



The Christian CENTURIES

ABCtoAD Series
By Timothy Ministries

From There To Here

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

TWO GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1. How did the church of the apostles become the contemporary, flawed-but-beautiful global entity that it is today?**

Would Christianity, or the way we live the Christian life, be recognizable to the apostles if they were to time travel to the 21st century? Does the Christianity of Latin America, Africa or Asia look more like first-century Christianity than American Christianity does? What were the fundamental principles, the *sine qua nons*, of apostolic Christianity without which our religion ceases to be *Christianity*, and what were cultural elements in the apostolic Christianity that God never intended to be transplanted into the Christianity of other cultures?

- 2. How did the Theology of the Bride, overt in the teachings of John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul and John, become submerged by other theologies during much of the history of Christianity?**

What were the “distractions” that, over the centuries, drew attention away from the Church’s bridal destiny? Were those “distractions” from God or from the enemy? If they were from the enemy, did God nevertheless use them to build His Church?

The Theology Of The Bride

A Synopsis

THE THEOLOGY STATED

The reason for *all creation* is the overflow of the Father's love for the Son. The expression of the Father's love for the Son is multiplied through a prepared bride, who loves much for having been forgiven much (cf. Luke 7.47). The preparation of the bride (Revelation 19.7) involves the Father's love being perfected in her (1John 4.12) as she learns deep obedience to the greatest commandment (Matthew 22.37-38), and does all things for God's glory (1Corinthians 10.31) in order to draw others to the heavenly Bridegroom (Revelation 22.17).

THE THEOLOGY OF THE BRIDE IS BASED UPON THESE TRUTHS:

1. God has no inherent lack or deficiency.
2. God is inherently relational, i.e., a Trinity.
3. God is love (1John 4.16).
4. The Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17. 24).
5. The eternal Son of God became man without ceasing to be God (John 1.1-3,14).
6. The greatest commandment is not to glorify God, but to love God (Matthew 22.37-38). Scripture commands us to do all things for God's glory (1Corinthians 10.31), but this mandate is subservient to the greater commandment.
7. Among all His creatures, God created only one species in His relational image (Genesis 1.26-28).

THE THEOLOGY OF THE BRIDE DEPENDS UPON:

1. Monotheism (contra pagan polytheism).
2. An inherently relational God (downplayed by Economic Trinitarianism, and contra Hinduism and Islam).
3. A God who is love personified (1John 4.16).
4. A God-Man who is unique among all other human beings (cf. John 3.29-30; contra Gnosticism and New Age).
5. Christocentrism (contra Secular Humanism).
6. Creatures made in God's relational image (contra Darwinism).
7. A high view of marriage (contra Gnosticism; contra post-modern sexual ethics).



