive and such an example to believers and pagans alike are very interesting. (1) The Thessalonians had accepted the Gospel "not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."<sup>4</sup> Notice that it was not just a mental acceptance of the doctrine but an acceptance which was sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit and accepted by the total personality — "with full conviction." (2) They became imitators of the apostles who in turn had been imitators of the Lord.<sup>5</sup> (3) They received the Word of God in "much affliction" but with a "joy inspired by the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup> Likewise they received the word of God, preached by the apostle, not as the word of men but as what it really was — "The Word of God."<sup>7</sup> (4) Lastly, these Thessalonians were growing in the Lord rather than regressing into Judaistic quarrels which brought

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<sup>1</sup>I Thessalonians 1:7-8, R.S.V.    <sup>2</sup>I Thessalonians 4:10, R.S.V.

<sup>3</sup>II Thessalonians 3:1.    <sup>4</sup>I Thessalonians 1:5, R.S.V.

<sup>5</sup>Note how the word "imitators" or "example" appears in I Thessalonians 1:6, 1:7, 2:13, and II Thessalonians 3:7, 3:9.

<sup>6</sup>I Thessalonians 1:6, R.S.V.    <sup>7</sup>I Thessalonians 2:13, R.S.V.

no edification or growth. Timothy brought Paul the good news of their "faith and love" and how they "remembered" Paul on his journeys.<sup>1</sup> Paul was able to give thanks on account of them when he heard Timothy's report because their,

"faith is growing abundantly and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing . . .steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring."<sup>2</sup>

They were remaining true and yet growing in love and faith. This perhaps is an important clue to the relationship of theology to the expansion of the church. Correctness of theology is needed, yes, but likewise growth in the virtues of God and the power of the Holy Spirit are needed. This church seemed convinced that God had spoken to them through the messengers, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. They were conscious of the task which they had yet to accomplish before the coming "Day of the Lord." Thus, God had spoken and given them a commission. They were internally driven by love to want to accomplish His task of proclaiming salvation to all men.

#### Summary of the New Testament Study

It was seen that the apostles had a unity of doctrine in spite of the fact that there was an absence of fixed patterns of thought. They had one gospel with a variety of presentations which sprang from a variety of experience and temperament and the demands of different situations in which the message was proclaimed. The apostles did not intend to give the church a creed but allowed freedom of interpretation when it was ruled by the Spirit of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>I Thessalonians 3:6, R.S.V.      <sup>2</sup>II Thessalonians 1:3-4, R.S.V.

It was seen that their belief was based on the Word of God as it gave them truth about God through the means of direct revelation. The message which the New Testament missionary preached was not bound by a creedal form, was not stereotyped, nor did it have a fixed verbal form. No sermon, contained in the New Testament, fully expresses the whole message of the church and seldom do two sermons express the truth in the same way though they all express the central truths. What were these central truths? They are expressed well by Weatherspoon, with whom this author's findings correspond very closely.

"(1) Embedded firmly in the message was the conviction that the age of the Messiah had come. The day of redemption. . . had at last arrived.  
 . . . . .

(2) This fulfillment was realized in Jesus. . . . Peter said 'Thou art the Christ the son of the living God'. . . . In the most real sense he [Jesus] was their message."<sup>1</sup>

Weatherspoon then lists the elements of the life of Jesus which he considers central. They express well what this chapter also has discovered.

"(1) They kept alive as an integral part of the good news the story of his life and ministry.  
 . . . . .

(2) This climax and completion they saw in the crucifixion and resurrection. Here was the heart, the focus, the glowing center of their message. It is a notable fact that although all the elements of the message were never in a single sermon the cross and the Risen Living Christ were never absent.

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<sup>1</sup>Jesse Burton Weatherspoon, Sent Forth to Preach, Studies in Apostolic Preaching (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), pp. 81-84.



.....

(3) An integral part of the proclamation of the Resurrection was the gospel of the Exalted Living Christ.

.....

(4) In the gospel was, also the expected return of the Lord in glory to judge the world. . . .

(5) On the basis of these facts and sure hopes, and on the condition of repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord, rested the further gospel of personal salvation. If men would repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. . . the blessing of his salvation would be theirs. This rings through all the preaching.

.....

It was this one central message with the fullness and finality of its meaning that became in the first century the most dynamic, most creative force in the world."<sup>1</sup>

This then was the doctrinal expression of the earliest church.

Yet the problem still remains to be answered -- What gave them such power and such a desire to be "missionary" in their outlook and outreach?

First, they were from the beginning apostles -- sent men. They had been entrusted with a commission by the king of a kingdom in which they were citizens and which was not of this earth. They were just pilgrims. They were sent to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the wicked generations of men. In this they were following the example of Jesus who was "sent" by the Father.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-90, passim.

Second, they were not prepared (even after their long theological training under the Master) until they had been empowered from on high. To receive Christ's gospel and teachings were not enough. They had to tarry until they received the heaven-sent dynamic. At Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Spirit who was ever to be present with them. To try and explain the life of the early church apart from this would be folly. It cannot be understood apart from the vital presence of the Spirit of God. Weatherspoon says that after Pentecost they were seized with "a passion of utterance". The commission of Jesus took fire in their hearts, and from that day making Christ known and pressing his claims upon men became their supreme business."<sup>1</sup>

The early church was possessed not with the factual doctrine of the Holy Spirit but with the actual experience of His presence and power. It was this dynamic of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the reality of the very presence of the Living Christ, and the keen consciousness of their mission to reach "all men" which thrust these fire-brands among the thistles of the world to burn a path of righteousness for the day of the coming of their Lord. "All" could be saved thus "all" must hear from the lips of these "witnesses."

Their preaching was born of an experience with Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God himself which made them "witnesses" to the work of God in their own lives. Their gospel was very personal and they could cry "This wonderful thing has happened to me - yes me - and it can happen to you

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 47.



too." They also based their experience upon the historical fact of the Christ-event and the prophecy of scripture. These early missionaries preached in terms of a Person and not only theology. Weatherspoon also notes this of them when he says:

"Christianity is not a theology - period. It is also a Person. It is more than ideas or facts (even facts about a person) to be believed. It is a Person to be believed, trusted and obeyed."<sup>1</sup>

These early Christians were living examples of a "living sacrifice" of which God highly approved. Their doctrine was living, personal and expressive through faith, intent, thought, feelings and deeds.

By preaching the gospel of the living Lord in a personal context, the message had personal appeal and meaning to those that heard. The Cross, Resurrection, Crucifixion, Kingdom and all the Christian truths became vitally personal to all. This perhaps gives the inner reason for the spread of the Gospel in the ancient church and its relation to their theology.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

## 2. HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE APOSTOLIC PERIOD

### Missionary Effort

Introduction. The proper starting point of any discussion of missions would of necessity be the Old Testament and the Jewish concept of its mission in the plan of God. As stated by Barnes:

"The missions which have sprung from the stock of the Messiah are rooted in the missions of the Messianic Race. . . .The Law was a tutor to lead, not only the Hebrews, but also the heathen, to Christ."<sup>1</sup>

But a detailed study of the Jewish concept of its mission is out of the range of this study.

The next events which should be included in this study are the missionary endeavors of Christ himself.

"So all-prevading is the missionary atmosphere of his [Jesus] life and teaching that if there were no missionary commands, the necessity of missions would yet be laid upon his followers."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus was concerned with the mission of His Father. He told of this purpose when He said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which

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<sup>1</sup>Lemuel Call Barnes, Two Thousand Years of Missions Before Cary (Based upon and embodying many of the earliest extent accounts) (Philadelphia: American Baptist Pub. Society, 1900), pp. 30-32.

<sup>2</sup>Helen Barrett Montgomery, From Jerusalem to Jerusalem (North Cambridge: Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1929), p. 18.

was lost."<sup>1</sup> Again he said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."<sup>2</sup> Jesus was a missionary himself, as these passages show. He then called others to this important task by saying, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."<sup>3</sup> His view was universal, for he said, "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>4</sup> To make a more detailed study of the missionary views of Jesus, is not the major subject of this paper. It is sufficient that it be noticed that the Master Himself was concerned that all men should hear about the kingdom of God, thus showing his concern about the expansion of the gospel.

This chapter will be mainly concerned with an investigation about the expansion of Christianity during the Apostolic period. Historians, ancient fathers and other sources will be reviewed, and insights gleaned on what they tell us about the relationship between expansion and theology in the Apostolic Church.

Sources. As Waite indicates, one of the striking things to the historian is that when he wants to study the first hundred and seventy years of the Christian religion he is confronted with a dearth of material. He suggests, however, that a frame-work of the orthodox religion can be pieced together, just as the scientist uses a few bones to construct the entire anatomy of some animal.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 19:10, K.J.V.    <sup>2</sup>John 6:38, K.J.V.

<sup>3</sup>Matthew 4:19, K.J.V.    <sup>4</sup>Matthew 8:11, K.J.V.

<sup>5</sup>Charles B. Waite, History of the Christian Religion to the Year Two Hundred (Chicago: C. V. Waite and Co., 1908), pp. 485-86.

The sources from which information is obtainable concerning the church during the first three centuries may here be noted, as given by Raidabaugh:

- "1. The four Gospels, which bring down the history to A.D. 33.
2. The Acts of the Apostles, as related by the Evangelist St. Luke, which extends over a period of about 30 years, from A.D. 33 to A.D. 63.
3. The Fathers; to wit: Clement of Rome, Barnabas and Hermas, in the first century; Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Dionysius of Corinth, in the second century; and Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian and Gregory Thaumaturgus, in the third century.
4. Ancient ecclesiastical writers, the earliest of whom is Hegessippus, who flourished about A.D. 170, and the chief of whom is Eusebius . . . about A.D. 270."<sup>1</sup>

For the early part of the first century church, the Book of Acts is practically the only primary source. Information is scanty concerning the territorial progress of Christianity from 70 to 100 A.D.

Apostolic periods. The Apostolic period divides up well around its church centers during certain periods. (1) From 30 to 44 A.D., Jerusalem was the Great Church center. (2) From 44 to 68 A.D., Paul made Antioch in Syria the great missionary church center. (3) From 68 to 100 A.D. John made Ephesus the center of the church world. Rome did not become one of the centers of the church until after the Apostolic age.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>P. W. Raidabaugh, ed., Evangelical Normal Series, Text-Book No. 6, Church History (Cleveland: Pub. House of the Evangelical Association, 1885), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Lars P. Qualben, A History of the Christian Church (Revised Ed., New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1942), pp. 36-37.



Extent of expansion. In spite of Christ's teachings, the church did not at first see clearly that the whole world was to be its field. It had to be led out, step by step, into its world-wide missionary ministry. It had to break away from Jewish exclusivism to Christian universalism. For some time they spoke the word "to none save only to Jews."<sup>1</sup> But this was soon to change by steps. The first step was Peter's Pentecost sermon. To whom was this sermon preached? A long list of aliens is given but it must not be overlooked that these were Jews and proselytes only. Peter was not speaking to a non-Judaistic audience. The scripture says "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. . ."<sup>2</sup> The record gives a list of the many nations represented and then adds "both Jews and proselytes."<sup>3</sup>

The next step is found in Acts, chapter eight. Persecution soon scattered all the believers except the apostles.<sup>4</sup> Philip then "went down to a city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ and multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said."<sup>5</sup> Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard of Philip's mission and its success, they sent Peter and John to investigate. It was not easy, it appears, for a Jew to receive a Samaritan (a half-Jew) as a fellow believer at this early stage. But Peter and John were so fully convinced that the mission was of God that they cooperated fully and were so won over that on their way back to Jerusalem they preached "the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 11:19, K.J.V.    <sup>2</sup>Acts 2:5, R.S.V.    <sup>3</sup>Acts 2:10, R.S.V.

<sup>4</sup>Acts 8:1    <sup>5</sup>Acts 8:5-6, R.S.V.    <sup>6</sup>Acts 8:25, R.S.V.

The fourth step finds Peter preaching to Cornelius who appears not to have been a proselyte but a "God-fearing" man (one who had accepted the God of Israel and the law of Moses as a guide for his life). Peter was amazed when the Holy Spirit came upon him, a Gentile, also.<sup>1</sup> Philip, then, preached to the non-proselyte Ethiopian.<sup>2</sup>

The Gentile church of Antioch was then formed. "Men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus."<sup>3</sup>

From this Gentile church the next advance took place as Barnabas and Saul were sent forth as missionaries.<sup>4</sup> It was on this trip, which was mainly to contact other Jews and bring them to the Messiah that a decisive step was taken in their lives. The jealous Jews blasphemed while Paul spoke and they contradicted him. Paul and Barnabas thus spoke out boldly saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles."<sup>5</sup>

The circumcision question arose and Paul and Barnabas carried it to the Jerusalem council. This marks the next advance toward Gospel universalism. Paul presented his case, as did the Judaizers. Peter threw the weight of his influence on the missionaries' side (of allowing the Gentiles to be accepted without them having to keep the law of Moses). The head of the church, James, then cast a deciding vote and declared the

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 10.    <sup>2</sup>Acts 8:26ff.    <sup>3</sup>Acts 11:20, R.S.V.

<sup>4</sup>Acts 13.    <sup>5</sup>Acts 13:46, R.S.V.

Gentiles free from the legalistic laws of the Jewish faith.<sup>1</sup> The victory had been won and the Gentiles "rejoiced" at the decision.<sup>2</sup> To all the victory message was clear: the Gospel is free and not bound by any nationalism or religious ritual.

The final step entered, in fulfilling the command of Acts 1:8, is seen in Acts 16 when the church reached into the regions beyond. Soon "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."<sup>3</sup> At Thessalonica also the charge was made that these men had "turned the world upside down."<sup>4</sup>

The spread of the church was rapid. There was a time when the Christians could be numbered:

"one hundred and twenty in Acts 1:15, three thousand in 2:41, five thousand in 4:4. Thereafter the complexity of the church, and its extension over many synagogues, and groups, prevented statements of this kind. No one could any longer survey the church as a whole; numerical estimates were impossible. . ."<sup>5</sup>

Glover states that the extension of the gospel witness must have reached all those recorded in the second chapter of Acts.<sup>6</sup> These being, "Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libia

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 15.    <sup>2</sup>Acts 15:31, R.S.V.

<sup>3</sup>Acts 19:10, R.S.V., cf., Acts 19:26-27.    <sup>4</sup>Acts 17:6, R.S.V.

<sup>5</sup>Sir William M. Ramsay, Pictures of the Apostolic Church, Its Life and Thought (Philadelphia: The Sunday School Times Co., 1910), p. 92.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Hall Glover, The Progress of World-Wide Missions (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1924), p. 38.



belonging to Cyrene, and. . .Rome. . .Cretans and Arabians. . ." <sup>1</sup>

We read further of Barnabas of Cyprus (Acts 4:36), Nicholas of Antioch (Acts 6:5), the Ethiopian (Acts 8:27), and Ananias of Damascus (Acts 9:2,10). Peter is in Judea and Philip is found in Samaria, while Paul went "from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum." <sup>2</sup> Within thirty years after the crucifixion there were Christian churches in all the great cities of the Roman empire. Thus it was that just about seventy years after the founding of the first Gentile church in Syria, Pliny wrote in strong terms about the spread of Christianity throughout the back country of Bithynia, a remote area. The church was spreading out into the countryside, and winning adherents so fast as to cause the ancient shrines to be almost deserted. He wanted to know how to deal with these Christians. <sup>3</sup> Warneck estimates that at the end of the first century Christians may have numbered about 200,000. <sup>4</sup>

Early missionaries. The earliest missionaries were the rank and file followers of Christ. The great bulk of the work was accomplished by laymen and not by the leaders of the new church. From the time of the earliest persecution of the infant church in Jerusalem, occasioned by the

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:9-11, R.S.V.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 5:19, K.J.V.

<sup>3</sup> Pliny's letter and the reply to it may be found in, J. Stevenson, ed., A New Eusebius, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957), pp. 13-16.