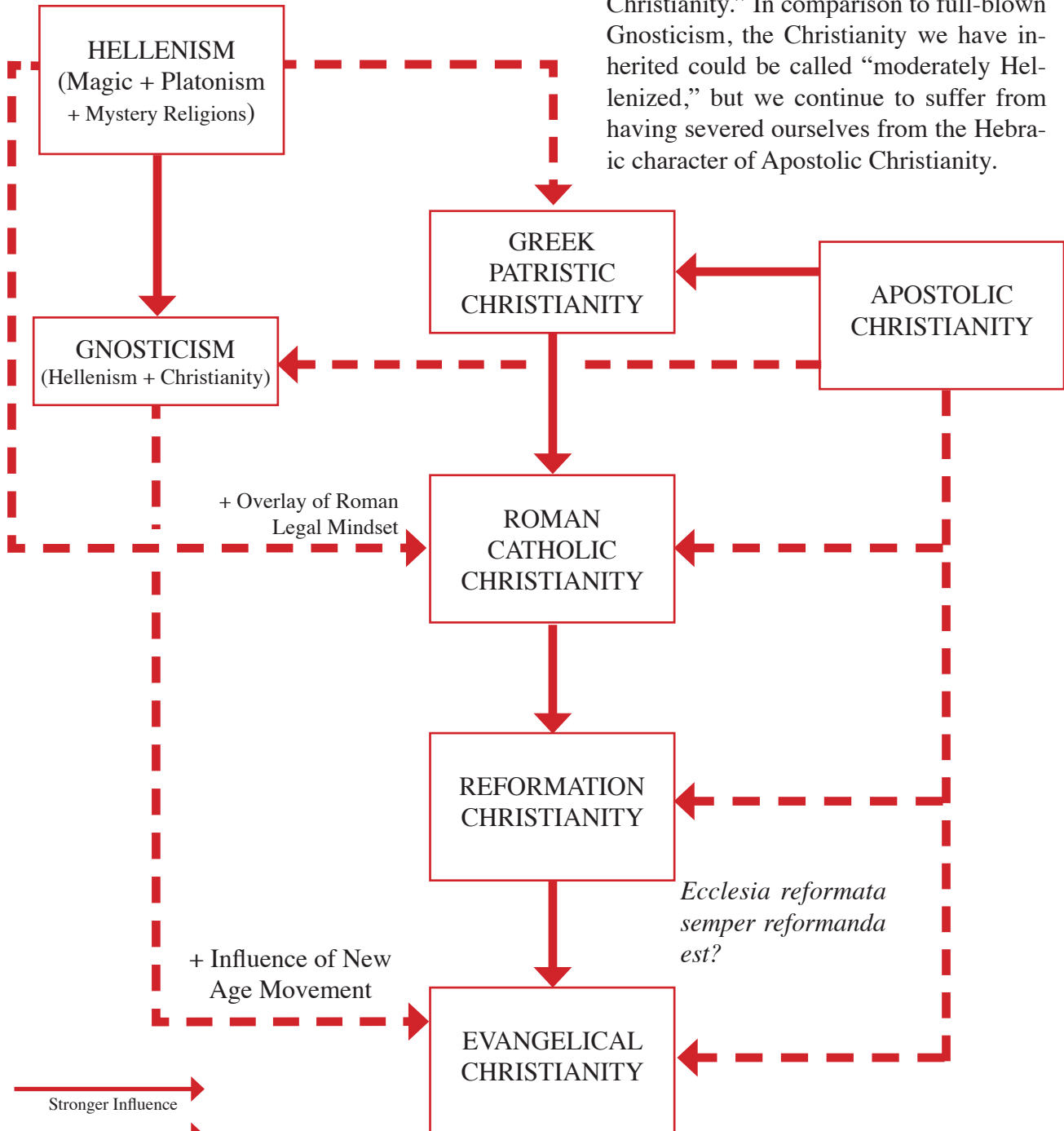
The Christian CENTURIES

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Hellenism & Christianity

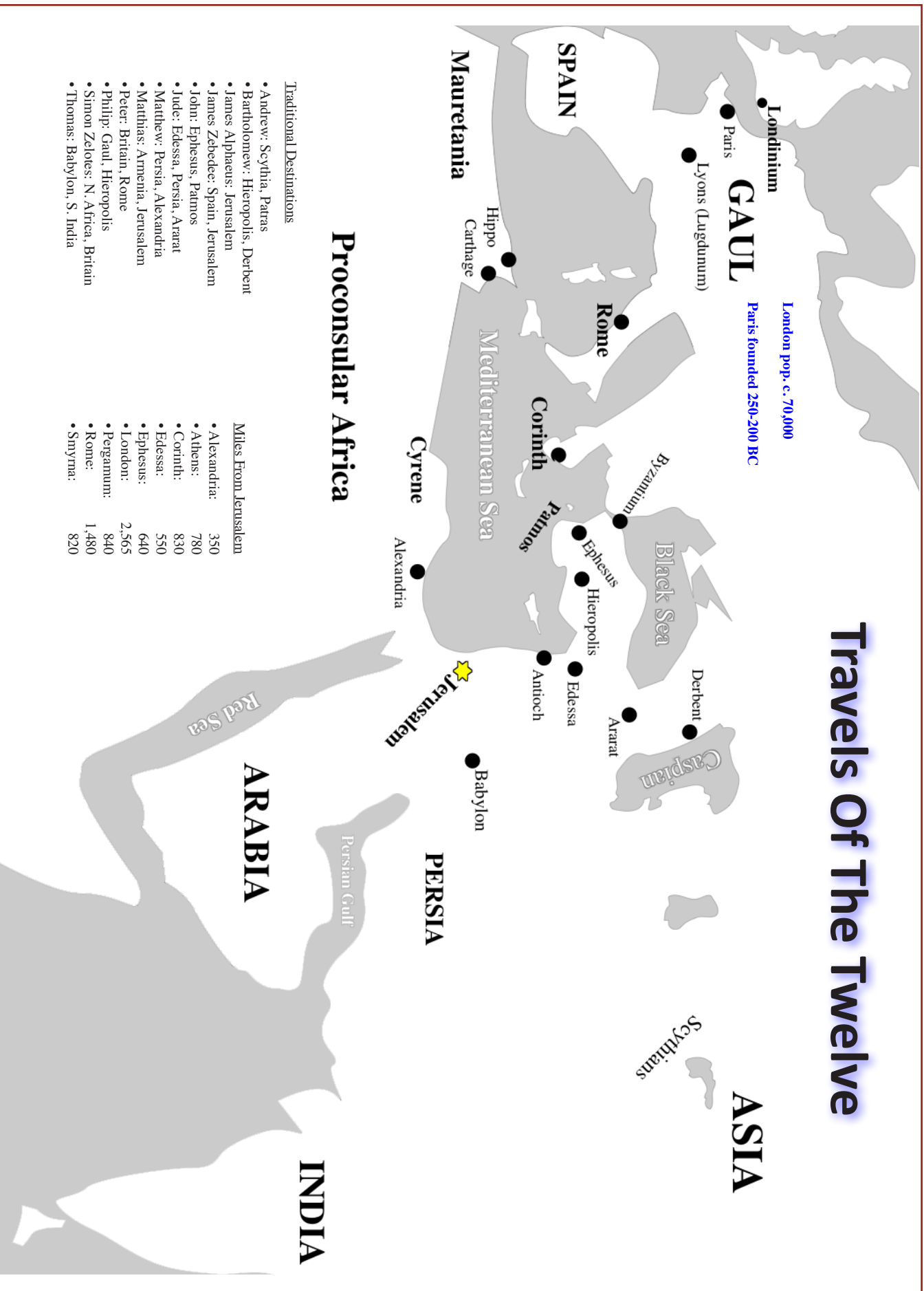
Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

The old Gnosticism has been characterized as “the acute Hellenization of Christianity.” In comparison to full-blown Gnosticism, the Christianity we have inherited could be called “moderately Hellenized,” but we continue to suffer from having severed ourselves from the Hebraic character of Apostolic Christianity.



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Travels Of The Twelve





The Christian CENTURIES

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The Church Severed From Her Hebraic Roots

Chronological Summary

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

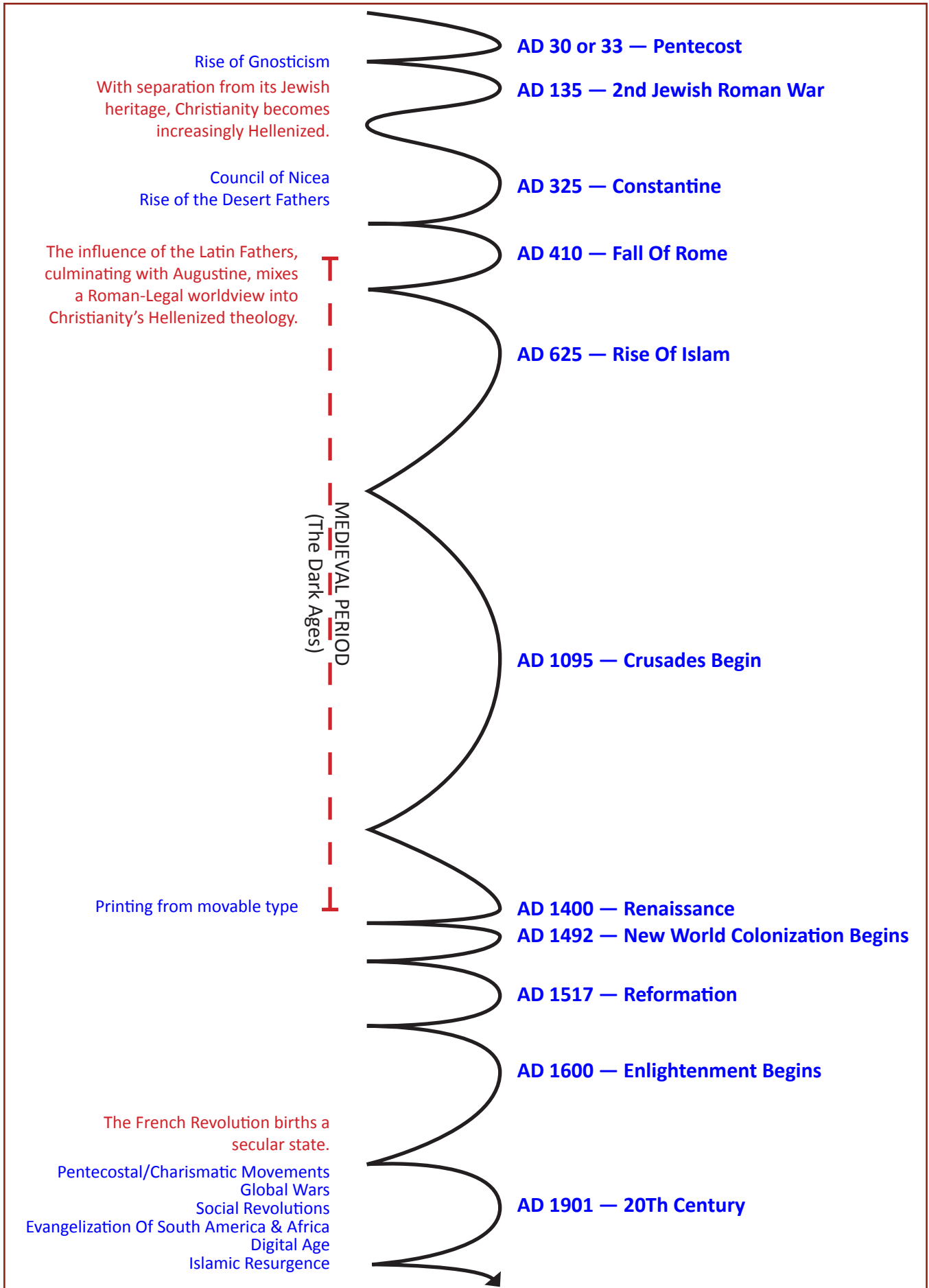
Anno
Domini

- 30-33 Jesus offends Pharisees and Sadducees as One "greater than the temple."
- 33 Mass conversions on the day of Pentecost worry temple authorities (Act 2-4).
- 34 Persecution led by Saul spreads Christianity throughout the empire and biases Holy Land synagogues against followers of the Way (Act 9.2; 1Th 2.14-15).
- 48 Jewish believers no longer the majority in worldwide Christianity.
- 49 Jews in Rome riot against Jewish believers in Jesus; Jews expelled from Rome.
- 50-52 Jerusalem Council opens door for uncircumcised Gentiles (Act 15).
- 66-73 Holy Land Jewish Christians refuse to join nationalists in First Jewish Revolt.
- 80-100 Synagogues of Asia Minor slander Jewish Christians (Rev 2.9; 3.9).
- 90 *Birkat ha-Minim*: a ritual Jewish blessing (curse) upon sectarians.
- 115-120 Christian worship shifts to almost entirely from the Sabbath to Sunday.
- 132-135 Jewish followers of Jesus refuse to join Second Jewish Revolt with its competing messiah. Judaism loses its status as *religio licita*.
- 138-312 The widespread influence of Marcion's anti-Old Testament heresy contributes to general antipathy toward the Jews.

The Severing Complete

- 160 Justin Martyr asserts that Christians are "true spiritual Israel" (*Dialogue*, ch. 11).
- 250 Origen calls Jews "most wicked nation" (*Celsus* 2.8), writes "Christians Are The Spiritual Israel" (*Com. on John*, 1.1).
- 339 Converting to Judaism becomes criminal offense.
- 380 Ambrose defends bishop who incited the burning of a synagogue (Letters XL).
- 386-387 Chrysostum preaches "Homilies Against The Jews" in Antioch.

BC to AD: The Christian Centuries





The Christian CENTURIES

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Seven Compelling Facts About The First Christ Followers

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

The First Christ Followers:

1.

- A. The Church would break completely from its Hebraic heritage by AD 135. Until then, Christianity was understood as a Jewish sect.
- B. In reality, Christianity was simply Judaism universalized. The first Christians thought in Jewish categories with a Hebraic worldview.



2.

- A. The Jewish priority on kinship carries over into the NT ideas of spiritual adoption (Rom 8.15; Gal 4.4-7; Eph 1.5), “the household of faith” (Gal 6.10), “the household of God” (Eph 2.19; 1Ti 3.15; 1Pe 4.17; cf. Heb 2.11), the corporate temple (1Co 3.9-17; 2Co 6.16), filial respect in the Church (1Ti 5.1-3; 1Pe 1.22; 2.17), brotherly love for believers (Rom 12.10; Heb 13.1; 1Pe 3.8; 5.9), and justification by faith (i.e., by a trusting relationship).
- B. Two models for church life compete in our culture: the business model (performance and bottom line) and the family model (relationships and fruitfulness). The Church in Acts clearly operated on the family model (Acts 1.12-14; 2.42,44; 4.32,23; 5.42; 6.1; 20.20; 21.17; see 1Ti 3.1-5).

3.

- A. Their whole of religion was summed up in the commands to love God and one another (Joh 13.34; 1Jo 4.20-21), and they understood this love as an action that would holistically address what we now call social justice (Jam 2.15-17; 1Jo 3.10,16-17).
- B. In the NT, the common apostolic phrase “in Christ” has varied connotations depending on context, but in many passages we may paraphrase it as “in [the household (or family) of] Christ,” or simply “in [(or by) relationship with] Christ” (Rom 8.1; 12.5; 16.3,7,9; 1Co 1.30; 3.1; 4.15; 15.22; Gal 1.22; 3.28; 5.6; Eph 1.1; 2.13; Philip 1.1; Col 1.2; etc.).



The *orante*, A symbol of “filial piety,” i.e., “a son’s or daughter’s loyalty.” For early Christians it referred to the security of being in the spiritual family of the Church.

4.

- A. They understood the Human-Divine Partnership (Act 4.29-30; 14.3).
- B. They ministered creatively to other cultures (Act 17), but also used common sense (Didache 11).

5.

- A. They fellowshipped with a city church rather than with a competing church.
- B. They identified their leaders with the cities in which those leaders ministered.

6.

- A. **Over Themselves:** They depended upon hearing from God by Scripture, counsel (Acts 15.28), and by corroborated revelation (Acts 16.10).
- B. **Over All Creation:** They obeyed God before man, stood against heresy (like Gnosticism), and decided on the basis of rightness rather than feasibility (Acts 13.3).

7.

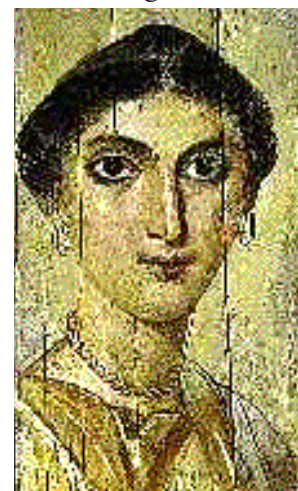
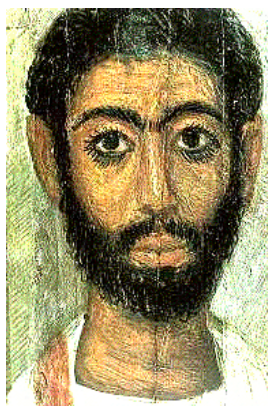
- A. **Peter:** “God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified” (Act 2.36). The book of Acts correlates bold proclamation with signs and wonders.
- B. **Stephen:** “Behold, I see the heavens opened! ... Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Act 7.54-60).

Didache 11 (1) So if anyone should come and teach you all these things that have just been mentioned above, welcome him. (2) But if the teacher himself goes astray and teaches a different teaching that undermines all this, do not listen to him. However, if his teaching contributes to righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, welcome him as you would the Lord.

(3) Now concerning the apostles and prophets, deal with them as follows in accordance with the rule of the gospel. (4) Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. (5) But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in such case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. (6) And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night’s lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

(7) Also, do not test or evaluate any prophet who speaks in the spirit, for every sin will be forgiven, but this sin will not be forgiven. (8) However, not everyone who speaks in the spirit is a prophet, but only if he exhibits the Lord’s ways. By his conduct, therefore, will the false prophet and the prophet be recognized. (9) Furthermore, any prophet who orders a meal in the spirit shall not partake of it; if he does, he is a false prophet. (10) If any prophet teaches the truth, yet does not practice what he teaches, he is a false prophet. (11) But any prophet proven to be genuine who does something with a view to portraying in a worldly manner the symbolic meaning of the church (provided that he does not teach you to do all that he himself does) is not to be judged by you, for his judgment is with God. Besides, the ancient prophets also acted in a similar manner. (12) But if anyone should say in the spirit, “Give me money,” or anything else, do not listen to him. But if he tells you to give on behalf of others who are in need, let no one judge him.