<sup>4</sup> Gustav Warneck, Outline of a History of Protestant Missions, trans. by George Robson (New York: F. H. Revell Co., 1901), p. 3.



martyrdom of Stephen, the Christians were "all scattered abroad throughout all the regions of Judea and Samaria, excepting the Apostles. . .Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."<sup>1</sup>

These then are the unnamed believers, who bore no special commission and who organized comparatively few churches, yet they carried the gospel far and wide. Bliss says that:

"Could we learn more fully the facts of that apostolic age we should undoubtedly find that it led all the succeeding ages in the vigor of its individual effort. It was not a time of great leaders but many leaders."<sup>2</sup>

These common missionaries had no organization, or churches or support. There was simply a constantly increasing number of individual Christian believers, who, wherever they went, whether on their regular business or driven by persecution, preached Christ, and Him Crucified, told the story of the cross, bore witness to its value for themselves, and urged the acceptance of the Saviour on those with whom they came in contact.

These "witnesses" pressed the claims of Christ on everyone they met. They used their businesses to do this. Every man, woman, child, free-slave, bond-slave, Jew, Gentile, learned or unlettered, all were moved by the motive of Christ to proclaim the message to others. Clear testimony to this fact is given by the first literary opponent of the new faith --

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 8:1,4, K.J.V.

<sup>2</sup>Edwin Munsell Bliss, The Missionary Enterprise, a Concise History of Its Objects, Methods and Extension (New York: F. H. Revell Co., 1908), p. 13.

Celsus (c. 178). He writes:

"Weavers, cobblers, and fullers, the most illiterate persons, preached the irrational faith and knew how to commend it especially to women and children."<sup>1</sup>

This is corroborated by Tertullian who places it to the credit of Christianity: "Every Christian laborer finds out God and manifests Him."<sup>2</sup> Thus Bliss states:

"Of missionaries in the modern sense the term there were few: of those who devoted their full time and strength to the work of preaching there were few; but of those who made their trade, their profession, their every-day occupation, of whatever sort, the means of extending their faith, there was a multitude."<sup>3</sup>

The laity were the most effective missionaries during the apostolic period because they could say along with Paul "We also believe and therefore speak."<sup>4</sup> The contagion of such faith made the spread of the Gospel in this period a real layman's missionary movement.

Though most of the work of spreading the gospel was done by the unnamed and unlettered believers, there were also some important early leaders. Historians must admit that they possess little accurate knowledge of the missionary activity after the close of the New Testament, but they also are able to present some traditions which cannot be lightly set aside, because of their unanimity and early date. The practically unanimous

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<sup>1</sup>John Aberly, An Outline of Missions (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1945), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Edwin Munsell Bliss, A Concise History of Missions (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1897), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>II Corinthians 4:13, K.J.V.

traditions of the early church writers must be treated with some respect. These traditions will now be discussed briefly.

Andrew is said to have preached the Gospel in Cappadocia, Galatia and Bithynia. Origen says that he evangelized the area north of the Euxine Sea. From there he is said to have gone to Achaia where he was crucified by the order of Pro-counsul Aegeas.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence of Papias and Polycrates gives strong support to the tradition that Philip suffered martyrdom at Hierapolis after missionary journeys in Scythia and Phrygia.<sup>2</sup>

Bartholomew carried the Gospel to India, Armenia, Persia, Babylonia, Mesopotamia, Assyria and Asia Minor. Pantaenus of Alexandria reported that he had met with Christians in India (which may be Arabia) who traced their Christianity to this apostle and produced a copy of Matthew's Gospel which he had left them. Bartholomew is then said to have suffered martyrdom at Albanopolis where he was flayed alive and beheaded.<sup>3</sup>

Indian Christians have claimed Thomas, surnamed Didymus, as their founder, for centuries. They say that Thomas planted Christianity in Arabia, the Island of Socotra, Malabar, Mylapore near Madras and even China. He was stoned in Mailapur and finally transfixed by a Brahman spear. This tradition seems to be given some support by the English king, Alfred in

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<sup>1</sup> A. Henderson and Ernest Parry, A Historical Survey of Christian Missions from the 1st Century to the End of the 17th (London: Faith Press Ltd., 1927), pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



A.D. 883 who sent priests to the shrine of Thomas, and by Marco Polo (A.D. 1288), who testified that the Christians of India still believed that Thomas died at Mailapur.<sup>1</sup>

"Other traditions, most of them of respectable authority, exist in regard to other apostles and early disciples: e.g. Eusebius records a tradition that S. Mark preached the Gospel in Egypt and founded churches, first of all at Alexandria. . . before the death of the last of the apostles, S. John, the Gospel had been preached. . . in most, of the more remote regions of the then known world."<sup>2</sup>

Streeter refers to the Gnostic Acts of Thomas (C. A.D. 250) which speaks of the division of the regions of the world between the apostles as their fields of preaching.<sup>3</sup> This does not have as strong an authority as the belief that the apostles did reach many corners of the earth, and it is sufficient for this paper to note that the apostles helped in spreading the gospel into remote and distant places.

### Theology

Theology of apostolic period. The first missionaries had a message. Their one aim was to make it known. They were "witnesses" of the things they had seen and heard. That witness was about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> Just a quick glance at any concordance will

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Burnett Hillman Streeter, The Primitive Church Studied with Special Reference to the Origins of the Christian Ministry (London: Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>See Acts 10:40-41.



show that the word "witness" occurs in the New Testament many times, in fact, over 170. Their testimony from the beginning was a personal one -- "That. . . which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life. . ."<sup>1</sup>

What then were the main theological tenets of the Apostolic period? In previous chapters this was sought in an inductive manner. This chapter sought to discover what others believed to be the crux of the doctrinal position of the primitive church.

It was shown in the previous chapters that Christ was the center of most of the thinking of the early church. This will be used as a starting place in seeking to draw a sketch of the primitive doctrine.

They believed that their religion was exclusive. Cook states that there is no doubt about the New Testament claims to exclusiveness for the Christian message.

"It doesn't picture God as A God; He is the Only God. Paul says, 'We know then an idol is nothing in the world and that there is none other God but one' (I. Cor. 8:4) Further it does not present Jesus Christ as a savior; He is the only Saviour of men. For Peter said, 'There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' (Acts 4:12)."<sup>2</sup>

Speer in his Christocentric book The Finality of Jesus Christ brings this thought out clearly by saying:

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<sup>1</sup>I John 1:1, R.S.V. Peter also stated in Acts 4:20 "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

<sup>3</sup>Howard R. Cook, An Introduction to the Study of Christian Missions (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 20.

"It is not enough to say that the central thing in Christianity is Christ. Christ is not only the center. He is the beginning and the end. He is all in all. The Christian faith is a conviction and an experience, and Christ is the object of each. . .to the thought of the early church Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the full and final revelation of the Father, the One Lord and Saviour and He was also the most real life of the early church, a power of joy and purity and love, the bond of a new fellowship, the Head of a new society, the Light of a new day."<sup>1</sup>

The early church was gripped by the conviction that "God hath made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified."<sup>2</sup> For the belief of the community, which is echoed in the words of the New Testament writers, Jesus is the miraculous Son of God, on whom men believe and whom men put wholly on God's side.

"Early in its history the church reached the conviction that the Gospel was not only a new religion distinct from Judaism but also God's complete and final revelation of Himself to mankind. . ."<sup>3</sup>

The phrase, "in Christ," cannot even exhaust the thoughts of the early church about their Lord. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."<sup>4</sup> and the believer is in Christ "a new creature."<sup>5</sup> But believers are also for Christ and with Christ and of Christ and by Christ."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert E. Speer, The Finality of Jesus Christ (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1933), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Acts 2:36, K.J.V.

<sup>3</sup>Mordan, The Nature and Right of Religion, quoted in Speer, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>II Corinthians 5:19, K.J.V.    <sup>5</sup>II Corinthians 5:17, K.J.V.

<sup>6</sup>Speer, op. cit., p. 50. cf., II Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 3:3; I Corinthians 6:15; Hebrews 3:14; Ephesians 3:21.

In one word Jesus Christ was the whole world of thought and life to the first Christians.

Neander notes that there was one article of faith which made Christianity have a peculiar mark. He thinks that this was the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. The believers then ascribed to him the whole idea of what the Messianic concept contained, according to the Old Testament promises.<sup>1</sup> He was the divine prophet proclaimed from ancient times come in human flesh. The thought was so overwhelming that the disciples were obsessed with this truth.

The centrality of Christ in the thought of the primitive church can hardly be explained in enough words. This author has found in all the books studied, that the historians have to admit, if they are objective, that the church was Christ-captivated.

Aberly says the church relied on Jesus to correct not only social ills but other ills as well.<sup>2</sup> Mosheim recognized that the church was composed only of those who believed firmly that "Jesus was the only Redeemer of the world."<sup>3</sup> Moffat lists the themes of the apostolic fathers as being six in number and all of them but one are directly related to Christ's deity and work.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Agustus Neander, History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by the Apostles, Trans. by J. E. Ryland (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1869), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Aberly, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>John Laurence Mosheim, An Ecclesiastical History Ancient and Modern Trans. by Archibald Maclaine (Cincinnati: Applegate and Co., 1854), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>James C. Moffat, Church History in Brief (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Pub., 1885), p. 72.



Ramsay shows that the disciples who were looking for the immediate restoration of the kingdom of Israel were changed by the Christ-event and the power of the Holy Spirit. They now regarded the crucifixion and its shame as the central idea in the salvation planned by God, promised in David and carried through by Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Qualben states that the apostles taught that a man can only be justified and saved by faith in Christ alone, apart from human merit. This was in contrast to the ideas of the Pharisees and Judaizers who stressed works and some sects which stressed knowledge or education.<sup>2</sup>

Weizsacker notes that the early church had absolute faith in the kingdom which depended upon their belief in the Messiah, which rested on the second conviction that Jesus was indeed the Christ. He also states that for Paul, his faith in Christ was the first thing in his life and everything else depended upon it.<sup>3</sup>

Purves says that the teaching of the new disciples and the preaching to the populace "consisted mainly in the recital of the deeds and teachings of Jesus as well as pointing out the fulfillment of prophecy in him."<sup>4</sup>

Ropes states that Paul's theology was built on the fact of Christ's death

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<sup>1</sup>Ramsay, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Qualben, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

<sup>3</sup>Carl Von Weizsacker, The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church, Trans. by James Millar (Second Revised Ed., London: Williams and Norgate, 1897), I, 32, 141.

<sup>4</sup>George T. Purves, Christianity in the Apostolic Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 42.



and resurrection and on Christ's person, not on his teaching.<sup>1</sup>

Smith says that "truth becomes embodied and personified in Jesus Christ, and is exhibited in concrete forms both in his person and in his life. The truth of Christianity is preeminently the facts that pertain to Christ. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Smith further states that this was the one theme of all the apostles teaching. The substance of all Christian doctrine is found in the facts and truths that pertain to Christ. Smith says Christ is the unifying point of all the apostles doctrine and then attempts to show how their diversity is in effect a unity of belief with a diversity of presentation.<sup>3</sup>

Nichols states that the so-called doctrines of the primitive Christians were very simple and that "all their thoughts about religious truth were dominated by Jesus, in whom their religion was wholly wrapped up."<sup>4</sup> Montgomery says that they preached an uplifted Christ for it was Christ who was the substance of their preaching, Christ who was their hope of Glory, and Christ who was their power as they faced the Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James Hardy Ropes, The Apostolic Age in the Light of Modern Criticism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>Judson Smith, Lectures on Church History (Oberlin: W.E. Chamberlin, printer, 1881), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Hastings Nichols, The Growth of the Christian Church (Revised Ed., Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1941), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>Helen Barrett Montgomery, The Bible and Missions (West Medford: Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1920), p. 88.

These ought to be sufficient to show that almost every writer must come to the realization of the central, pivotal place which Jesus plays in the whole thinking of the early church, its leaders, and its common members. Christ was ALL to them! It cannot be stressed enough- Christ only - sola! It seems hard for the present generation to understand fully their obsession but they were captivated by the glory, majesty and blessedness of Him and all He was. They were not concerned about a doctrine of Christ but of a person, an event, a faith, and a way of life! The dynamic of this new faith was to be found in their personal identification with Christ - the Lord of Glory.

"To me to live is Christ. . .It was this that made living for Christ good and strong, and that made dying for Him a noble and rational thing. As Tertullian said to the heathen, 'we say, and we say it openly; while you are torturing us, torn and bleeding we say aloud: 'we worship God through Christ.'"<sup>1</sup>

Some other beliefs of the early Christians may now be investigated. It must be remembered that all their thinking was cast in the shadow of Christ who was working through these men by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

The primitive Christians believed the Gospel was for "all." It was a universal salvation. The plan of ages was for "all nations" and not for the Jew alone.

They preached a gospel of love in action so that many heathen were won over to the faith by the sheer superiority of its social outreach. Celsus, a literary opponent says:

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<sup>1</sup> Speer, op. cit., p. 58.

"It was by preaching to the poor, the burdened, and the outcast, by the preaching and practice of love, that Christianity turned the stony, sterile world into a fruitful field for the church. . ."<sup>1</sup>

Righteousness was the ideal for the Christian. This could not be accomplished by law nor by deeds but only could be attained through the unmerited bestowal of forgiveness through Christ. The faith-method was in absolute contrast to the law-method. Paul sought to prevent anything from mingling with this one gospel requirement in Christ. John sought to show that it was by believing in Jesus that one has life in His name. That was the whole purpose of writing his Gospel about the Jesus - the Son of God.<sup>2</sup>

John and Paul taught the pre-existence of Christ and His divinity. The speedy return of Christ was anticipated by the believers and taught by some, though Paul did not allow this hope and expectation to alarm and confuse the churches under his care but cast the second coming into the proper perspective.

In this attempt to draw out some of the earliest doctrines the author feels that he has left more unsaid than was said. The subject is much too vast to be covered completely, thus a summary will be sought from two sources - namely the Scriptures and the great historian Harnack.

Revelation 1:4-8 sums up the apostolic thoughts about Christ, and no doubt represents the view of the church in general.

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<sup>1</sup>Montgomery, From Jerusalem to Jerusalem, pp. 38-39.

<sup>2</sup>See John 20:30-31.



"Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

Harnack the great German historian makes these accurate, objective insights as to the theology of the early church.

"The contents. . .message. . .are inexhaustible. Yet the message itself is thoroughly compact and complete. It is the objective and positive as the message of the only God, who is spiritual, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, the creator of heaven and earth, the Lord and Father of men, the great disposer of human history: furthermore, it is the message which tells of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came from heaven, made known the Father, died for sins, rose, sent the Spirit hither, and from His seat at God's right hand will return for the judgment; finally, it is the message of salvation brought by Jesus the Saviour, that is freedom from the tyranny of demons, sin and death, together with the gift of eternal life.

"And it is objective and negative, inasmuch as it announces the vanity of all other gods, and forms a protest against idols of gold and silver and wood, as well as against blind fate and atheism.

"Finally it is subjective, as it declares the uselessness of all sacrifice, all temples and all worship of man's devising, and opposes to this the worship of God in spirit and in truth, assurance of faith, holiness and self-control, love and brotherliness, and lastly the solid certainty of the resurrection and of life eternal, implying the

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<sup>1</sup>Revelation 1:4-8, R.S.V.



futility of a present life, which lies exposed to future judgment."<sup>1</sup>

"The center of this message was God the Saviour in Christ. His Person, Deeds, Sufferings and Resurrection were salvation."<sup>2</sup>

This was the missionary message of the early church. The One living God, as Creator, Jesus the Saviour, the Resurrection and self-control form the most conspicuous features of the primitive missionary doctrine.

Motives behind apostolic expansion. Neil cautions us against using the great commission of Matthew's Gospel as a proof text, for he feels that we cannot support the missionary cause on this type of verse. He reveals his liberal and critical views of the scriptures in the same passage by saying that this last command of Jesus belong to the area of "interpretation rather than to a record of the original words of Jesus."<sup>3</sup> He does realize though that the "Great Commission" saying is not unique to Matthew.

Hodgkins would disagree with him and proclaim that the first aim or motive of the apostolic missions was to obey in letter and spirit the commands found in many portions of the scriptures<sup>4</sup> and that these scrip-

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<sup>1</sup>Adolph Harnack, Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, Trans. and ed. by James Moffatt, I, 106-9 quoted in Speer, op. cit., pp. 115-16.

<sup>2</sup>Harnack, op. cit., I, 124., Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Stephen Neil, The Christian Society (New York: Harper Bro., 1953), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>See Matthew 28:18-20; 20:14; Luke 24:46-49; Mark 16:15-16; John 20:21 and Acts 1:4,5,8.

tures prove that Jesus intended for them to be missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the first motive which the earliest believers had was one of a personal loyalty to the Saviour. There was his command - go, disciple the nations - they obeyed.