A Roman Egyptian couple of the 2nd century





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Hellenism

The Birth & Character Of A world Culture

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

Vocabulary

Economic Trinitarianism
Gnosticism
Hellenism
Mystery Religions
Platonism
Renaissance
Reformation
Syncretism

Hellenism, *the civilization*, was imposed upon the Mediterranean world by Alexander the Great as he marched his conquering armies eastward from Macedonia, breaking down national and religious boundaries all the way to the Punjab. Hellenism, *the culture*, birthed from that merging of nations and “the extensive mingling of populations,” outlived both Alexander and his civilization, such that the succeeding Roman Empire became markedly Hellenistic in its worldview — as did the subapostolic Church. As D. F. Watson explains,

Although Greece was no longer a political power, its cultural influence — the Hellenization begun by Alexander the Great — was a powerful force molding not only Palestinian culture but Roman as well. Greece continued as a cultural and intellectual center during the Roman period, being the location of choice for upper-class Romans to finish their formal education. The influence of Hellenism upon the church was also marked. The early church used rhetorical and other facets of a Greek education in its preaching and teaching, modes of worship and ethical exhortation, among others things. This Greek influence is particularly seen in the fact that the early church used the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the OT, and wrote the documents of the NT in Greek. This influence continued beyond the first-century church to play a role in interpretation and theological formulations.¹

This Hellenistic culture, so influential in the Roman period, remained distinctively Greek because *Koine* (the common Greek language that followed the Attic Greek of the classical era) long persisted as the international language of learning and commerce throughout the Mediterranean world. Nevertheless, Hellenism was an amalgam of Greek, Middle Eastern, and Asian elements, and for our present study we should understand that a chief characteristic of this world-blanketing culture was “syncretism in religion...” Albert Henry Newman wrote that in Alexandria, for example, “long before the beginning of the Christian era, Greek, Jewish, Egyptian, Persian, Old-Babylonian, and Indian thought had met and *eclectic systems were a characteristic feature of the intellectual life of the time.*”² Indeed, the Greeks’ willingness to assimilate foreign divinities had greatly aided the Hellenization of conquered regions. The syncretizing character of Hellenism was not simply an expression of political expediency, however. Instead, religious syncretism was natural to Hellenism because Greek religion had always been non-exclusive (largely because “for the Greeks ritual was more important in a cult than theological content”).

This aspect of Hellenism, its readiness to assimilate and blend religious beliefs and practices, produced a vigorous spiritual milieu in the world at the very time when the Roman Republic transitioned into an Empire and the Christian era dawned. Indeed, the Pax Romana that so benefited

1 D. F. Watson, “Greece and Macedon” in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

2 Albert Henry Newman, *A History Of Anti-Pedobaptism: From The Rise Of Pedobaptism To A. D. 1609* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), p. 1, emphasis added.



the spread of Christianity, also provided a favorable environment for eastern religions to sink their roots more deeply in the west, for gnostic cults to get organized, and for the old mystery religions to spread their influence to new cities. So rich was the religious soil of the time, that throughout the Empire, as S. Angus put it, “[the] **religious syncretism, inaugurated by Alexander, increased in momentum until it reached its might in the third and early fourth centuries.**”³ As Newman concurred, “The philosophies and theosophies of the East had never been more active and aggressive than they were during the first three Christian centuries.”

This dynamic religious environment, continually fanning a cross-pollination of ideas, profoundly affected the Christian Church that was just learning its way in the Gentile world. Everett Ferguson tells us that, in the early centuries, “... Greek philosophy provided the vocabulary, ethical assumptions, thought world, and intellectual options with which Christian thinkers worked.”⁴ Indeed, Hellenism in general, and pagan religion in particular (through its increasingly popular mystery cults) powerfully influenced the development of Christian doctrine from the second to the fourth centuries.

That influence had largely to do with Hellenism’s addiction to magic (and its associated awe of ritual). Nothing was more fundamental to both paganism and Hellenism than the universal belief in magic: the power of spirits, or daemons, mediated by the rites and incantations of adepts. Ferguson tells us that “Magic came to rule supreme in late antiquity,” and explains that, “The root idea in magic was that by employing the proper means the gods or demons could be forced to do something for you.” According to the Hellenistic worldview, spirits were ubiquitous and their realm intersected the visible and tangible world of human experience: people envisioned the universe “as a vast, multistoried [tenement] with swarms of supernatural beings occupying the floors above and below” its mortal inhabitants. Because these ever-present daemons, were the causes behind supernatural occurrences, Hellenists thought of miraculous events as an utterly normal part of daily life. Of course, this worldview made it constantly necessary that its adherents avail themselves of religious practitioners who could manipulate the daemons and the gods.

— From *Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin*, Roderick Graciano, (Tacoma, WA: Timothy Ministries, 2016), pp. 230-233.

³ S. Angus, *The Mystery Religions* (New York, NY: Dover, 1928, 1975), p. 37, emphasis added.

⁴ Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), p. 29.



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The Safeguards Against Heresy

Adapted from Roderick Graciano,
Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

To understand the devolution of biblical doctrines in Christian history, we must realize that as members of a fallen race we all have difficulty perceiving truth (Joh 18.38), and difficulty preserving it once perceived (Pro 23.23). When it comes to grasping and holding onto biblical truth, we must contend with the world, the flesh, and the devil (Joh 8.44; Gen 3.1; cf. 2Co 11.14). The community of the faithful, once having believed biblical propositions, is subjected to intense pressure to liberalize, reinterpret, or even jettison their scriptural beliefs. For this reason, Christian communities, like those of Galatia and Colossae, began to slide into heresy within a decade of their inception, even while their founding apostles still lived! For the same reason, the Church has had to battle a constant parade of heresies since.

The Safeguards Against Heresy

Thankfully, God has always given safeguards to protect the truth from His own people's propensity for heresy and apostasy. During His earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus, the very personification of the truth (Joh 14.6), served as both the ultimate corrective to heresy and the supreme guardian of the right understanding of Scripture. He corrected the bad theology of the Sadducees regarding the afterlife and resurrection (Mat 22.23-32). He also reprimanded the wrong application of Scripture practiced by the scribes and the Pharisees (Mar 7.5-13). While with His disciples, He guarded them from error and apostasy, and they kept God's word (Joh 17.6,12). When Jesus ascended to heaven, other safeguards remained to preserve the true doctrines of Scripture. The seven safeguards were:

1. **Jesus**
2. **The apostles taught by Jesus** (cf. Eph 2.20; 2Pe 3.2; Jud 1.17).
3. **The Holy Spirit** (Joh 16.13; cf. 1Jo 2.27).
4. **The Church** (1Ti 3.15).
5. **Commitment of believers to do God's will** (Joh 7.17).
6. **The canon of Scripture** (2Ti 3.16).
7. **The Hebraic hermeneutic** (see Isa 8.20).