A second motive was that they wanted to see Christ enthroned in the hearts of men as the Lord and Saviour. He had been despised, rejected and crucified with scorn. They were anxious that He should be enthroned. Christ must be enthroned in lives and evil must be dethroned.

Edman thinks that the prime factor in the primitive church which motivated them was "soul-saving, the pointing of the penitent to the Lamb of God and to faith in his substitutionary atonement."<sup>2</sup> Their desire was to bring as many as possible to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The believers of the earliest church recognized that God loved all men so very much that he spared not His own son in order to save them and bring them to the knowledge of the truth. "The love of Christ has ever been the constraining power of the true missionary."<sup>3</sup> As this truth is lost - that Christ loved men enough to die for them - the missionary outreach dims.

Another motive of the earliest missionaries was the realization that the honor of Christ was involved to a great degree in the character of the men who professed His name. They were to be epistles known and

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<sup>1</sup>Louise Manning Hodgkins, Via Christi, An Introduction to the Study of Missions (New York: MacMillan Co., 1901), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>Edman, op. cit., p. 389.

<sup>3</sup>Aberly, op. cit., cf. II Corinthians 5:14.

read by all men. Their lives could bring honor to their Master.

The first-century Christians depended upon the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, motivate, inspire and bring results. There was a very vivid sense of His presence, power, and influence. They were "filled with the spirit." McGiffert, summarizing the Christianity at large, in his book, The Apostolic Age, observes this point:

"Our study of the Christian life of the Apostolic age has revealed the moving and controlling power of that life in the disciples' vivid sense of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. It is its spiritual character which distinguished the age from all subsequent periods in the history of the church."<sup>1</sup>

Pfeiffer sums up the motives of the Apostolic "witnesses" by quoting from Martin's Apostolic and Modern Missions:

"As consisting in obedience to the command of Christ, love to Christ, zeal for His honor, for the extension of His church, the triumph of His kingdom, zeal for God, and compassion for a world perishing in sin."<sup>2</sup>

Why christianity advanced and triumphed. This study is now at the point of investigation where it is necessary to see just why the primitive church extended as it did. Was it due to theology, outside circumstances, luck, political advantages or just what?

Many attempts have been made to account for the large success of Christianity in the face of the most severe opposition in the early time.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Cushman McGiffert, A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 544.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Pfeiffer, Mission Studies (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1908), pp. 80-81.



It might be well to see first just what opposition the new faith faced at its inception.

Jesus' popularity was short-lived in Judah and Galilee and his own race turned against Him and crucified Him. The Romans, likewise, were not impressed with Him, either as a Redeemer or a Rabbi. Even the disciples left Him at the moment of greatest peril and need. Barton states that this beginning was:

"not an auspicious one for the inauguration of a movement that was to impress upon the whole world the fact that a man who had been driven out of Galilee and crucified at Jerusalem, betrayed by His race and violently put to death by the officials of His own government, was the Redeemer of man, whose kingdom should be an everlasting Kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

In the same book, The Unfinished Task, Barton lists the following eight obstacles which the new faith had to overcome during apostolic times.<sup>2</sup>

1. Jesus Christ was a Jew. He had been rejected by His own people. The Jews would find it hard to believe someone whom their Rabbis in Jerusalem had rejected.
2. The Disciples were Jews and this race had been banished from Rome. There was a strong anti-Jewish feeling in the empire. The Jews were not even allowed in their own capitol, Jerusalem in a later period.
3. The disciples were not men of influence, learning or repute but were common, poor, unknown, countrymen.
4. These lowly preachers were to preach as the Savior of the world, one who also was of a humble birth.

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<sup>1</sup>James L. Barton, The Unfinished Task of the Christian Church (Student Volunteer Movement, 1908), p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 106-7.



5. The Christ whom they were proclaiming as the Savior of men was dead. This was a great obstacle to many.

6. Not only was Jesus dead, but he had been killed by the Jews and the Romans. That could only mean to the Roman mind, that He was a criminal, proven so before a Roman court.

7. The Gospel which they were preaching was hateful to the sensual and vice-infested Roman world. Wealth, power, lust and greed wants no part of a message of poverty of spirit and meekness.

8. The disciples were preaching their faith as the only religion and that it was supreme. It is reported that a place in the Pantheon was offered to the Christians in which they might place an image of their Lord so that those who wanted to might come and worship Him.<sup>1</sup> This was the tenor of the times. But the disciples proclaimed that there was no other name under heaven through which salvation was possible. Christ must be supreme and all others must recognize His superiority. These then are obstacles which were enormous yet which made the subsequent victory all the more amazing.

The classic reasons for the expansion of Christianity are given by Gibbon. He lists five reasons.

- (1) The zeal of the early Christians.
- (2) The belief in future rewards and punishments, the doctrine of immortality and the millennium.
- (3) The power of miracles in the primitive church.
- (4) The austere morals or high virtues of the believers.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

(5) The compact church organization.<sup>1</sup>

These traditional reasons are excellent but not sufficient to account for the triumph of the new faith. There are much deeper reasons than these so they will be added.

(6) The influence of the Holy Spirit who changed the pre-Pentecost believers to aggressive harbingers of the Good News. They had experienced the power of His Spirit and continued to walk in Him just as they had begun in the Spirit. The central idea throughout the book of Acts is the guidance of the Holy Spirit who initiates and conducts to a successful issue all the actions of the early church.

(7) The believers relied upon spiritual means. "Prayer pervaded the life of this early church like fragrance. They really expected prayer to be answered, and they dared to pray for hard and difficult things. . ."<sup>2</sup>

(8) They had a willingness to suffer and if need be to die for Him whom they had once forsaken. Had He not died for THEM!

(9) "The nearness to the underlying historical events gave to Christianity of the Apostolic age an imminently vital and practical character. . .The force of the historical facts gave to the new religion an atmosphere of intense reality."<sup>3</sup>

It left little room for speculation and theorizing. Some had been personal

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Gibbon, History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Revised by M. F. Guizot (New Ed., Dayton: United Brethren Printing Establishment, 1856), I, 157-81 passim.

<sup>2</sup>Montgomery, The Bible and Missions, pp. 88-89.

<sup>3</sup>George Holley Gilbert, A Short History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1906), pp. 230-31.

companions of Jesus, and all of them were men of His generation. "This force impelled believers to be missionaries rather than theologians."<sup>1</sup>

(10) The Christians expected the speedy return of the Lord and all that was important was that they get the message out to as many as possible before He came back. Thus they did not become organization-heavy.

(11) Speer quotes Dr. McGiffert's book The Influence of Christianity in the Roman Empire to support his theory that Christianity won partly, because it was superior to the pagan religions surrounding her. "The victory of ancient Christianity in the Roman Empire was fairly earned by sheer superiority."<sup>2</sup> The Greek religion was more poetry and philosophy than religion while the Roman religion, with its composite character, made it just a naturalization of foreign religions.<sup>3</sup> It was superior in its conception of God, of man; in its moral ideals, in its ethical and spiritual dynamic, its rootage in history and its hope and joy.

(12) Christianity would not assimilate or be syncretistic. It prevailed because it was distinctive and superior. Instead of making terms with the world, as later Christianity did, the early Christians broke with it. One of the fundamental contrasts of the New Testament is the condemnation of the world.<sup>4</sup> The permanence of the new faith was secured by the simple New Testament creed which stated that 'Jesus is Lord' and with that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>McGiffert, The Influence of Christianity in the Roman Empire, quoted in Speer, op. cit., pp. 101-2.

<sup>3</sup>Speer, op. cit., pp. 101-2.

<sup>4</sup>See John 7:7, 14:27 and 15:18.



there could be no compromise. They knew that their "Jesus" had nothing in common with idols or vain speculation. They were imbued with the strong conviction that Christianity was the only true and universal faith and the only means of salvation.

(13) They had a personal center for their faith. Their faith was in a personal God, the God and Father of Jesus Christ. This personal center, Jesus, was historic, and had lived with many of them, appeared to them after His resurrection and was still dwelling in them. He was the personal guide, friend and leader - they knew God as a personal reality.

(14) All the "new-born" men participated in the task of evangelization. "The early church did not support missionaries; it was missionary . . . everyone felt called to tell the Good News. . ."<sup>1</sup> Their parish was the whole world and each believer felt that he was an ambassador of reconciliation. They might kill one Christian, a hundred or a thousand but there would always be a missionary preaching Jesus as the Christ, for when there was still one believer there was still one active witness.

(15) "Indirectly persecution favored this result; as the brethren who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the work of the Kingdom."<sup>2</sup> Persecution helped to diffuse the message throughout the Empire.

(16) The pure lives of the disciples helped in the spread of the faith. They presented before the corrupt world a code of ethics, a mode of life and a corresponding life that was superior to any way of living

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<sup>1</sup>Montgomery, The Bible and Missions, pp. 88-89.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 52.



but this belief goes back further to an actual historical event. Something so wonderful had happened to these disciples and early believers that their whole lives were utterly changed. They were not concerned about right doctrines, they were obsessed with the fact of God Incarnate and His choice of them as messengers of His truth. The early Christians believed, because they had experienced. The experience plus their theology, used in the broadest sense of the term, motivated the earliest believers. Yet belief was not enough. Intellectual belief alone could have left them sitting in the synagogues saying "Isn't that wonderful?" Their belief or doctrine was of the type that captivates all of the human faculties. They became not their own anymore, for they had been bought and redeemed with a costly price -- blood!

These believers were not ready to evangelize the world on theology alone -- Christ had given them their theological training before Pentecost but it did not motivate them to move. But with the Resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit in power upon individual lives, the church exploded until it had reached far and wide.

The primitive Christians were not conscious of presenting a theology, they were presenting a Person -- yes, God. They were motivated by the love of God manifested toward them. At first they were not conscious of opposing the Jewish faith, they were preaching its fulfillment and they prayed that all might come to the Messiah in order that He might return soon. This is doctrine, yes, but more than that it was truth, attested to by facts, the Word, power and experience.

The primitive Christians were aware that they had come into a powerful personal relationship with the living Christ. They were actual

witnesses for God's Son and living examples of what Christ was able to do for individuals. Their witnessing was filled with personal testimony of that which had been wrought in their lives. This made them bold in presenting the gospel to others. It had changed them, it could likewise change others.

As it has been noted, other factors contributed to the advance of the Gospel, such as the need of the Roman world, but these factors are not sufficient in themselves. To say that Christianity just happened to have the right religion for the world at the time is to be blind to the facts. The world hated them and their belief and did not want it -- but inherent in its founder was the power to change the world. The time was ripe, and the Almighty God gave His Son, whereby all who believe (and there is their theology) might be saved, in order that they might serve.

CHAPTER III  
POST-APOSTOLIC PERIOD

## CHAPTER III

### POST-APOSTOLIC PERIOD

This chapter is a study of the spread of the Christian church during Post-Apostolic times and the influence which theology had, if any, upon the advancement of Christianity.

Most of the information was gleaned from the early fathers and historians whose particular interest was the ancient period of the church's history.

The extent of the spread, the persecutions, the doctrine, and the reasons for the expansion are discussed. Also a comparison is made between the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic missionary expansion.

#### Missionary Effort in this Period

Extension. For two centuries following the apostolic period the church grew even more rapidly than before. It became organized and consolidated so that it was no longer composed of scattered bodies of believers, but communities holding a definite position in the face of the pagan world.

Its distinctively missionary work was, however, in the main carried on by the same means as in the first century. Paul had no successor in his great journeys. The pioneering was still being carried on by the lesser-known and more humble believers, who were not so much missionaries as every-day Christian tradesmen, travelers, workmen whose lives even more than their teachings were the instruments which God used for the evangeliza-



tion of the remote sections of the pagan world.

Christianity spread to all parts of the Roman territory and even to regions out of their control. It has been estimated that one-fifteenth of the population of the Roman Empire was Christian by the end of the period.<sup>1</sup> Harnack has summarized the results as follows:

"(a) countries in which at least half of the population was Christian - Asia Minor, Thrace, Cyprus and Edessa, including Armenia; (b) countries in which Christians formed a very important section of the population - Antioch and northern Syria, Egypt, Rome, proconsular Africa, and Numidia; (c) countries in which Christians were thinly scattered - Palestine, Arabia, certain areas in Mesopotamia and Greece, northern and middle Italy, Mauritania and Tripolitania; (d) Those in which Christianity was extremely slender or not found at all - countries outside the Roman Empire, Philistia, countries north and northeast of the Black Sea, western and upper Italy, middle and upper Gaul, Belgium, Germany, and Rhaetia."<sup>2</sup>

Tertullian who lived around 160 to 200 A.D. holds that Christianity was brought to Britain toward the end of the second century.<sup>3</sup> The advance in Spain was so great that in 306 A.D. there were nineteen bishops from this area that assembled at Elvira.<sup>4</sup> By the third century, the belief that St. Thomas had reached India and established the church there was firmly rooted in Christian tradition and seems to be founded in facts.

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<sup>1</sup>John Aberly, An Outline of Missions (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1945), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>A. Harnack, The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, quoted in Aberly, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Lars P. Qualben, A History of the Christian Church (rev. ed., New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1942), p. 80.

<sup>4</sup>Edwin Munsell Bliss, A Concise History of Missions (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1897), pp. 18-19.

Henderson and Parry tell us that Clement of Rome in his Epistle (A.D. 95-97) hints at consolidation of the positions already won, rather than new missionary developments.<sup>1</sup> This does not seem to be supported by the facts. That there was consolidation cannot be denied, but to say that there was no lengthening of the church's cords cannot be so flatly stated.

Justin Martyr, who wrote in the middle of the second century tells of the extension of the Christian faith:

"For there is not a single race of men, whether among the barbarians or Greeks, or by whatever name they may be called, of those who live in wagons or are called nomads or of herdsmen living in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered through the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Maker of all things."<sup>2</sup>

Very early in the second century (A.D. 112) the noble Roman, Pliny the younger, governor of Bithynia, wrote to Emperor Trajan a letter in which he expressed his repugnance at the thought of executing Christians; for he said:

". . .many of all ages and every rank, and also of both sexes are brought into present or future danger. The contagion of that superstition has penetrated not the cities only, but the villages and country. . ."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Henderson and Ernest Parry, A Historical Survey of Christian Missions from the First Century to the End of the Seventeenth (London: Faith Press Ltd., 1927), pp. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Cullen Ayer, A Source Book for Ancient Church History From the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>J. Stevenson, ed., A New Eusebius, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337, Based Upon the Collection edited by the late B. J. Kidd (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957), p. 14.

From Pliny then it is seen that Christianity was wide-spread at his time.

When Greogry Thaumaturgus, so named because of the many miracles he was reputed to have performed, was sent as Bishop to Neocaesarea in Pontus, his native city, he was said to have found less than twenty-five Christians, but when he finished his work there were about the same number of pagans left!<sup>1</sup>

Tertullian addressed the heathen about 200 A.D. and said:

"We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you - cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camps, tribes, companies, palace, Senate, and Forum. We have left you only the temples."<sup>2</sup>

This faith had reached even into the Emperor's palace as Tertullian indicated.

Barton supports this by telling us:

"Tacitus speaks of the Christians who were seized as a 'vast multitude' even at that early date. Before the year 100, Flavius Clement, was executed as a Christian and his widow banished, thus showing that the faith was even taking hold of those of high estate."<sup>3</sup>

Practically within three hundred years, that little handful of disciples, which had gathered in Jerusalem in disappointment and almost despair after the ascension of their Lord, had set in motion forces that had led to the general evangelization of the known world. The numerical estimate

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin Munsell Bliss, The Missionary Enterprise, A Concise History of Its Objects, Methods and Extension (New York: F. H. Revell Co., 1908), pp. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup>Ayer, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>James L. Barton, The Unfinished Task of the Christian Church (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1908), p. 121.



of the Christians at this period vary according to different authorities as anywhere from five to ten million. At any rate the growth of this period must be regarded as unsurpassed in any period of the church's history.

The faith of Jesus' disciples which was almost extinct after Christ's death, was by the year 312, attached to the Roman colors - what a victory!

Latourette tells us why this period of expansion was so unique.

"Never in the history of the race has this record ever quite been equaled. Never in so short a time has any other religious factor, or, for that matter, any other set of ideas, religious, political or economic, without the aid of physical force or of social or cultural prestige, achieved so commanding a position in such an important culture. Others have gained far more adherents in the same length of time. Islam. . .from the success of its armies. Buddhism . . .by support give it by a great monarch, Asoka . . .Manichaeism. . .ideas as democracy, socialism and the scientific method. . .partly due to more rapid means of communication. . .partly to prestige . . .of Western Civilization. . .The phenomenal spread of Communism, far more rapid and spectacular than that of Christianity at the outset, has been due largely to the capture of the Government of the huge Russian Empire by what was a comparatively small group. . .In the ways we have indicated, Christianity's unique record in the first three centuries is unique."<sup>1</sup>

School of Alexandria. Of the three major catechetical schools of this period the school in Alexandria stands out as the outstanding missionary school. One of the great purposes of this school was to train missionaries. Eddy speaks of the Alexandrian school as the "first great missionary college" which was:

"presided over from about 180 to 200 by Pantaenus, . . .a convert from Stoicism.

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity (New York: Harper and Bros. Pub., 1953), I, 112-13.



From Alexandria, Christian teachers and evangelists went forth to Africa, Arabia and the Near East, while Pantaenus himself was sent as a missionary to 'India'. . ."<sup>1</sup>

Henderson and Parry make these remarks about the Alexandrian School:

"The far-reaching activities of the catechetical school must have played an enormous part in the extension of the Faith; and although we lack detailed information, we may be certain that the pupils of such a master as Pantaenus learned how to combine missionary zeal with profound scholarship."<sup>2</sup>

Persecutions. This rapid spread of the church, which has been outlined was not without strong opposition. Often this period is called the age of persecution. According to Barton the early church's persecution may be divided into three periods:

"First the period from the death of Christ to the reign of Trajan, when persecution was permitted but not legal; second, from the reign of Trajan to the accession of Decius, when persecution was legalized but depended largely upon the individual views of the local governors. Third, from the accession of Decius to the promulgation of the first edict of toleration by Constantine, when persecution was legal and general."<sup>3</sup>

Such was the characters of the persecutions up to the middle of the third century - danger of local mob violence because they were a minority. But during the third century the persecution ceased in their local and sporadic character and became general and systematic. The Empire was disintegrating

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<sup>1</sup> Sherwood Eddy, Pathfinders of the World Missionary Crusade (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Henderson and Parry, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Barton, op. cit., pp. 113-14.

and at such times governments demand loyalty. The Christians persisted in refusing to make sacrifices to the emperor. This brought upon them the hostility of the once tolerant Roman Empire. So general was the persecution that "the names of the church's martyrs during this period are known better than those of her missionaries."<sup>1</sup>

Under the Roman Empire there were ten great attempts to stamp out this new faith. The first great persecution was by Nero (A.D. 64) and the last by Diocletian (A.D. 303). The first of these persecutions, by Nero, serves as an example of all. Tacitus gives us a full and vivid description of this persecution, as the Emperor sought to blame Rome's burning on the Christians.

"Therefore, at the beginning, some were seized who made confessions; then, on their information, a vast multitude was convicted, not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race. And they were not only put to death, but subjected to insults, in that they were either dressed up in the skins of wild beasts and perished by the cruel mangling of dogs, or else put on crosses to be set on fire, and, as day declined, to be burned, being used as lights by night. Nero had thrown open his gardens for that spectacle, and gave a circus play, mingling with the people dressed in a charioteer's costume or driving a chariot."<sup>2</sup>

The number of the martyrs cannot be known but a good idea is received from the catacombs of Rome. These were underground meeting places, and graveyards used by the early Christians. In the catacomb of St. Sebastian

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<sup>1</sup>Aberly, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ayer, op. cit., p. 7.

alone rest the bodies of 174,000 martyrs.<sup>1</sup> These were only a portion of those who died for their Master, and these were only those who died in one city, or those who could be claimed for burial.

How did these persecutions affect the growth of the Christian church? Were they crushed under its weight? No, it seemed that the more the faith was persecuted the brighter burned its light. Men counted themselves fortunate to suffer for Christ, and went to their death singing triumphant hymns of the church. The endurance of the persecutions by the Christians baffled the Romans. Stories of their bravery support this. Young Origen wrote to his father who was in prison for his faith, "Take care not to change your mind on our account."<sup>2</sup>

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, (A.D. 166) who knew St. John, was offered his life if he would deny his Lord. Polycarp, now very aged, answered, "Fourscore and six years have I served Him and He has done me no wrong. How then can I speak evil of my King who has saved me."<sup>3</sup> Ignatius, who was martyred in 117, said, "God's grain am I to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be turned into the pure bread of God."<sup>4</sup>

These, and many more, examples of the martyrs and confessors, could be given. They silently preached their faith by their lives and sufferings

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Hall Glover, The Progress of World-Wide Missions (New York: Harpers, 1924), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>Helen Barrett Montgomery, From Jerusalem to Jerusalem (North Cambridge: Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1929), pp. 29-30.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



and thereby had as great a missionary value as the normal preaching of the Gospel. The result was that, numerically, the losses caused by persecutions were made good, and also that by a substantial increase on all sides, the Christians at this time became a large and influential body.

Eusebius tells us that:

"the numbers of Christians grew and multiplied in these 50 years [A.D. 260-302, an ebb in persecutions] that their ancient churches were not large enough to receive them, and therefore, they erected on their foundations more ample and spacious ones in every city."<sup>1</sup>

The persecutions helped spread the new faith, commend it to others, sift the chaff from the church, and produce a community of believers with deep convictions and genuine piety. Persecutions however led some to court martyrdom, which was later to be condemned by the church.

Tertullian gave to the church the motto, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church" which is incorrectly quoted, for he said: "Your cruelty does not avail. . . the oftner we are mown down. . . the more numerous we grow, the blood of Christians is seed."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, as blood bought redemption for man, so blood helped to spread this original message of redemption through Christ's blood.

#### Theology of the Post-Apostolic Period

Though the theology of this period became more settled and finer

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<sup>1</sup>Eusebius, quoted in Henderson and Parry, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>William Owen Carver, The Course of Christian Missions, A History and An Interpretation (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1932), pp. 49-50.



lines tended to be drawn, it can be shown that the main stream of the church still preached the essential doctrines of the Gospel as were held from Apostolic times. Certain changes occurred, which will be noted later, but on the whole there is a continuity of belief from the first century to the third. Mosheim evidences this same view when he discusses the theology of the second century. He states:

"The Christian system, as it was hitherto taught, preserved its native and beautiful simplicity, and comprehended in a small number of articles. The public teachers inculcated no other doctrines, than those which are contained in what is commonly called the Apostles' Creed. . .at this time there was not the least controversy about those capital doctrines of Christianity, which were afterwards so keenly debated in the church. . .this venerable simplicity was not, indeed, of a long duration . . ."

In order to find out what the church believed during this period it is necessary to discover from the primary sources what was held as the central "doctrine." This material was gleaned from the "Fathers" of the church. (The term "Father" is applied to those early Christian writers who were regarded in their day as authorities in doctrine and practice and those trained by the Apostles or those quite close to them, such as the Apostles' disciples.)

Perhaps the most complete view of the primitive doctrine of this period is from the pen of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (C. 130-200). In refutation of the current heresies of his day he uses the following striking

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<sup>1</sup>John Laurence Mosheim, An Ecclesiastical History Ancient and Modern, Trans. by Archibald Maclaine (Cincinnati: Applegate and Co., 1854), p. 42.

language concerning the faith of the catholic church. Notice how much it sounds like a creed.

"The church although scattered through the whole world even to the ends of the earth has received the faith from the apostles and from their disciples. This is the faith in one God the Father Almighty, who has made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them: and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who has made flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit who through the prophets proclaimed God's ways with man and the coming. . . , the birth of a virgin, and the suffering and the resurrection from the dead and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to consummate all things, and to raise up all flesh of all mankind."<sup>1</sup>

After this statement there follows the emphatic testimony of the unity of the catholic doctrine.

"Since the church has received this preaching and their faith, as we have said, although she is scattered through the whole world, she preserves it carefully, as one household: and the whole church alike believes in these things, as having one heart and soul, and in unison preaching these beliefs, and teaches and hands them on as having one mouth. For though there are many different languages in the world, still the meaning of the tradition is one and the same. And there are no different beliefs or traditions in the churches established in Germany, or in Spain, or among the Celts, or in the East, or in Egypt or Libya or those established in the center of the earth. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus, Adeversus Haereses, I, X, 1-2, quoted in Henry Bettenson, ed. and translator, The Early Christian Fathers, A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 126-27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. cf. also Book III, Iv, 2, of Adeversus Haereses.

Again Irenaeus says:

"There was one and the same God the Father and Christ Jesus who rose from the dead; and they [The Apostles] preached faith in Him to those who did not believe in the Son of God and exhorted them out of the prophets, that the Christ whom God promised to send, He sent in Jesus, whom they crucified and God raised up."<sup>1</sup>

Speer quotes the testimony of Justin Martyr (died 167), nearly a generation nearer the beginnings, which is equally as clear. Justin calls God "the most true God, . . .", as to other gods he says he is an "atheist" . . . he calls Jesus "Master" . . . and "Teacher" and says "He is both Son and Apostle of God the Father of all, and the Ruler. . .". He further states that they "worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself. . .". Justin further claims that Christ "ought to be worshipped" and that He was "born of a virgin as a man, and was named Jesus and was crucified and died and rose again and ascended into heaven. . ."<sup>2</sup>

The Second Epistle of Clement begins "Brethren, we ought so to think of Jesus Christ as of God - as of the Judge of the living and the dead."<sup>3</sup>

The first of the Apostolic Fathers, Clement of Rome wrote his Epistle to the Corinthians about 97 A.D. and testifies that Christ did not come in pomp or arrogance but in a lowly condition as had been foretold

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<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, XII, 2, quoted in Robert E. Speer, The Finality of Jesus Christ (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1933), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Robert E. Speer, The Finality of Jesus Christ (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1933), pp. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 19.



by the Holy Spirit. Clement then applies to Jesus the whole Fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and says:

"Let us remember the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us". . . "Have we not all one God and one Christ?". . . "On account of the love He bore us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God, His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls."<sup>1</sup>

The Shepherd of Hermas (150 A.D.) holds the conception of Christ as the Son of God when it says:

"The Son of God is older than all His creatures, so that He was a fellow councillor (sic) with the Father in the work of creation . . . a man cannot enter otherwise into the Kingdom of God than by the name of His beloved Son."<sup>2</sup>

The Epistle of Diognetus also tells of the faith of Christians as it is manifested of Christ.

"As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him: as to men He sent Him; as a Saviour He sent Him; and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us. . ." "He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities He gave His own Son as a ransom for us. . ." "This is He who being from everlasting, is today called the Son of God."<sup>3</sup>

Polycarp (died A.D. 167) speaks of the supremacy and superiority of Christ in his Epistle to the Philippians.

"Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour". . . "our righteousness which is Jesus Christ". . . "Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.



and our everlasting High Priest."<sup>1</sup>

Ignatius (died A.D. 117) and his Epistles date back in the very early second century and the last quarter of the first. He too testifies that Christ is central for in The Epistle to the Ephesians he speaks of "Jesus Christ our God". . . "Jesus Christ our inseparable life". . . "Jesus Christ who was the seed of David according to the flesh, being both Son of Man and Son of God."<sup>2</sup>

These quotations contain the words of Polycarp, Ignatius and Clement of Rome, all of whom were immediate disciples of the apostles of Christ. Also the later Fathers, Justin and Irenaeus unite in proclaiming that the authentic and unvarying witness of the church was to the sole primacy and deity of Christ and that He was central in their lives and teachings. There may have been other beliefs, and no doubt there were, but these men spoke in the line of apostolic succession, as such, so that at least they represent what was considered the orthodox faith of the primitive Christian church.

The theology of the Post-Apostolic period then is altered little from what it was in the apostolic church as shown in the last chapter. Though there were many deviations from this basic creed or belief, yet the main body of the church still considered there to be one creator - God, who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ who was attested by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was this view of Christ which gave these centuries its

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

continuing apostolic theology. The Post-Apostolic church saw Jesus as the Unique Son, Saviour and Redeemer who was the absolute, final, authoritative value in religion. Jesus stood alone in His distinctive relationship between man and God. Jesus lived in history and His works, life, death and resurrection were historical and yet He was eternal and universal. In Jesus alone was man able to be saved. It was this conviction about Christ which gave Christianity "survival value" in the second and third centuries when her foes sought her destruction. There were other versions of Christianity which were contending for the field but all those with a lower concept of God and Christ lost in the difficult battle of survival during these hard centuries. These early Christians believed that every man had the ability to respond to God's call of salvation. Jesus died for all men. This gave the early church the dynamic to preach the "Christ" to all men, for all could and ought to accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour. It was this universal possibility of salvation which necessitated its universal proclamation.

#### Reasons for the Expansion and Changes Which Occured

Reasons for the rapid expansion in this period. It is not possible to say that the reasons for the expansion of the church in the Post-Apostolic period are totally different from the reason in the Apostolic age. Therefore, the several reasons given in the last chapter would carry over into these two centuries also. For instance, the universality of the Gospel, its superiority, its Christ-centered message, the high ethics of the Christians, their intransigence, their willingness to suffer for Christ, and their expectation of the speedy return of Christ would change only slightly. A

mankind."<sup>1</sup>

(6) Dr. T. R. Glover gives the terse and accurate reason for the spread, the reason "that Christians out-taught, out-lived, and out-died the followers of other faiths."<sup>2</sup>

(7) The natural external circumstances which helped the spread of Christianity in all of the first three centuries might be mentioned. The wide diffusion of the Jews gave the gospel a hearing for they had the Old Testament to read and synagogues to preach in. The Greek language was universal. The very creation of the Roman Empire with its safety of travel, and fast travelling news all aided the expansion. But these reasons can never fully account for the expansion of the faith.

(8) Neil calls the second century "more religious than the first."<sup>3</sup> He says this was because the outward difficulties and inner poverty were driving men to seek sources of spiritual power. The Roman Empire was showing signs of decay and the mystery religions were not satisfying. Mackintosh sums it up by saying:

"It was into no unspiritual world that the Christian religion came but a world rather of seething hopes and dreams and premonitory glimpses. . .as with ideas like those of Incarnation, atonement, resurrection and many more. . .These hopes the Gospel was to realize."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lecky, History of European Morals, quoted in Aberly, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>T. R. Glover, Conflicts of Religions in the Early Roman Empire, quoted in Aberly, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Stephen Neil, The Christian Society (New York: Harpers, 1953), pp. 34-35.

<sup>4</sup>Mackintosh, The Person of Christ, quoted in Speer, op. cit., pp. 109-10.



little later in this chapter, the changes which occurred are noted but first a few of the reasons for the continual expansion of the faith are noted.

(1) The oral witness to the power and purpose of Christ continued but there was also added the printed testimonies. Justin became a missionary to the cultured and ruling classes through his writings. Tatian became a "literary missionary" in Rome. All the numerous "ante-Nicene Fathers" were in varying degrees missionaries of the pen, as well as of the voice.

(2) The continued persecution created an uncommon type of piety and gave the Christians a deep conviction in their Lord's promises.

(3) The pagans were surprised by the effect of Christianity in reforming the lives of men. Slaves of sensuality became pure in morals, the avaricious and miserly freely gave to those in need and the revengeful later prayed for their enemies. The quick changes wrought in the believers' lives were a surprise to the pagans.

(4) The discipline of the church was made extremely strict. Yielding in any way to the pagans brought strict warnings and punishment from the church. Believers were not to yield under persecution. Even those who gave up the Sacred Books were called "traditores" (traitors) and considered as criminal. Those who paid divine honors to the emperors or to the heathen gods fell under a severe censure. These measures gave the church a concrete purity, though they may have carried it, at times, too far.

(5) Lecky gives his one all-inclusive reason for its success in this period as "the congruity of Christian teaching with the nature of



Heathenism as a religious force was bankrupt as is evidenced by the best thought of the age being alienated from the pagan gods and the repeated attempts of men to seek satisfaction out of the mystery symbols and by initiation after initiation.

(9) A few high officials were won to the faith and they used their influence to promote the faith.