Let's remember Paul's prophetic warning to the elders of Ephesus (Act 20.28-30):

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Plague-Conquering Love

Adapted from Rodney Stark's
The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History (Princeton, 1996)

PAGANS	CHRISTIANS	RATIO
<i>After the EPIDEMIC OF AD 160 (Plague of Galen)</i>		
9,960	40	1/249
X 30% Mortality	X10% Mortality	
6,972	36	1/197
...plus a 40% per decade Conversion Rate		
=-16	=+16	
6,956	52	1/134

*After a 40% per decade Conversion Rate X 90 years,
and the SECOND EPIDEMIC OF AD 251, with its*

X 30% Mortality	X10% Mortality	
4,062	997	1/4

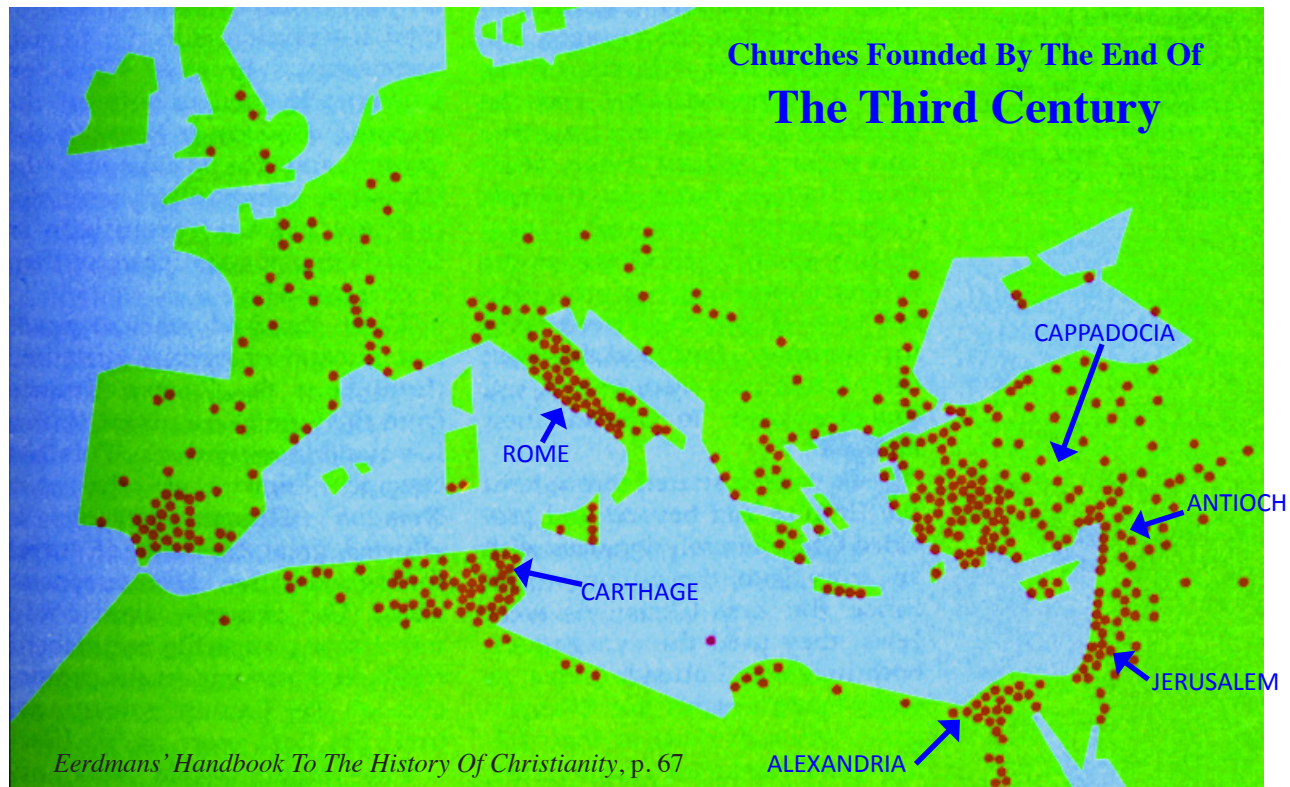


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The Persecuting Emperors

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Claudius (AD 41-54)

In AD 52, Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because of rioting in connection with “Chrestus” (according to Suetonius). Claudius may have inadvertently deported Christians (who were still perceived as sectarian Jews) like Aquilla and Priscilla (Acts 18.2).

Nero (AD 54-68)

Miraculously, Paul on trial in AD 62 was acquitted this savage lunatic (who was about 25 at the time), probably thanks to Luke’s well-researched, two-volume brief submitted in Paul’s defense. In the year 64, however, Nero sought to pin the blame on the Christians for the great fire of Rome. The persecution in Rome following the fire may have brought about Peter’s martyrdom in 64. Paul was also ultimately condemned under Nero, and martyred in Rome in 64 or 67.

Domitian (AD 81-96)

Domitian’s persecutions were primarily against Jews, and more politically motivated than religious, though the official charge was sometimes “atheism.” Since Domitian was the first emperor to have himself officially declared in Rome as “God the Lord,” Jews and Christians would have, of course, balked at worshipping him, and thus opened themselves up to the charge of “atheism.” John was exiled to Patmos, and published the book of Revelation, during the reign of Domitian.

Trajan (AD 98-117)

Trajan was the first emperor to persecute Christians as fully distinct from Jews. Though he discouraged the Bithynian governor Pliny from hunting out Christians, he decreed that Christians who were accused should be punished unless they recanted and demonstrated their “repentance” by worshipping the Roman gods.

Hadrian (117-138)

Continuing the policies of Trajan, and sporadically enforcing them, Hadrian’s greatest act against the people of God was to proclaim edicts (one banning circumcision) that incited the Second Jewish Revolt, and resulted in the rebuilding of Jerusalem as a pagan city, the end of Jewish nationalism (until modern Zionism), and the final break of the now mostly Gentile church from its Hebraic roots.

Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161)

An emperor who only sporadically enforced the policies of Trajan and Hadrian, Antoninus nonetheless has the distinction as that emperor under whose proconsul Polycarp was martyred for his refusal to “swear by the genius of Caesar,” and to “curse the Christ.”

Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180)

The emperor depicted at the beginning of the *Gladiator* film (2000), was a Stoic who opposed Christianity on philosophical grounds and blamed Christians for natural disasters, perhaps in part because mentors had convinced him that Christians preached gross immoralities (incest?). The policies of Marcus Aurelius, the “magnanimous philosopher-king,” allowed fierce regional persecutions to break out against the Christians, resulting in more Christian martyrdoms than ever before.

Septimus Severus (AD 202-211)

In the latter part of his reign, Septimus Severus forbade conversions to Judaism and Christianity, perhaps because of his preference for Mithraism, the sun worshipping religion favored by Roman soldiers. Persecutions broke out in North Africa and Egypt, claiming the lives of Perpetua and her servant Felicitas, as well as of Clement of Alexandria.

Maximus the Thracian (AD 235-236)

For political reasons Maximus ordered the execution of Christian clergy during his brief reign. Except for this persecution from AD 235- 238, Christians enjoyed about 50 years free of persecution after the death of Septimus Severus.

Decius (AD 249-251)

Decius instigated the first empire-wide persecution against Christians, demanding that all offer incense to the genius of the emperor and receive a Certificate of Sacrifice from the local Sacrificial Commission.

Valerian (AD 257-260)

Blaming the Christians for plagues and civil strife, Valerian had the property of Christians confiscated and took away their right to assemble.