(10) Many prominent women helped to spread the Gospel because of the exalted place Christianity gave to womenhood. Even in the New Testament we see the zeal of the women in spreading of their faith.

(11) The schools of training at Antioch, Edessa, Caesarea, Selucia-Ctisephon, Alexandria, Carthage, and elsewhere were formed during this period for the training of leaders and missionaries. Carver says that these schools were originally for the training of Christian leadership and that the Gospel passion for missionary expansion was the primary motive.<sup>1</sup> Though this might be contested, it is known with certainty that some schools were "mission-minded" (for example, Alexandria).

(12) The Gospel had an essentially spiritual nature. Over against the hopeless cynicism of the world it placed its deathless affirmation of the love and companionship of God. To men sunk in lust and sensuality it proclaimed a Saviour from sin. They believed they were going to live in the eternities.

(13) Latourette, aptly, expresses the fundamental reason for the spread of Christianity:

"Yet the spread and persistence of the

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<sup>1</sup>Carver, op. cit., p. 51.

influence of Jesus can never be ascribed primarily to external circumstances. Always the essential factor has been an inner vitality. No matter by what other forces the spread of Christianity has been facilitated, and these have been varied and many, most of the active agents have been those caught by Jesus and dedicated to him."<sup>1</sup>

"The source of this abounding life could have been no other, as Christians have all along said, than Jesus himself. It is he who accounts for the church and the New Testament."<sup>2</sup>

They were "living sacrifices", pulsating with the life of Christ.

This Christian faith with its positive content and bold exclusiveness survived and outlived all heresies, conquering all foes because of this center of their faith - Jesus. This center of the new faith was something original and unparalleled. It was not an idea nor a ritual act but a Personality. Many might have argued that there was nothing "new" in Christian teaching. To this the Post-Apostolic church answered boldly that there was something new - their Founder. He was New, Alone, Incarnate God, and Supreme Judge. He was new and brought new teaching and truth which answered the anticipations and gropings of men's hungry hearts.

Thus, the main source of the spread of Christianity is this life, traceable back to Jesus, a life which wells over in personal experience with the risen Lord. A generation which maintains this vital Jesus-life seems destined to be missionary, vibrant, and concerned about bringing glory to God by winning more men to His banner in obedience.

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Unquenchable Light (New York: Harper Brothers, 1941), p. XIX.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

Changes which came about in the church during this period. Though the church continued to advance rapidly, it is possible to see a change coming over the church during this Post-Apostolic period. In this Post-Apostolic period one can witness the formations, developments, and modifications which came about as Christianity grappled with its task in the conditions and relationships of a world which it sought to change. The change which can be noticed is the change from a movement of life to an institutionalized church.

These changes came in stealthily and subtly. As Harnack notes of the church, "Her missionary methods altered slowly but significantly in the course of the third century."<sup>1</sup> A few of these changes will now be noted.

(1) The oral witness was still the main means of witnessing during this period but the preaching became "more formal and professional, but without losing its power."<sup>2</sup>

(2) The church in the middle of the third century shows signs of having passed beyond the purely missionary stage.

"We become conscious that we have passed largely into an era of consolidation, and this is borne out when accounts of synods and records of councils come before our notice - councils assembled even during the times of persecution."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harnack, op. cit., quoted in V. Raymond Edman, The Light in Dark Ages (18 Centuries of Missions from the Giving of the Great Commission to the Beginning of Modern Missions under William Carey) (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1946), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Carver, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Henderson and Parry, op. cit., pp. 13-14.



(3) The interaction of Christianity with the pagan faiths, and heretical groups brought a more formal statement of faith and a more exact position for the orthodox. (The effects of the heretical groups upon Christian expansion will be discussed in another chapter because of their importance.)

(4) Edman, who thinks that the two centuries after John show profound changes in missionary methods and motivation, states that in this era there:

"were church 'fathers', but no great missionaries; bishops, but not prophets of the old order. Under the enthusiasm of the pentecostal indueement the church continued to surge forward, despite the persecutions of pagans and Empire; but the dynamic was dying away."<sup>1</sup>

(5) Edman also says that the second and third centuries were eras of church leaders rather than lay witnesses, of the officers of the church rather than the enlisted personal. He further says that these centuries turned to apologetics and the appeal to philosophy rather than the preaching of the Word in the power of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> This judgment is open to question for the church continued to advance not because of its leaders but because of the personal witness of a vast throng of born-again believers. True, more is known about the church's leaders of the second and third centuries than of the first but this does not preclude the gospel still being spread by lay witnesses.

(6) The Episcopacy began to replace the apostolic order of apostles,

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<sup>1</sup>Edman, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.



prophets and teachers. The beginnings of the clergy are found in this period, with a differentiation from the laity.

(7) "Ecclesiastical mechanism replacing men motivated by the Spirit of God thus produce the most vital change in the missionary program."<sup>1</sup>

(8) Education began to take the place of evangelism. Edman paraphrases Harnack as saying:

"By the end of the second century missionary preaching of Christ crucified, risen and returning to set up His kingdom on earth was practically extinct, and had been replaced by the instruction of catechumens and members of one's household."<sup>2</sup>

(9) If they had begun to lose their vital power, then how did they continue expanding. Well it might be stated that they did not lose all their vital contact with Christ during this period and the spiritual power carried over into these two centuries also. However, the church did begin to gain new members by mass conversion rather than by individual belief. This is most noticeable, however, after 312 A.D. When the church began to take members en masse the church suffered in spiritual power, for the people could not know the personal power of the life and teachings of Jesus. At Pentecost a large number were converted to the Lord, it is true, but this is of a different character. Those at Pentecost were familiar with the Old Testament, the prophecy of the Messiah, they heard the preaching of the word and the Spirit did a work in their hearts. But the mass conversions which came in the third and fourth centuries were of a different nature.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

Whole families, clans and tribes were baptized without even a knowledge of who the Christ was and what He demanded from them. This of course would deaden the missionary zeal of the church because the church was thereby becoming paganized.

(10) Growing within the church was the tendency toward asceticism which led to the monasticism of the fourth century. This was a new type of missionary force which tended to draw men from worldly concerns rather than going out to make converts from among the world. Monasticism, itself may have grown out of a loss of concern for the needs of men, but this can not now be analyzed.

(11) The Christians began to appeal to human authorities, such as bishops or the church rather than to the Word of God. As the faith of Christendom shifted to the church as the sole interpreter of truth the church lost contact with the real power - The person of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God.

(12) Edman says that: "The word of God began to fall into neglect and disuse, and with it went the original program of Christianity: the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth."<sup>1</sup>

Summary and conclusion. It was seen that the Gospel had continued to spread with speed in spite of the fierce persecutions. The theology of the period appeared to be based on the same core of beliefs as was found in the apostolic age but that significant changes began to take place.

Some of the reasons for the rapid expansion of Christianity were:

(1) the continual oral witness to Christ with the added printed testimonies

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<sup>1</sup>Edman, op. cit., p. 43-44.

(2) persecution created a real piety and pure church (3) the gospel wrought immediate changes in new believers lives and this influenced the pagans (4) the church tightened her discipline to exclude compromisers (5) the gospel met the need and nature of mankind (6) the Christians out-thought, out-lived, and out-died the believers of other faiths (7) natural circumstances such as better methods of communication, the Roman Peace and the synogogue all aided the growth of Christianity (8) Christianity was meeting the growing void of paganism. (9) low and high men alike accepted the new faith (10) women were used in the spread of the gospel (11) schools of training sent out more missionaries and built up believers (12) the spiritual nature of the gospel answered to the cynicism of the age (13) the Christians were totally given over to their Master as "living sacrifices." (14) and the personal experience and zeal of the Christians thrust them forth as "witnesses."

The changes which occurred in this period were noted as: (1) preaching was becoming more formal (2) the church was becoming consolidated as evidenced by creeds and councils (3) the heretical groups effected the faith and made beliefs more rigid (4) the differentiation between laity and clergy began to come into view (5) the spirit of Christ began to be replaced by ecclesiastical mechanism (6) teaching began to replace missionary witnessing and evangelism (7) the church began to shift into apology instead of missionary outreach as such (8) mass conversions without a personal experience with Christ let many into the church which weakened her witness (9) monasticism began to creep into the church's life (10) Christians began to appeal to human authorities rather than on the Spirit of God and (11) the Word of God began to fall into disuse.

Thus it was seen that when the Christians began to leave the central element of their faith - the Person and Work of Christ - there went with it a decline in missionary zeal. Christ was the only way of salvation. When men believed there were other ways, their witness was weakened and became unconvincing. The continual triumph of Christianity depended, it seems, upon the simple elements of the faith - the preaching of the living God as the Father of men, the saving work of the Son Jesus Christ, and the energizing and purifying power of the Holy Spirit. When the church ceased to be totally dedicated to God her missionary vision and outreach seemed to be curtailed in like proportion.



CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HERETICAL GROUPS UPON CHRISTIAN EXPANSION

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INFLUENCE OF THE HERETICAL GROUPS UPON CHRISTIAN EXPANSION

This chapter will deal with the three major heretical groups in the ancient church; The Ebionites, Gnostics, and the Monarchians. While the main body of the church was progressing with great speed, some of these heretical groups also spread throughout the then known world. The Gnostics, for instance, covered a large area of the world and were as universally distributed as the Christians. What then gave the Christian church the staying-power through the centuries while the other groups died out in time? Was there something inherently different which made the one to triumph over the others? This chapter will attempt to see what the internal character of these sects was and to see if their theology affected in any way their spread or their later decline and death.

The study of these heretical groups is helpful in so far as they constitute one of the most impressive instances of the great law of 'Progress through conflict' which seems to be inscribed over the history of human life.

"The law that the ultimate attainment of the many is rendered possible only by the failure of the few, that final success is conditioned by previous defeat."<sup>1</sup>

By studying them it can more clearly be seen just what it was in

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<sup>1</sup>Bethune-Baker, An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd. 1903), p. 2.

catholic Christianity which gave it that lasting-power to cover the entire earth. By studying these groups it should be possible to more clearly define the position of the main body of the church against which it reacted and from which it broke. The reasons for the expansion of the main-line of Christianity may thus be more clearly understood.

### 1. EBIONITES

The first heretical group studied was the Ebionites. This sect can be classified into three main groups; the Nazarenes, the Pharisaic and the Gnostic Ebionites. All three were Jewish groups which rose above Judaism but had not caught the universality of the Gospel. A thorough discussion of the background and beliefs of each of these factions is found in Appendix A. What is of major interest to this study is how the churches' missionary efforts were hindered or aided by this group. The influence of this sect upon missionary expansion will now be discussed.

#### Influence of the Sect and its Theology Upon Christian Expansion.

Ebionism is essentially a national religion and not universal.

Latourette says of these Ebionites:

"The effort to remain within the Jewish faith and to win all of the seed of Abraham to acknowledge the Nazarene Messiah had failed. It was as a universal religion unhampered by an inherited racialism that Christianity went on its way."<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubting that the Pharisaic Ebionites and the Essene

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<sup>1</sup>Latourette, op. cit., I, 337.

Ebionites had a certain vitality and power for progress but the direction was not toward the primitive Christian faith but away from it. Latourette states that their missionary work among their fellow Jews met with some success.<sup>1</sup>

The Elchasaite group was the most "missionary" of all the Ebionites. While the Nazarenes remained static, and the Pharisaic group appealed to the Jews in the large, the Essene group tried to make a wider appeal.

The Book of Elkesai appeared to be an Ebionite effort to propagate the system Westward. This was Ebionism assuming a literary dress and trying to make an appeal to the Gentiles with their new beliefs.

The Essene Ebionites seemed to be attempting a real advance at winning non-believers. They tried to eliminate from Mosaism its more national and limited elements and tried to commend itself to the world as a universal religion. To support this claim to truth they used their fiction of a new revelation which was revealed in the Elkesai and received from an angel.

An unsigned article in the Encyclopaedia Britannica gives credit to this group as sending out missionaries. "One Akibiades of Apamea undertook a mission to Rome about 220 to propagate its teaching."<sup>2</sup>

Rainy makes the frank statement, which is supported by others, that the Ebionites "became separated from other Christians, ceased to exert

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"Ebionites", The Encyclopaedia Britannica (11th Edition, Cambridge: University Press, 1910, VIII, 842.



influence, and sank into narrow and obscure sectarianism."<sup>1</sup>

One of the main theological effects was that while it struggled to maintain the theological foundations of Judaism it at the same time wanted parts of Christian theology. In doing this it failed to grasp the essential nature of Christianity, and thus its impoverished views led to heresy.

This group only extended the Law-Grace tension for a longer period, but it had little effect in binding the main body of the Church again to the "elementals" of religion.

Ebionism was the oldest disturbing influence in the progress of Christianity. It fixed itself on Christianity at the very spot of its birth. The decisive moment for their faith was at the Jerusalem Council when the church chose the freedom of the Spirit in contrast with the bondage of the Old Covenant.

The sect was hostile in opposition to the progressive movement of the Christian church but one is amazed at how little effect it had in actually hindering its growth.

This section may be concluded with the insight of Beveridge when he sums up the influence of this sect:

"The Ebionites as a sect continued into the fifth century and gradually disappeared. . . Nothing else could have been looked for. They had taken a false direction, which led them more and more away from the channel in which the church's life flowed full and free. Catholic Christianity swept past them. They moved further and further away

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Rainy, The Ancient Catholic Church (From the Accession of Trajan to the Fourth General Council), (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 21.

until all progress was barred against them. While the church's life and doctrine developed into Catholicity, strong and clear. Ebionism more and more degenerated, until its elements were absorbed either in bitter Judaism or in truculent heathenism. Catholic Christianity gained nothing from Ebionism, unless in that reflex way in which heresy often has of causing the church to make sure of its ground and to mature its Christology."<sup>1</sup>

The progressive advance of the Christian Church, still so alive with the person of the indwelling Christ, was not hindered for long by this sect which only reminded them of Judaism and heathenism. The Ebionites made no advance of any note upon Judaism and heathenism in that they still left man with no mediator, or reconciler and allowed nothing but a transient and illusiory union between God and man. Catholic Christianity surged passed them.

They had no unique, universal, personal Saviour of men, to present to the world. They missed the import of the total mission of Jesus and remained outside of the fold of those who were empowered by the personal encounter with the Risen Lord.

It was seen from this study that the Ebionites were a group which followed a doctrine which tied them to the old Jewish principles. This intermixture of Jewish and Christian principles contributed to call forth the reaction of that opposite tendency of mind, the Gnostic tendency, to which this study now turns, and which at length must bring about a total separation of Christianity from its organic connection with Judaism. Ebionism was not a very strong deterrent to the rapid advance of the orthodox church because it was quickly ingulfed back into Judaism while Christian-

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<sup>1</sup>Beveridge, op. cit., V, 145.

ity broke from its legalistic bonds and surged forward.

## 2. GNOSTICS

The Ebionitic sect, as was seen, led gradually to a revolt from Judaism which ushered in the powerful Gnostic sects. A complete study of the historical background of these sects and their main theological beliefs is given in Appendix B.

What is of major interest to this study is the actual influence which the Gnostic sects had upon the church's expansion and outreach. Both the hindering influences and the good influences are considered.

### Influences of the Gnostics

When one considers the influences which Gnosticism had on the church's expansion judgments are not easily reached. For some influences can be both helpful and hurtful at the same time. For example, one may say that it was an asset to the expansion of Christianity when the church was forced to unify itself in opposition to the Gnostic beliefs. Thus was formed a unified catholic church which was able to spread the Gospel more effectively because of its united efforts. Yet, at the same time it can be seen that this unity of organization, creed, and belief made it "'Catholic' in the technical sense of that term, viz. exclusive."<sup>1</sup> (For those who held beliefs different from the catholic church found themselves excluded from their fellowship.) So then, while the consolidation of the faith was a help for the expansion of the Gospel it also became a hinderance

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<sup>1</sup>Gilman, Peck and Colby, op. cit., VIII, 461.



because it excluded and shut out from Christian fellowship some who would have given added power to the Christian Church.

Hindering influences. Some of the influences of the Gnostic theology which had hindering effects upon the church in their advance with the Good News will now be discussed.

(1) Although defeated in the end, Gnosticism succeeded in imparting some of its own un-Christian mysticism into the church. E. F. Scott calls this the "most enduring of all the effects that are traceable to the Gnostic movement."<sup>1</sup>

(2) The asceticism of the Gnostics prepared the way, at least in part, for the monasticism of the church.

(3) Waddington believes that since the real character of the religion of Christ was not yet generally comprehended, and the heathen formed their estimation of it according to the specimen which was presented to them; that when they observed the absurdities of the Gnostics and the immoralities practiced in the name of Christ, they extended their contempt and indignation to the whole body of the followers of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

(4) Waddington also believes that the progress of the faith was also retarded because these individual foolish acts of the Gnostic contributed in bringing down upon the Christians the visitations of popular fury and imperial injustice, which almost crushed and terminated it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Scott, op. cit., VI, 240-41.

<sup>2</sup>George Waddington, A History of the Church from the Earliest Ages to the Reformation (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



(5) They drew up such a complicated Christology that "it frequently recalls the Christology of the later dogmatic of the Greek Fathers."<sup>1</sup> This was true perhaps because the Gnostics seemed to start a trend toward the over-intellectualizing of the faith at the expense of a personal vital relationship to a living person.

(6) The ascetic principle of the Gnostics seemed to carry over into the later Catholic Church. It even at a time became dominant in the later church. This could only be possible if the dualistic concept between flesh and Spirit was carried into the Christian faith. "Augustine. . . introduced a number of dualistic ideas into Christianity"<sup>2</sup> and they have been with us ever since.

(7) Latourette says that the very refusal of catholic Christianity to compromise with the Gnostics was an asset in that this intransigence gave solidarity to the Christian community and encourage tenacity of purpose.<sup>3</sup> E. F. Scott disagrees with this, however, for he thinks this was a misfortune.

"Not only was it deprived of influences that would have proved helpful but it suffered a partial arrest in development. . . To check the inroads of Gnosticism the church had to prohibit freedom. Dogma was made rigid; the idea of a new revelation was forbidden; ecclesiastical government became official and oppressive."<sup>4</sup>

The contrast between the third and fourth century and the primitive period

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<sup>1</sup>Boussett, op. cit., XII, 157-58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>Latourette, op. cit., I, 342.

<sup>4</sup>Scott, op. cit., VI, 241.

seems to afford us with proof that the church did suffer a loss from this triumph over heresy.

(8) J. M. Robertson states that another hinderance was that the Gnostics drew on the idea of allegory from the Jewish Platonist Philo and brought it into the church.<sup>1</sup>

(9) Gwatkin sees the Gnostics as the forerunners of mediaeval developments.

"Among them for instance we find the first traces of images, Mariolatry, and transubstantiation, and of the gorgeous heathen ceremonialism which overcame the churches in the fourth century."<sup>2</sup>

Other elements which carried into the mediaeval church which stunted its growth was the use of amulets and the worship of angels.

(10) The sacramental idea of religion became more firmly established after the Gnostic period. The only difference was that it was church ritual rather than Gnostic. Through its syncretic origin Gnosticism introduced for the first time a whole mass of sacramental, mystical ideas into the church.

"But even in the long run even genuine Christianity has been unable to free itself from the magic of the sacraments; and the Eastern Church especially has taken the same direction as Gnosticism."<sup>3</sup>

(11) The last hindering effect is that of tradition and outward organization. The early church became more highly organized, in the way

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<sup>1</sup>J. M. Robertson, A Short History of Christianity, "The Thinkers Library, No. 24." (London: Watts and Co., 1931), p. 70-71.

<sup>2</sup>Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>3</sup>Boussett, op. cit., XII, 157.

of Bishops and other offices. Through these they sought to establish, through tradition, that they held the truth which was passed down from the apostles. Though this was a fairly sound system it in actuality led to the Popish system and the abusive use of tradition by the Roman Church in later centuries. The Church of course was unaware of all these tendencies which had crept into the church. Nevertheless it is evident that she conquered Gnosticism only by the partial adoption of many of its aims and interest.

Good influences. Under this heading those influences which helped the expansion of primitive Christianity will be discussed.

(1) The Church had to resort to a more thorough study of the historical tradition in opposition to Gnostic speculation. In the struggle with Gnosticism it obtained a firm hold of the principle that that alone is to be held true Christianity which can be shown to be historically derived from Christ and His apostles.

(2) "One of the marked effects of the Gnostic theories was the influence exerted by them in stimulating the development of theology within the limits of the Church."<sup>1</sup>

The church was stimulated to defend its doctrines against the Gnostic attack. It was at the principal seats of Gnosticism, Alexandria and Antioch, from which the first Christian systematic theologies arose and flourished.

Neander speaks of this asset, of arousing men's minds to self-active appropriation and digestion of Christian truth, and the bringing into clearer consciousness the peculiar essence of its doctrines, as the chief

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<sup>1</sup>George Park Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 60.



mission for which Gnosticism was allowed to flourish.<sup>1</sup>

(3) Hurst says that the chief service of Gnosticism was that it acquainted the pagan mind with some fundamental Christian truths and that it disintegrated the fabric of the pagan philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this is what Payne has in mind when he makes the overly optimistic statement that the Gnostics "far from hurting the young shoot of Christianity, they gave it a rich, fantastic soil to grow in."<sup>3</sup> Waddington says that Gibbon thought that the Gnostics promoted the progress of Christianity, on the whole because the heathen to whom they communicated an imperfect knowledge of the faith, subsequently threw off their errors and melted into the body of the church.<sup>4</sup>

(4) Rainy thinks that the Gnostics accelerated the Christian development because the Gnostics were a body of men filled with a zeal for spreading the truth that Christianity was not only a true religion but the absolute and final religion. He indicates that because most of them remained in the church, that their efforts actually aided the expansion of Gospel, though they did introduce intellectual prejudices.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Augustus Neander, General History of the Christian Religion and Church, trans. by Joseph Torrey (revised ed., Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1871), I, 478.

<sup>2</sup>John F. Hurst, Short History of the Early Church (New York: Chautauqua Press, 1886), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Payne, The Holy Fire (The Story of the Fathers of the Eastern Church), (New York: Harper and Brothers, Pub., 1957), p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Waddington, op. cit., p. 71 in footnote.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Rainy, The Ancient Catholic Church (From the accession of Trajan to the Fourth General Council, A.D. 98-45), (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 98.



(5) Latourette feels that:

"The very refusal of Catholic Christianity to compromise with non-Christian faith probably was an asset of no mean value. . .this intransigence gave solidarity to the Christian community and encouraged tenacity of purpose."<sup>1</sup>

Of course there were drawbacks to this intransigence also, as has already been indicated.

(6) Harnack holds that the "Catholic Confederation," embracing the majority of the churches of the East and West and with headquarters at Rome, came into existence in the Gnostic controversies. He holds that the feeling of unity and fellowship begotten by the "Catholic Confederation" helped greatly in the spread of Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

(7) The Gnostics seemed to contribute much to the church in the way of hymn lore, which helped its spread. Many of the Gnostic hymns were taken by the Christians and adapted to the services of the Church.

(8) Since Gnosticism had concerned itself so greatly with the writings of the apostles and the Old Testament, it became the imperative duty of the Church to settle forever the inspiration of the Old Testament and the limits of the New Testament canon.

(9) In order to standardize the doctrine of the church, appeal was made to the Rule of Faith. From this Rule sprang the ancient creeds of Christendom. This regula fidei gave the church an authoritative standard of belief whereby all innovations could be tested.

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<sup>1</sup>Latourette, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>2</sup>A. Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity, quoted in Latourette, op. cit., footnote pp. 342-43.

(10) The claim of the Gnostics to be the universal religion led to the church asserting the catholicity of her own position. Then in order to defend this position the bishops were given the task of fighting heresy throughout the realm. By this method they gained prominence for the station of bishop and this gave impetus to the development of the episcopal polity.

(11) The Doctrine of Apostolic succession, tradition, and unbending church discipline aided the church for a while but eventually became a means of abuse.

In conclusion, it can be seen that Gnosticism had both hindering and good effects upon Christian expansion. Items which helped the church in the second century, though, often hindered her advance in the fourth and fifth centuries. It must be considered an advantage for the further development of Christianity, that at its very outset it prevailed against the great movement of Gnosticism.

The crisis involved by the assaults of Gnosticism was very momentous for the ancient church. Had Gnosticism not been overcome, the Christianity would have forfeited its peculiar genius and "would have been drawn into the general vortex, thus perishing like the religions of collapsing paganism."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. MONARCHIANS

The last heretical group which this author studied was the Monarchian group. A study of the sect's background, its classification, and its doctrinal position can be found in Appendix C. The influence which this

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<sup>1</sup>G. Kruger, "Gnosticism", The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1909), IV, 494.

sect's theology had upon Christian expansion will now be discussed.

### Result and Influence

In its various forms the sect of the Monarchians:

"...agitated the church of Rome, especially during the episcopates of Zephyrinus and Callistus, during the third century; and passed into the great controversies which agitated the whole church in the fourth centuries and called for the two great councils of Nicea and Constantinople."<sup>1</sup>

The ravages worked by these Monarchian view can be seen by the frequent condemnations of them in the shape of Sabellianism:

"Pope Damascus condemned them in the council held in Rome in 380. . .similarly, in the ecumenical council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). . .council of Broga (561). . .and. . .the condemnation is repeated in the Lateran council of 649. . ."<sup>2</sup>

(1) Bruce considers the publication of the Monarchian views as beneficial to the church in that it stimulated a closer consideration of the entire subject of the trinity and an attempt to state the doctrine of God in terms which did more justice to the Biblical revelation, Christian experience and historical fact.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Likewise this quest for a proper expression of the nature of God led Tertullian to provide terms which have since been used as the

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<sup>1</sup>John Henry Blunt, Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Religious Thought (London: Rivingtons, 1874), pp. 331-32.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh Pope, "Monarchianism", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), VIII 780-81.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce, op. cit., II, 139.



expression of the orthodox position in Western Christianity. It is to him that:

"...we owe the word 'Trinity' (Latin, trinitas), and also the definition of the Godhead as being 'one substance (Latin, substantia), in three persona (Latin, personae)'."<sup>1</sup>

(3) The Monarchians pushed the church into a more thorough and comprehensive examination of all the sublime doctrines of Christianity. For truth can often be proved by controversy in that it demands a minute examination of the presently held beliefs.

(4) Seeberg says that the major historical significance of the Monarchians is that they "reminded the church that there is only one personal God."<sup>2</sup>

(5) Hurst ascribes to Sabellius the high honor of doing the church an inestimable service in that he rescued the catholic church from the dangerous doctrine of subordination of Christ and the lower subordination of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> For Sabellius had given all three persons of the Godhead a type of equal value. After his death, the arian heresy, which was the outgrowth of the Dynamistic type of monarchianism was condemned in the Nicene council and the equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was forever declared a fundamental article of Christian faith. Sabellianism thus prepared the way for the Nicene theology. Sabellius differed from the orthodox Nicene statement later to appear, in that he denied the trinity

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Seeberg, op. cit., I, 136.

<sup>3</sup>John Fletcher Hurst, History of the Christian Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1897), I, 265-67.



catholic church were: (1) its introduction of asceticism and mysticism into the church (2) the orthodox church tended to prohibit freedom because of Gnostic looseness (3) allegory was brought into the church (4) the offices of the church received undue power (5) and the sacramental idea tended to replace a vital, personal faith.

Some of the influences of Gnosticism which aided Christian expansion were: (1) the church was stimulated in the development of its theology (2) they acquainted the pagan mind with Christianity (3) most of the Gnostics remained in the church and helped spread the knowledge about Christ (4) the canon was determined (5) the orthodox church united against the heresy (6) rules of faith were formed (7) and in general the church sharpened her advance under the competition.

It was seen that some of the main influences which the Monarchians had upon Christian expansion were: (1) the church was stimulated to a closer consideration of the entire subject of the trinity (2) the church had to rethink its beliefs about Christ (3) the church was prepared for the coming statement of faith at the Nicene council (4) the Monarchian heresy caused the church to become more centralized, authoritarian, sectional, and exclusive which hindered her in later years.

Thus, it can be seen that the heresies had both permanent and temporary affects upon Christian expansion. Some were hindering influences and some were helpful influences. The overall effects of these heresies upon the Christian church is momentous. They did not, however, preclude the power of the Holy Spirit as He caused men to spread the Gospel of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATIONS

The early disciples believed that in all things Christ should be "pre-eminent" for all the fullness of God dwelled in Him. For them Christ was the center of their lives. Christ was to them the, ALL, the One, He was everything and "above all and through all and in all."<sup>1</sup>

There were many natural factors which contributed to the rapid advancement of Christianity. It was noted that these indicated that the time was ready for the Messiah to come, but these natural reasons were found to be insufficient in themselves to give a full answer to the problem which was discussed in this thesis.

A "belief" the early church indeed had, but their faith went beyond intellectual assent. They were redeemed and bought men, called to be "ambassadors", empowered by the Holy Spirit, cleansed of sin, witnesses of the total Christ-event in their own lives, and daily living sacrifices to God. They were motivated by doctrine, yes, but much more by dynamic spiritual truth, attested to by facts, the Word, power, and their own personal encounter with the risen and reigning Lord. The early Christians witnessed because they had experienced.

The Post-Apostolic study gave a continuing view of the rapidly expanding church and showed how in the main it continued to carry through the same core of belief and vitality as was seen in the first century. It was noticed however that significant changes began to occur in the expansion and doctrines of the church.

It was seen that the church was called upon to meet new challenges such as persecution, heretics, compromisers and intellectualism. Never-

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<sup>1</sup>Ephesians 4:4-6, R.S.V., cf. Colossians 1:18, 3:11.

theless the momentum of the church, with its proximity to the early Christians, in the main continued to surge forward.

The changes which were noticed during this period, and which hindered missionary advance were: (1) the increasing rigidity of doctrine (2) the rise of fixed creeds (3) the rise of councils (4) ecclesiastical mechanisms replacing the spirit of Christ (5) formal teaching displacing evangelism and missionary witnessing (6) taking members into the church in mass instead of by personal decisions (7) heretical influences (8) and a growing ascetic tendency.

It was seen that when the Christians began to leave the central elements of their faith, there went with it a decline in missionary zeal. These tangents became detrimental to the spreading of the Good News. When the church ceased to be totally dedicated to God its missionary vision and outreach seemed to be curtailed in like proportion.

The study of the three representative heresies gave an impressive example of the great law of "progress through conflict." It was seen that the heresies in general made the church rethink her whole position and theology.

In the Ebionitic study it was seen that the sect lost its right to speak to the religious needs of mankind because it failed to grasp the essential nature of Christianity and relegated the person of Christ to an inferior position. This group extended the grace-law tension for a longer period. However, Christianity easily broke from their narrow sectarianism and was not seriously influenced by their beliefs. They had missed the essential purpose and mission of Christ and thereby forfeited their right as an influence for righteousness. They remained tied to their modified Jewish principles until they finally died out.



The Gnostic heresy, unlike the Ebionites, had a profound influence upon the expansion of the Christian church.

The crisis which the church faced in the heresy of the Gnostic belief or doctrine had profound effects upon Christian expansion. As it was seen, it both hindered and helped Christian expansion. The results of this sect continued into the subsequent centuries. The full influence of their beliefs have never been fully decided by the historians.

It is to be noted, however, that even though they often had a false view of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, yet they had a real zeal. This is puzzling. Perhaps this zeal was the last dying attempts of paganism to regain its ascendancy. Nevertheless, the Gnostics failed to have the staying-power needed for a universal religion which could meet men's needs.

The Monarchian heresy had effects upon Christian expansion in that it caused the church to become more centralized, authoritarian, sectional and exclusive which hindered her in later years.

This sect caused an inter-church theological dispute. Yet the Monarchian sect, in the long run, seemed to have placed the Christology of the church on a firm historical and Biblical ground. The lack of concern for missionary expansion among the parties engaged in the controversy, seemed to be due to the heavy stress on "right" belief. This "right" belief tended to put an emphasis on the "letter" of their doctrine and not the "spirit" of the belief. The strength which should have been spent in conflict with foes without was exhausted on fierce contentions within.