Diocletian and Galerius (AD 303-311)

Though his wife, Prisca, was a Christian, Diocletian hounded Christians in an attempt to encourage patriotism in the empire. He instigated the Great Persecution with the goal of the total extinction of Christianity. His first edicts prohibited all Christian worship and ordered the destruction of all church buildings and Christian books. A later edict required all Christians to sacrifice to pagan deities, resulting in a particularly vicious persecution in Africa.

After Diocletian abdicated the throne, **Galerius** continued his policies until becoming seriously ill in AD 311, at which time he and his fellow emperors issued an edict canceling the persecution of Christians.



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BATTLES AND DISTRACTIONS

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

The **Theology of the Bride** that was overt in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, continued in the awareness of certain circles in the early Christian Church, but was soon obscured by the controversies of the larger Body. The controversies *were necessary* but often meant that (for a time) the **Theology of the Bride** would receive scant attention.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

The first general council of Christian leaders, recorded in Acts 15, boiled down to the issue of whether Gentiles had to become Jews to be saved. The question was resolved (for the majority) with the decision that salvation was for Gentiles as Gentiles, and with an exhortation to new Gentile believers that they abstain from immoral and idolatrous practices. Unintentionally, this necessary council may have set the tone for later controversies about “who is IN and who is OUT” with regard to the faith. When Christians fight about “who is truly saved; who is truly a Christian,” the **Theology of the Bride** takes a back seat.

POLYTHEISM

As Christians dispersed from Jerusalem and took the gospel out into the world, pagans leveled the charge of atheism against them, since Christians did not worship the pagan gods. The early Christian apologists (c. AD 120–220) had to confront pagan polytheism with the truth that there is only one God (and that all the gods to which pagans sacrificed were demons, 1Co 10.20). The Christian apologists were Trinitarians, but they described God's Trinitarian nature as having to do with His administration (i.e. *economy*) of redemption. Their writings present one God, the Father, extending His mind (Christ) and wisdom (the Holy Spirit) into the world to accomplish redemptive work. This emphasis upon the oneness of God in pre-Nicene apologetics (labeled “economic Trinitarianism”), unintentionally *de-emphasized* the status of Son and Spirit as “Persons,” and thus obscured relational aspects of the Trinity.¹

GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism arose from a syncretizing of Christianity, Platonism and the mystery religions. While Gnosticism had differing forms of outward expression in its varied sects, the name of this heresy derives from its emphasis upon gaining a salvific knowledge of one's own divine nature. Battling Gnosticism in the second century required that the Christians emphasize the unique divinity *and* true humanity of Christ, and the exclusive authority of the apostolic Scriptures recognized by the catholic (i.e., universal) Church.

Vocabulary

Apocrypha
Apologist(s)
Asceticism
Desert Fathers
Dualism
Monasticism
Plato, Platonism
Pseudepigrapha

¹ See Kelly, J. N. D., *Early Christian Doctrines*, Fifth, Revised (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 1977), ch. 4, sections 5 and 6.

In due time, the anti-material dualism of the Gnostic sects brought its influence to bear upon orthodox Christianity, and Christian views of marriage (cf. 1Ti 4.1-3). An apocryphal *Acts of John* has a fragment that describes marriage as “the experiment of the serpent, the ignorance of teaching, injury of the seed, the gift of death,” and yet says this to encourage the reader to “join yourselves together in an inseparable marriage, holy and true, waiting for the one true incomparable bridegroom from heaven, even Christ, the everlasting bridegroom.” Ironically, Gnostic teaching emphasized a **Theology of the Bridegroom** while destroying the picture of the Church’s bridal destiny in human marriage.

PERSECUTION AND PROSPERITY

The persecution and trials of the early centuries caused some Christians to prioritize other matters (like apologetics and survival) over the **Theology of the Bride**, while for others it renewed hope in the Church’s bridal destiny. In the early Jewish-Christian psalms, known collectively as the Odes of Solomon (c. AD 100), Christ speaks in Ode 42.8-9 and says, “Like the arm of the bridegroom over the bride, so is my yoke over those who know me. And as the bridal feast is spread out by the bridal pair’s home, so is my love by those who believe in me.” In c. AD 360, the church of Nisibis (now Nusaybin, Turkey on the NE border of Syria) under siege by the Persians, cried out to the Lord with the words, “Be jealous for me, for I am thine, and to thee, Lord, am I betrothed! The Apostle who betrothed me to thee told me that thou art the Jealous One.”²

Wherever Christianity and Christian ethics proliferated, prosperity tended to follow, and prosperity had a similar sorting effect to that of persecution: some Christians drifted from devotion to Christ, distracted by worldly blessings (cf. the church of Laodicea, Rev 3.17); other believers shunned worldly comforts and retired to the desert to pursue deeper devotion to Christ. With the advent of ascetic monasticism (end of 3rd century), a well-intentioned but individualistic (and Gnostic-influenced) aspect crept into the **Theology of the Bride** when Christian women were encouraged to renounce traditional marriage and become “brides of Christ,” living chastely in their parents’ homes or in a house of virgins.

CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

With the beginning of the Arian controversy, c. AD 318, the idea of Christ as Bridegroom was submerged by the debates regarding the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria insisted that “If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence ...” In other words, based on a single and narrow connotation of the biblical word “begotten,” Arius claimed that the Son of God was not eternal. The ensuing controversy forced Christian leaders from far and wide to gather in Nicea and hammer out the fine points of Trinitarian doctrine. With the “Christian” emperor Constantine now at the helm of the Church, the Christological controversy was not a polite discussion among Christian scholars, but a true power struggle among worldwide church leaders. Though the Nicene Council affirmed the eternal deity of Christ, the controversy continued (resulting in the exile of leaders on one side or the other) until the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.

² Murray, Robert, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom : A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 1975), p. 141.



The Christian CENTURIES

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MYSTERY RELIGIONS

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

The mystery religions were cults that (a) introduced Christianity to the principle of religious initiation, and (b) presented their own initiations as salvific. By the time of Christ, most of the mystery religions (sometimes referred to simply as the mysteries) — the Eleusinian, the Dionysian, that of Serapis, that of the Great Mother and Attis, etc., — had already existed for centuries, and that of Isis and Osiris for millennia. Even the relatively newer mystery religions probably derived elements from much older traditions, reaching back in some instances to the Babylonian story of Ishtar and Tammuz. These cults had certainly existed long enough to be disdained by the post-exilic Jews. With the dawning of the Pax Romana, however, the mystery religions proliferated so that by the apostolic era they seemed to be, as Newman said, “lying in wait, as it were, for nascent Christianity.”¹



The Goddess Isis

History refers to these cults as mystery religions precisely because of their secretiveness. Most etymologists trace the Grk word *mystery* (*μυστήριον*) to the verb *μύειν* which means ‘to shut the eyes or the mouth.’ Thus “a mystery,” in pagan usage, is something about which one must remain silent, whether from ignorance or by oath. Oaths of silence were indeed integral to the mystery religions, undoubtedly for commercial reasons. These cults involved expensive rites of initiation, and if the details of those rites were given away so as to be imitated by whomever, who would pay the top price to experience them? Thus, initiates were sworn to secrecy. In fact, a person “could incur the death sentence by revealing the mysteries” of a cult, whether he or she communicated the information “through speech, pantomime, dance, or depiction.”² Because the mystery religions so closely guarded their secrets, our historical knowledge of their practices and teaching is necessarily limited, and historians still debate the precise significance of their rites.