#### Conclusions and Evaluations

This study was an attempt to see if any way doctrine influenced

missionary expansion. The study was limited to the one great wave of missionary expansion from the death of Christ to the Edict of Constantine. The conclusion reached is not a simple yes or no answer. Doctrine indeed had a profound influence upon the Christian expansion but that alone did not determine whether a person or a group was missionary. The dynamic seems to be not so much in doctrine as it does in the more intangible elements of their religion. The essence of this intangible, for Christianity in the primitive era, in a word, may be said to be that God incarnate had complete rule in every department of their lives and was living His life through anyone who had died unto himself so that for him to live was Christ.

The illustration of the differences in the church at Corinth from the Church at Thessalonica show in a vivid manner the relationship of theology to missionary expansion. Paul had given birth to both of these churches and both were nurtured on his theology. However, the Corinthian church was non-missionary while the church of Thessalonica exhibited a great deal of missionary zeal.

The Corinthian church's enthusiasm for outreach, declined due to an overstress on internal problems which grew from a lack of Christian love. They were so concerned with self-esteem that they "babes" in Christ as is evidenced by their problems, divisions, sins and inactivity in spreading the Gospel. They were so concerned with their own beliefs that their zeal for Christ began to flag. When their devotion to Christ was no longer central in their lives their outreach stopped also.

The Church of Thessalonica handled their internal problems in such a way that they were free to advance with full force. Truth to them was more than a formal belief but was a subjective, total life in Christ which

fortified an objective theology. To believe and not to act was apparently unknown to them. They were totally yielded to the Holy Spirit working in them.

Their inner compulsion was love to God. Love was the inner vitality of their doctrine and that which gave belief meaning and power. They loved "all the brethren" and the love of Christ was constraining them to proclaim the Gospel to others.

The power of Christianity is the power of love. The decline of Christian devotedness appears to be the reason for the decline of the Christian dynamic. Faith, love, and the life in the Spirit gave meaning and reason to their belief Christ must be their one controlling passion.

These then appear to be the most important clues to the relation of doctrine to missionary expansion, during the ancient period. This may be the principle which motivated missionary outreach throughout the first great wave of missionary endeavor.

In closing the writer wishes to commend to others the study of the remaining four to six periods of great missionary outreach. Perhaps a study of those periods and the influence which doctrine had upon the missionary expansion in those eras could give a clearer answer to the problem.

## APPENDIX A



Celsus also makes the distinction between these two groups.<sup>1</sup>

These two groups are the Nazarenes who were "stationary" Jewish Christians, and the Ebionites who became highly heretical. This latter group divides into two or three other doctrinal positions. Some of these groups will now be discussed in greater detail.

Seeberg indicates that the Nazarenes were within the fold of the catholic Church but that the other groups are not by saying: "They [Nazarenes] were really Jewish Christians, whereas the two following groups were only Christian Jews."<sup>2</sup>

Nazarenes. This portion of the Jewish Christians adhered, even after the destruction of Jerusalem, to the national customs of their fathers. They united the observance of the Mosaic ritual law with their belief in the Messiahship and divinity of Jesus; used the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, deeply mourned the unbelief of their brethren and hoped for their future conversion in a body, and for a millennial reign of Christ on earth.

They also believed in Christ's virgin birth and the apostleship of Paul. They wished to remain Jews themselves and to retain the obligation of the Mosaic Law but did not feel they should bind these obligations on the Gentile Christians nor did they refuse fellowship with them. Neander gives us another distinctive trait of Nazarenes:

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<sup>1</sup>G. Uhlorn, "Ebionites", The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Samuel Macouley Jackson, ed., (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1909), IV, 57.

<sup>2</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, Text Book of the History of Doctrine, trans. by Charles E. Hay, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), I, 88.

"The distinctive trait of these Nazarenes was their decided anti-Pharisaic tendency. They denounced the maxims of the scribes and Pharisees, who caused the people to err by their traditions and who had hindered them from believing in Jesus. . ."<sup>1</sup>

From these beliefs it can be seen that this group was not heretical "but stunted, separatist Christians."<sup>2</sup>

They stopped at the obsolete position of a "narrow and anxious Jewish Christianity" and thus shrank to a insignificant sect. They had risen far above Judaism but had not caught the universality of the Gospel's message. "Jerome says of them, that, wishing to be Jews and Christians alike, they were neither one nor the other."<sup>3</sup>

Pharisaic (non-gnostic) ebionites. This second class of Judaistic-Christians were far more numerous than the Nazarenes and seem to be the proper successors to the Judaizers opposed in the Epistle to the Galatians.

Irenaeus tells us that these Ebionites closely corresponded with the teachings of Cerinthus. The views of Cerinthus are stated by Irenaeus:

"He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the Son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible,

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<sup>1</sup>Augustus Neander, General History of the Christian Religion and Church, trans., by Joseph Torrey (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1849), I, 349.

<sup>2</sup>Schaff, op. cit., p. 432.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

inasmuch as he was a spiritual being."<sup>1</sup>

With these views of Cerinthus the Pharisaic Ebionites agreed. Further Hippolytus said they alleged:

"That they themselves also, when in like manner they fulfill (the Law) (sic), are able to become Christs; for they asserted that our Lord Himself was a man in like sense with all."<sup>2</sup>

Pharisaic Ebionism's most characteristic feature was its Christology. The life of Jesus, who it recognized as the Christ, fell into two distinct and clearly defined parts at the point of cleavage stood the baptism. Up to the point of his baptism Jesus was a man, just as much as any of us. His sonship up to this point before baptism was purely ethical and along this line of sonship it is possible for any man to be a Christ. Christ was justified through the law, so the Ebionites said, and thus so can we.

Jesus was so pre-eminent in his virtues that he became worthy to be the Messiah and at his baptism the seal of this worthiness was placed upon Him. This is an adoptionistic Christology. Thus Jesus' baptism was His birthday as the Messiah. A new power, the Christ, entered into Him at that time. This power was not God, though, because God was infinitely supreme and could not stoop to union with men. The power, or Christ, came into union with Jesus, not to redeem the world, but to be a prophet of a new order and to make known the father.

This Christ-power left Jesus before His death. Only Jesus suffered and rose again. The Christ returned to 'His own Pleroma'.

Apart from their Christology, it is learned that these Pharisaic

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<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus, I, XXVI quoted in Philip Schaff, op. cit., II, 432.

<sup>2</sup>Hippolytus, VII., 22, quoted by Beveridge, op. cit., V, 142.



champion. Peter is then made to say many things which support the Ebionite viewpoint.

"Among the main Ebionite elements in the Clementine romance is the essential identity of Christianity with Judaism. Christ is the restorer of the pure, primitive religious of Moses. Christ is the last of a series of eight prophets - Abraham, Moses and Christ being the chief - by all of whom the same truth has been inculcated. . .there is a disposition to find an original religion to which all religions are traceable. . ."1

Christ came just to purify the original religion from the additions which distorted it. These writings held that you could hold either to Moses or Christ because they both came to reveal the one primitive religion which had been obscured.

There is much more which could be said about the doctrine of this latter group of Gnostic Ebionites, however, that will not be necessary. Enough has been said to show that this group closely approaches Gnosticism while holding to some characteristic Ebionitic ideas.

#### Expansion

It must have proven difficult, for that rigid Ebionitism which maintained the perpetual validity of the Mosaic law, to make proselytes from among the members of the Gentiles whom had become Christians. But even in the time of Justin Martyr, attempts were being made to win the Gentile Christians to the observance of the Mosaic law.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George Park Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1896), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Neander, op. cit., I, 362.



In its attempt to win the Jewish and Gentile world the Ebionites lost because of its inherited racialism. Most of the Jewish Christians were found in Syria and Palestine. Though some did get to Rome. Pantaenus found some in "India" (probably south Arabia according to Latourette).<sup>1</sup>

The Jews resisted their attempted missionary activities among them and classed them as apostates. Schaff said that sects of Ebionites could be found in Palestine, surrounding regions, the Island of Cyprus, Asia Minor and Rome.<sup>2</sup>

J. P. Arendzen traces their influence in Babylon and Persia where they are traceable through the Mandeans and the Mohammedans.<sup>3</sup>

Bruce tells us they lingered on in Transjordan and Egypt until the seventh century and hints that there might have been a very small remnant in Jordan as late as 1936 A.D.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1937), I, 337.

<sup>2</sup>Schaff, op. cit., II, 432.

<sup>3</sup>J. P. Arendzen, "Ebionites", The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1909), V, 244.

<sup>4</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame, (The Rise and Progress of Christianity) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 175.

APPENDIX B

## APPENDIX B

### GNOSTICS

#### Background Material

Origin and name. If we are to understand the peculiar character of the great Gnostic movement we must be careful not to be led astray by the catchword "Gnosis." Many mistakenly regard the Gnostics as pre-eminently the representatives of the intellectuals among the Christians and Gnosticism as only an intellectual tendency concerned with philosophical speculation. It is true that at its height, Gnosticism could claim many of the world's thinkers, but that is not what the name primarily indicates. Among the majority of the followers of the movement, according to Wilhelm Boussett, "Gnosis" was understood not as meaning "knowledge" or "understanding" in our sense of the word, but "revelation."<sup>1</sup>

These Gnostic sects felt that they had a secret and mysterious knowledge accessible to them and to no other. This knowledge was not proved or propagated, but believed and guarded by those so blessed to be among the initiated. This type of knowledge, then, was not based on reflection or scientific study and proof but on revelation. This revelation was claimed to be derived directly from the times of primitive Christianity, from the Christ Himself, His disciples and friends or else from their own later prophets.

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<sup>1</sup>Wilhelm Boussett, "Gnosticism", Encyclopaedia Britannica (11th edition, Cambridge: Universith Press, 1910), XII, 157.

With this distinction clearly in mind the reader will not as easily make the mistake of considering the Gnostics only as "Christianity perverted by learning and speculation."<sup>1</sup>

The origin of Gnosticism goes back far beyond the Christian movement. Historians are still not settled as to just where its source was.

"The ancient historian Hegessipus informs us. . . that the heretical gnosis did not make its appearance with an uncovered head until after the death of the apostles, but that it previously worked in secret."<sup>2</sup>

Whereas many of the early historians considered Gnosticism to have its roots in the Greek culture, recent historians look at it as a combination of Greek and Oriental religious thought and speculation. They now look at Gnosticism as in existence before the rise of Christianity, but that with the appearance of Christianity the Gnostics seemed drawn to them by a magnetic attraction which led them to incorporate many of its views.

Schaff shows us the varied background of this group by saying:

"Gnosticism is, therefore, the grandest and most comprehensive form of speculative religious syncretisms known to history. It consists of Oriental mysticism, Greek Philosophy, Alexandrian, Philonic, and Cabbalistic Judaism, and Christian ideas of salvation, not merely mechanically compiled but, as it were, chemically combined."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Melvill Gwatkin, Early Church History to A.D. 313 (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1912), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>C. P. Wing, "Gnosticism", Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, Ed. John McClintock and James Strong (New York: Harper and Brothers, Pub., 1894), III, 893.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), II, 448.



There is reason to believe then, that Gnosticism antedated Christianity, originated no essentially new speculations but only recognized and selected what seemed to be true in earlier systems, and combined these fragments in new relations in such a way that they had a living power.

Gnosticism was the attempt to establish the universal religion, in which the religious problems of the educated world in that age should be answered by means of the ancient oriental mythology and magic with the addition of the Gospel of the Church. Whereas the church sought to answer the question "What must I do to be saved?" the Gnostics sought the answers to such questions as "What is the origin of evil?" and "How is the primitive order of the universe restored?"

With this background laid, it may now be stated what is meant by the term "Gnostic." The word itself is a very general term like "Protestant" and is not specific such as "Lutheran." Therefore it includes a vast and varied group of sects and beliefs. This study will attempt to present the picture of the Gnostics in a general manner. It will consider a "gnostic" as any person or group who, during the early ages of Christianity, corrupted the doctrine of the Gospel by a profane mixture of the tenets of oriental philosophy and Greek speculation. This is not easily done, but the historians themselves seemed unable to treat them otherwise.

Sources. Historians have in their possession scarcely any authenticated documents which have come down to them from persons living at the time and in countries which Gnosticism had its birth. For information regarding the Gnostics the historians are almost entirely dependent upon the representations of opponents, who knew very little about Oriental thought and thus could not appreciate its thought.

The scriptures allude to Gnosticism, as for instance in I Timothy 6:20, where St. Paul warns Timothy against "the gnosis, which is falsely so called."<sup>1</sup>

In more recent times, more Gnostic works, hymns and writings have been found, which increased the sources somewhat. Nevertheless even so recent a work as the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states, "There is no comprehensive modern study of Gnosticism in English."<sup>2</sup>

Extent of spread. From the early part of the second century their teachings were openly proclaimed and immediately secured and amazingly wide circulation. This rapid growth was probably due to their wandering teachers who covered the various lands.

No sooner had the direct influence of the apostles ceased than the Gnostic influence increased greatly. The second and third centuries were the times of their greatest expansion.

As Christianity spread within and without the Roman Empire, Gnosticism spread as a fungus at its roots. Irenaeus notes their spread in this manner: "A multitude of Gnostics have sprung up, and have shown themselves like mushrooms growing out of the ground."<sup>3</sup>

The spread of Gnosticism was looked upon by the church as an epidemic. The countries could be named where Christianity had spread and there would

<sup>1</sup>I Timothy 6:20, King James Version.

<sup>2</sup>F. L. Cross, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 565.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel Coit Gilman, Harry Thurston Peck, and Frank Moore Colby, The New International Encyclopaedia (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1903), VIII, 461.

be found the Gnostics also. We find them in all portions of the ancient church, though mostly among the educated. They never gained a foothold among the masses. Therefore, though the particulars of their development is shrouded in uncertainty, this much is known -- they were to be found almost everywhere! The history of the second century is just filled with them and the fathers refer to them constantly for some time afterwards.

In the primitive Christian Church there was little sympathy with Gnosticism, in any form, on the part of the Church. This attitude is demonstrated by the meeting of Polycarp and Marcion (who came so close to true Christian beliefs) one day on a street in Rome. Polycarp was stopped by Marcion, who asked him the question, "Do you not recognize me?" The father quickly replied, "Certainly, I know the firstborn of Satan."<sup>1</sup>

The movement was powerful in the 2nd century but during the third century it lost its force and began to wane until the middle of the third century when it began to be replaced by the closely-related and more powerful Manichaean movement. However, offshoots continued until the fourth and fifth centuries and certain ideas can even be found in sects of the present day.

Classification. The very attempt of classification of the various sects brings the historians into disagreement and frustration. Its variety brings forth these notes of despair from the historians. One says that "the variations in Gnosticism are multitudinous,"<sup>2</sup> another looks at the

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<sup>1</sup>John Fletcher Hurst, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1897), I, 232.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, The First Five Centuries*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Pub., 1937), I, 34.



infinitely varied shapes and says it is "almost impossible to classify them, or even to give an account of their leading ideas, which shall not be open to objection."<sup>1</sup>

Orr states it would be just as easy to classify the products of a tropical jungle or the shades and hues of the sunset clouds, which change under our view as we look at them, than to try to classify the sects and beliefs of the Gnostics.<sup>2</sup> Hurst says they represent the "Joseph's coat of theological and theosophical opinion."<sup>3</sup>

Yet with all these reservations each one tries some type of classification. C. P. Wing notes the following attempts at a classification:

"Neander divides them into Judaizing and anti-Judaizing Gnostics according to their agreement or opposition to ancient Judaism. Giesler. . .arranges them according to their geographical order, as Alexandrian, Syrian and others. Hase. . .makes four classes, Syrian, Hellenistic, Judaizing, and specially Christian. . .Baur. . .arranges the several sects into three principle classes, according to their relation to the three earlier religions with which they came in contact. . . Dr. Schaff. . .proposes a classification, according to an ethical point of view, into the speculative and theosophic, the practical and ascetic, and antinomian and libertine."<sup>4</sup>

With this forwarning relative to an attempt to classify the Gnostics, nevertheless one classification was chosen for convenience, that of Seeberg.

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<sup>1</sup>James Orr, The Progress of Dogma (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1952), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Hurst, op. cit., I, 219.

<sup>4</sup>Wing, op. cit., III, 892.



Seeberg classifies the most important "systems" as follows:

"Basilides, Valentine and his disciples (Heracleon, Ptolemaeus, and Theodotus as the chief representatives of the Italian school; Axionicus and Bardesanes of the Eastern school), the Ophites, Kainites, Perates, Sethians, the Gnostic Justin, the Naassines. To these are to be added the ultras such as Maricon, Carpocrates, etc."<sup>1</sup>

### Theology of Gnostic Groups

The theology of these various groups will now be studied. First the tenets of five main groupings will be discussed more specifically and then an attempt will be made to generalize as to the theological position which may best be termed "Gnostic" in a general sense.

(a) The Ophites. This group represented the Gnostics before Gnosticism had gained its full development. They were so named from the word ophis or "serpent" to which they paid honor as the symbol of intelligence. They held that the creator of the world was an ignorant and imperfect being, and it was a meritorious act when the serpent persuaded Adam and Eve to disobey him. The Cainites belonged to this group and they demanded that all their members curse Christ. They regarded some of the worse characters of the Bible in the highest honor.<sup>2</sup> The Sethites did not go to these extravagances.

(b) Valentinianus. In the Valentinian system, which came later than the former group, Christ and the Holy Spirit were two aeons. The Valentinians

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<sup>1</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, Text Book of the History of Doctrines, trans. by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 92.

<sup>2</sup>For instance, even Jesus was reckoned among the agents of the Jewish Jehovah and his betrayal by Judas was extolled as done with the best of motives and results.

granted that ordinary Christians were better than the heathen and that they might look forward to a kind of salvation. They termed themselves though as the "spiritual" and the heathen as the "hylic" or "psychic."

(c) Basailides. They taught that the world evolved from a pansperma or "seed of the world" in which all things were originally potentially contained. It is ruled by two great archons. They have no aeons, but the highest "light" descends through the successive spheres till it rests on Jesus of Nazareth.

(d) Saturninus. This system was marked by a strong dualism and by a gloomy asceticism. One group condemned marriage. They held the usual theory of aeons and that the Demiurge was not the supreme God. Tatian became a member of this gnostic sect. Their descent is traced back, supposedly, to Simon Magus.

(e) Marcionites. This group differs much from the ordinary Gnostic theories. They recognize the harsh God of the Old Testament as different from the good God of the New Testament who is wholly love. They held to the usual gnostic dualism and docetism. They laid stress on faith, however, and not on knowledge. They drew up their own canon of scriptures (the one Gospel -- Luke and the Pauline Epistles). They were rigorous ascetics..

With these groups in mind, the chief points or beliefs of the Gnostics will now be drawn together in a general way. This material has been adapted from five sources.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>W. M. Blackburn, History of the Christian Church from Its Origin to the Present Time. (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1879), p. 39-40; E. F. Scott, "Gnosticism" Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), VI, 234-35; John Rutherford, "Gnosticism", The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, General ed., James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1947), II, 1240; Seeberg, op. cit., I, 94-98; J. L. Neve, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), I, 55.

The three leading questions pertained to the relation of God to the world, the origin of evil, and the person of Christ. Upon these basic questions various theories were proposed, and common to nearly all of them were the following principles:

(1) Dualism, God and inorganic matter being eternal, unconnected and antagonistic.

(2) Matter is the seat of all sin and evil.

(3) Between God and primal matter (hyle) there is a series of Aeons or emanations. The first proceeding from God, who dwells far remote from all material objects. From the first aeon others proceed, until the demiurge, the world-creator, appears. He uses matter and creates the world. He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Most of the Gnostics regarded him as holding man in bondage to sin and matter by means of the Jewish system, which he invented.

(4) To deliver man from sin, or from the demiurge, the aeon Christ (Logos) came into the world.

(5) Christ either assumed an apparent body (Docetism), or entered the man Jesus at baptism, acted sinlessly through Jesus, and left his human body just before the crucifixion. The Jews, incited by Jehovah, slew Jesus, but could not touch the Christ. This was a denial of the true humanity of Christ.

(6) Christ and another aeon, the Spirit (pneuma), rescue all spiritual souls from matter and sin, unite them to God, and save them by means of knowledge, self-denial, mortification of the body, self-atonement, or a purgatorial transmigration of souls.

(7) As man has three natures, the material, psychical and spiritual,



so all men are divided by them into the same three classes; but only the spiritual can enter heaven; the psychical by good works may attain an intermediate state. (Gnostics are the spiritual and Christians are the psychical.)

(8) They claim on the part of the initiated a special knowledge of truth beyond that possessed by Christians. They claim a divine revelation for their select group.

(9) The denial of the personality of the Supreme God, and the denial also of the free will of man.

(10) Teaching both asceticism and indifference as means of attaining to spiritual communion with God.

(11) It has a syncretistic tendency combining Christian, Oriental, Greek, and Jewish thought in attempting to become a world religion.

(12) The Scriptures of the Old Testament were ascribed to the inferior Demiurge and not the true God.

(13) They seek to teach men the formulas of enchantment by means of which they may find entrance through the various gates of the upper world.<sup>1</sup>

(14) They presented the truth in the form of mystery-unions.

(15) In sensuousness consists the evil in men. The spirit is imprisoned in the body. Demons abide in the soul of man and injure and defile it.

(16) Christ's coming was to bring knowledge to the world and thereby

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<sup>1</sup>Seeberg, for instance, lists their symbolic rites, magic formulas and mystic ceremonies. A few are: three-fold baptism, magic charms and sentences, anointing with oil, the obscene rite, pictures, magic spiritual marriage and many others. Seeberg, op. cit., 98-99.



the spiritual elements are strengthened to release themselves from matter. The self-consciousness of the human spirit begins, and it now recognizes the means of grace and sacred formulas which aid it to rise from this world into that above.

(17) Redemption is chiefly for the "pneumatic" and the knowledge of the Great Unutterable is redemption. It is a redemption of the spirit and not the soul or body. According to the proportion of the spirit, left residing in the matter of a person's composition, is it determined whether or not one can be a "Gnostic." Regeneration is a chemical and not an ethical process.

AP (18) They believe in no resurrection of the dead, nor do they believe in Christian eschatology as a whole. The return of the spirit freed from matter, to the pleroma marks the end. They ascend to a world of freedom after subduing or deceiving the guardian demons of the various spheres by means of charms and pass-words.

These then are what may be considered the main theological beliefs of the Gnostics.

## APPENDIX C

### MONARCHIANS

#### Background Material

Introduction. The divinity of Christ was a recognized fact by the second century but the learned attempts to define the relation of Christ to the Father were far from satisfactory. The church had not yet settled the problem of how God could be 'one' and yet 'three' at the same time. Hence, as early as the second century distinct forms of Monarchian opinion had begun to be put forward. This line of discussion was to constitute the "main theological interest of the third century."<sup>1</sup>

As the third century closed and the fourth opened, the church was still conscious of being in presence of a problem which had proven difficult. The doctrine of the Logos - that is, the doctrine that the Lord pre-existed with the Father, as His Word and Son - held the field.

Christ was regarded as "a God", and his human nature was asserted. This Logos doctrine was framed in such a way as to guard the unity of God. But when the Logos, proceeding from the Father, assumed an independent existence, he was regarded as the "second God", and thus Monotheism was endangered. Thus it was that:

"Monarchianism made an effort to reconcile

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Rainy, The Ancient Catholic Church (From the Accession of Trajan to the Fourth General Council A.D. 98-451) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 220.

'sole power' or 'single rule'.

Monarchianism is generally supposed to have originated about the end of the second century but M'Clintock and Strong trace it to the earliest times of Christianity. They say that the early father, Justin Martyr, expressly denounced it and recognized that its source was from among the Jews. They say that Justin Martyr condemned the Jews for thinking that when God appeared to the Patriarchs, that it was God the father who appeared. Thus, these historians place the Monarchians' starting point at a very early time.<sup>1</sup>

It is well to keep in mind these two "caution" statements in regard to the Monarchians:

"(1) that the movement originated within the pale of the church, and had a great deal in common with that which it opposed;

"(2) that it was ante-Catholic rather than anti-Catholic, e.g. the Canon of the New Testament had not yet been established."<sup>2</sup>

Though many of the historians class them as heretics, and so they are classed even in this thesis, it must be remembered that on the whole these men are to be considered catholic. They were in harmony with their opponents except in the points of controversy.

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<sup>1</sup>John M'Clintock and James Strong, Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York: Harper and Brothers, Pub., 1894), VI, 448-49.

<sup>2</sup>"Monarchianism", The Encyclopaedia Britannica (11th ed., Cambridge: University Press, 1910), VIII, 868.

### Classification

"The history of the movement is as obscure as its origin."<sup>1</sup> Thus even the current distinctions between dynamistic and modalistic Monarchianism is not free from objections and no strict classification is possible from the sources known. Nevertheless, this author will attempt to classify the Monarchians, their teachers and doctrines under the most common classification of two main types - 'Dynamistic' and 'Modalistic'. To this will be added Neve's third group of 'Modified Monarchians'.<sup>2</sup>

Dynamistic monarchianism. (this group is also called Ebionite Monarchians, adoptionists, and humanitarian Monarchians). To this group "Christ is a pure man (though born in a wonderful way of the virgin by the Holy Spirit) whom God endowed with His power (dynamis), thus adopting Him (adoptianism)."<sup>3</sup> Exponents of this theory were: (a) Alogi - The earliest representatives of these Monarchians seems to have been this group of 'alogi' so called because they rejected, not the Logos doctrine altogether, but the Gospel of John, which was its strongest apostolic witness. They rejected the Johannine Epistles and apocalypse as well. They did not admit distinctions in the Godhead. Beyond this not much is known about the alogi because of the scant sources. So even as recent a writer as Carrington

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<sup>1</sup>Adolf Harnack, "Monarchianism", The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge ed., by Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1909), VII, 454.

<sup>2</sup>J. L. Neve, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), I, 112.

<sup>3</sup>"Monarchianism", Lutheran Cyclopedia, ed. in chief, Erwin L. Lueker (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 710.



says "the alogi remain somewhat of a mystery"<sup>1</sup> to us even today.

(b) Theodotians - These were the followers of Theodotus, a Byzantine tanner, who held that Jesus was only a man. Theodotus had denied Christ during a persecution, with the apology that he denied only a "man." Yet he still felt that Christ was the supernaturally begotten Messiah. Epiphanius described the Theodotians as an "offshoot of the heresy of the alogi."<sup>2</sup> They held that the Logos had no personal existence of his own but that the Logos is just a "limitation" of the Father. The person of Christ is thus entirely human, with the Logos as the controlling spirit in him. Theodotus was excommunicated by Victor at Rome.

A younger Theodotus put Melchizedek as mediator between God and the angels, above Christ, the mediator between God and men; and his followers were called 'Melchizedekians.'

(c) Artemonites - These were the followers of Artemon, who was excommunicated by Zephyrinus. "He held that the Dynamistic Monarchianism represented the original apostolic doctrine and that the divinity of Christ was a relapse into heathenism."<sup>3</sup> He tried to prove that the scriptures, the apostles and all the Roman bishops down to Victor had been of this opinion.

(d) Paul of Samosata - Paul of Samosata exemplified Dynamism at its height and (according to Neve) the rejection of him and his doctrine marked a turning point in the history of Christology of the Church. For

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Carrington, The Early Christian Church (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), II, 267.

<sup>2</sup>Bethune - Baker, op. cit., p. 98-99

<sup>3</sup>Lutheran Cyclopedia, p. 710.

after Paul's deposition it was no longer possible to gain a hearing for a Christology which denied the personal, independent pre-existence of the Redeemer.<sup>1</sup>

Paul denied the personality of the Logos and of the Holy Spirit and considered them merely powers of God, like reason and mind in man. He granted, though, that the Logos dwelt in Christ in a larger measure than in any former messenger of God. He taught a gradual elevation of Christ which was determined by his own moral development which led to divine dignity. However, he did admit that Christ remained free from sin and conquered the sin of our forefathers and thus became the Saviour of men. The personality of Jesus was entirely human and the real incarnation of the Logos was impossible because the Logos was regarded just as reason is to man, an operative power gradually leading him to a state of perfection. "It was not that the Son of God came down from heaven, but that the Son of Man ascended on high."<sup>2</sup>

The divine power within him grew greater and greater as the course of his earthly development proceeded, until at last through its medium he reached divinity. The son is of the "same substance" (homoousios) as the Father in the way in which a stream is of the "same substance" as the fountain from which it flows. Paul was the first to use the word homoousios to denote the son's relation to the Father in the Godhead. This phrase was picked up later by the catholic church and accepted.

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<sup>1</sup>Neve, op. cit., I, 110.

<sup>2</sup>Bethune - Baker, op. cit., p. 100-101.

Paul of Somosata was deposed by the bishops under him in Syria.

Modalistic monarchians. This group is also called Patripassians (Modalism). Dynamistic Monarchianism was largely a tendency in a few of the church leaders. But the very opposite was true of Modalism which affected the vast body of the Church's membership. Modalism appealed very strongly to the ordinary believer who saw in it a veritable safeguard of monotheism. This group was the really dangerous opponent of the Logos-doctrine and not the Dynamistic group. It was the prevailing doctrine in Rome from Victor to Callistus. They believed that:

"The three divine persons are in some manner a manifestation of one and the same God; God revealed Himself as Father in the work of redemption and as Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification."<sup>1</sup>

Important to this branch of the Monarchians were: (a) Noetus of Smyrna (Third Century): He held that Christ, being the father suffered for us. He is quoted as saying "Christ is Himself the Father, and. . .the Father Himself was born, He suffered and died."<sup>2</sup>

(b) Beryllus (Third Century):

"He denied the personal existence and in general the independent divinity of Christ, but at the same time asserting the indwelling of the divinity of the Father in him during his earthly life."<sup>3</sup>

Beryllus of Bastra was convinced of his error by Origen and was brought

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<sup>1</sup>Lutheran Encyclopedia, p. 710-711.

<sup>2</sup>Noetus of Smyrna quoted in Neve, op. cit., I, 111.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), II, 580.



back to more orthodox ideas such as the existence of a human soul in Christ.

(c) Praxeas of Asia Minor (Second Century): He held that the Father became incarnate in the Son and took part in His suffering. Tertullian said he "crucified the Father."<sup>1</sup> They said that the Son, or Christ is just the Father veiled in flesh. Praxeas constantly appealed to Isaiah 45:5; John 10:30 ("I and my Father are one") and John 14:9 ("He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"),<sup>2</sup> as if the whole Bible consisted of these three passages. From them he taught that the Father himself became man, hungered, thirsted, suffered, and died in Christ. This is why they are given the title Patripassions, which means the 'father suffers'.

(d) Sabellius (Third Century): Modalistic Monarchianism reached its full development under him. In the east the Monarchian followers were called Sabellians, while in the West they were called Patripassions. God, the absolute Monad, reveals Himself in three personae each representing the entire Monad. He differed from Noetus and Praxeas in that he gave the Holy Spirit a place with the Father and the Son. His fundamental thought is that the unity of God, without distinction in itself, unfolds or extends itself in the course of the world's development in three different forms and periods of revelation, and, after the completion of redemption, returns to unity.

Neve gives us a Sabellian analogy:

"Man has three names, body, soul and spirit; but there is only one person. The

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<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame (The Rise and Progress of Christianity) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), II, 138.

<sup>2</sup>King James Version.



one sun possesses light, heat, and roundness, but there is only one sun. So God has three names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; but there is only one Person. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identical."<sup>1</sup>

The God of Sabellionism was therefore a Unity, a Monos, a single Person viewed in three different forms. The Father is the Creator and Lawgiver stage, the Son is the Redeemer stage of His revelation, and the one God is revealed in the third stage in the 'person' of the Spirit as the giver and preserver of life.

Modified monarchianism. In this group Neve classifies the Roman bishops from Victor to Callistus.<sup>2</sup> Other historians, however classify them on the side of the Modalistic group. The situation in Rome was confusing and detrimental to the whole church. The advocate of hypostasianism and subordination, Hyppolytus, made his claim heard in Rome. Sabellius, the champion of Modalism had great influence with the Roman center also. Callistus actually sided with the Modalists and according to Schaff had "adopted and advocated the doctrine of Noetus."<sup>3</sup>

Callistus was brought under pressure and the consequence of it was that he excommunicated both the Sabellians and the Hippolytians. In doing this he presented a formula of compromise. He taught that the Father and Son and Holy Spirit were the names of the one God, and this one person cannot be two or three. The divinity of Christ he said, was identical

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<sup>1</sup>Neve, op. cit., I, 111-12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Schaff, op. cit., II, 578.

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