Nevertheless, as R. C. and C. C. Kroeger explained, the influence of the mystery religions “permeated ancient society so deeply ... that the general outlines can be constructed with a considerable degree of certainty. Literally thousands of allusions to the mysteries remain in the form of

1 Albert Henry Newman, *A History Of Anti-Pedobaptism: From The Rise Of Pedobaptism To A. D. 1609*, (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), p. 1.

2 Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 804.

literary references, vase paintings, reliefs, frescoes, inscriptions, funerary statues, and so forth. We are further aided by the confessions of certain of the Church Fathers who had been initiated into one or more of the mysteries....”³

The general principles of the mystery religions, then, were these:

1. **An expensive, non-repeatable initiation by a combination of public and secret rites** involving (in stages) offerings, purifications, and participation in dramatic reenactments of the life of the god (or god and goddess) to whom the particular religion was devoted. This initiation inducted a person into a society whose adherents knew each other by “confessional formulae or symbolic signs,” but not necessarily into a brotherhood because “initiation was individual, and so were its benefits.”⁴
2. **Devotion to a god (or god and goddess) of the underworld** whose myths had to do with the changing of seasons and with human life and death, such that their cultic celebrations dramatically portrayed “sorrow and joy, seeking and finding, conception and birth, death and life, end and beginning” through “sacred meals and weddings, fertility and birth rites, baptisms, investitures with sacred garments, rites of death and resurrection, or cultically symbolised [sic] journeys to Hades and heaven.”
3. **The performance of cultic rites** which portrayed by sacred actions the trials, triumphs and destiny of a god (or god and goddess). In these powerfully sensual dramas, many scholars (with some dissenters) believe that the initiate (at least in some cults) identified with the god, joined mystically in the experiences of the god, and himself became divine.
4. **The promise of salvation resulting from the mystical union between the devotee and the deity.** The mystical union was understood as an apotheosis for the initiate, who consequently enjoyed the same destiny as the god in this life and the next. Sometimes a sacred meal began the process of deification through the infusion of the imperishable Divine nature. Since sacred meals and other rites of initiation achieved one’s apotheosis, adherents of the mysteries attributed salvific power to the very rituals, as well as to the initiation as a whole.
5. **A vow of silence required of devotees** as to the nature of the religion’s secret rituals — thus keeping the religion a lucrative mystery.

— Adapted from *Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin*, by Roderick Graciano, 2016.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity*, Third Edition, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 258, 300.



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CHRISTIANITY VS THE MYSTERIES

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

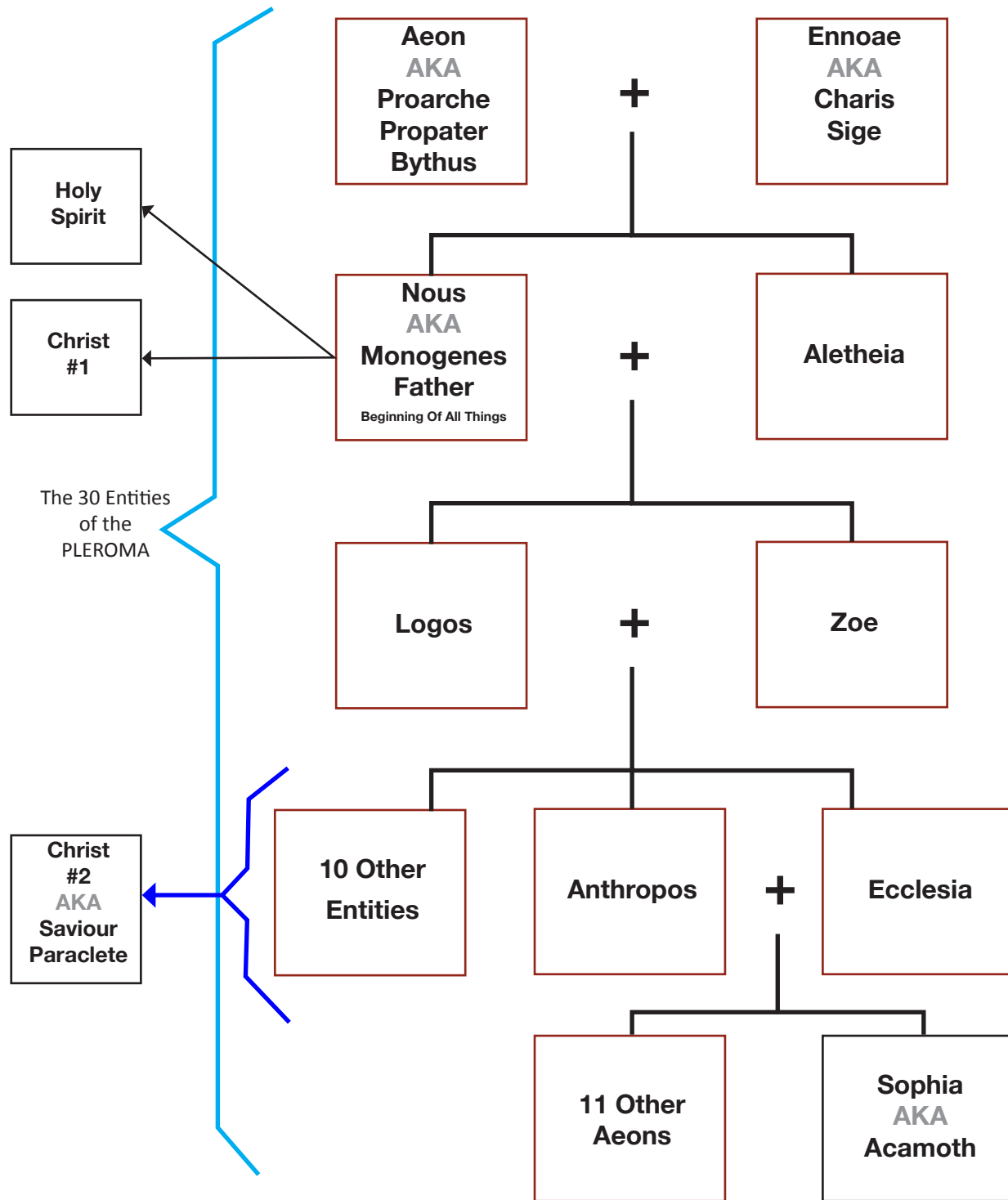
Christianity

Origin in Palestine
Historical basis for events
Established doctrine
God acts in history
Theological
Monotheistic
Incarnation (God becomes man)
Resurrection
Adherents join in God's work
Eschatological plan for the cosmos
All of life sacred
Exclusive
Mysteries made public
Emphasis on relationship
Rituals metaphorical
God saves you

Mystery Religions

Very little influence in Palestine
Mythological basis for events
Syncretizing, evolving doctrine
Non-historical deities
Lack of insight about God
Polytheistic
Apotheosis (men become gods)
Reincarnation
Adherents seek self-improvement
Personal plan for individual's afterlife
Sacred-secular split
Members belonged to multiple cults
Mysteries kept secret
Emphasis on ritual
Rituals magical
Initiation rites save you

The Valentinian Gnostic Genealogy



The Valentinian system originated with Valentinus c. AD 150 and retained influence until c. AD 300. In this system, as described by Irenaeus, Sophia is alienated from the Pleroma for her indiscretions, which resulted in the emergence of the Demiurge (God of the OT) and the origin of the material world. However, after bringing many spiritual seeds to full gnosis (with the help of Christ), Sophia is fully restored within the Pleroma and marries the Saviour. Those spiritual seeds not fully absorbed back into Sophia marry the angels who serve the Saviour. Then all matter is disintegrated, and only spirits remain.



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Current Gnostic Teaching In Their Own Words

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

An Introduction to the Ecclesia Gnostica

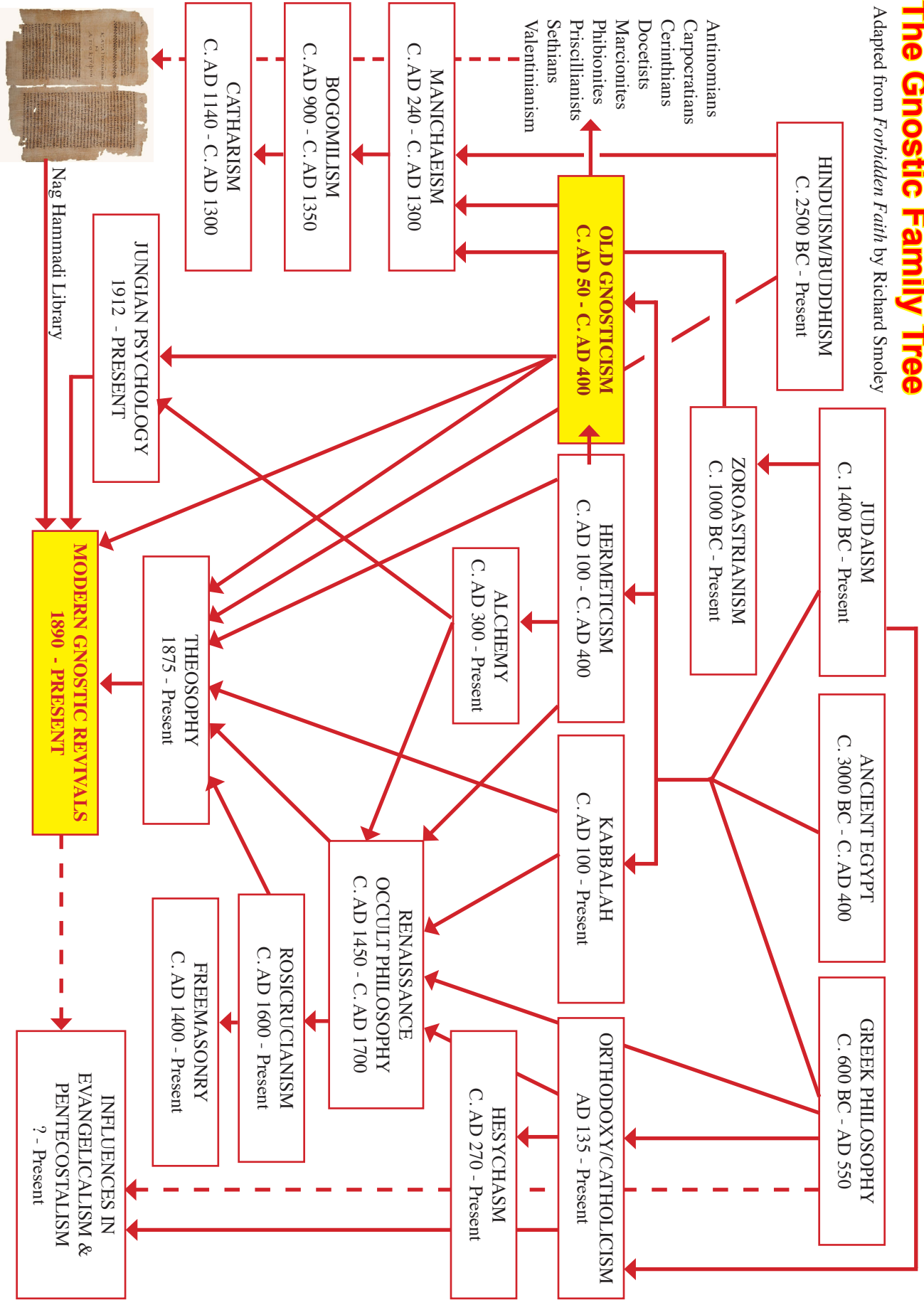
<http://www.gnosis.org/ecclesia/ecclesia.htm>



1. There is an original and transcendental spiritual unity which came to emanate a vast manifestation of pluralities.
2. The manifest universe of matter and mind (psyche) was not created by the original spiritual unity but by spiritual beings possessing inferior powers.
3. These creators possessing inferior powers have as one of their objectives the perpetual separation of humans from the unity (God).
4. The human being is a composite, the outer aspect being the handiwork of the inferior creators, while the “inner man” has the character of a fallen spark of the ultimate divine unity.
5. The fallen sparks of transcendental holiness slumber in their material and mental prison, their self-awareness stupefied by forces of materiality and mind.
6. The slumbering sparks have not been abandoned by the ultimate unity, rather there is a constant effort forthcoming from this unity that is directed toward their awakening and liberation.
7. The awakening of the inmost divine essence in humans is effected by salvific knowledge, called Gnosis.
8. Salvific knowledge, or Gnosis, is not brought about by belief, or the performance of virtuous deeds, or by obedience to commandments, for these can at best but serve as preparatory circumstances leading toward liberating knowledge.
9. Among the helpers of the slumbering sparks a particular position of honor and importance belongs to a feminine emanation of the unity. The name of this emanation is Sophia (Wisdom). She was involved in the creation of the world and ever since remained the guide of her orphaned human children.
10. From the earliest times of history, messengers of light have been sent forth from the ultimate unity. The task of these messengers has ever been the advancement of Gnosis in the souls of humans.
11. The greatest of these messengers in our historical and geographical matrix was the descended Logos of God, manifesting in Jesus Christ.
12. Jesus exercised a twofold ministry: He was a teacher, imparting instruction concerning the way of Gnosis, and he was a hierophant, imparting mysteries.
13. The mysteries imparted by Jesus (which are also known as sacraments) are mighty aids toward Gnosis and have been entrusted by him to his apostles and to their successors.
14. By way of the spiritual practice of the mysteries (sacraments) and by a relentless and uncompromising striving for Gnosis, humans can steadily advance toward liberation from all confinement, material and otherwise. The ultimate objective of this process of liberation is the achievement of salvific knowledge and with it freedom from embodied existence and return to the ultimate unity.

The Gnostic Family Tree

Adapted from *Forbidden Faith* by Richard Smoley





The Christian CENTURIES

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The Hellenistic Synthesis

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

With the severing of Christianity's Hebraic roots, and the subsequent Hellenization of Christianity, the synthesis of biblical and pagan elements brought about the following phenomena:

THE REDEFINITION OF MYSTERY

To this day, Catholics and mainline Protestants refer to "the mystery of baptism." Isn't it interesting, therefore, that no one ever referred to Christian baptism as a mystery until around the time of Clement (AD 200)? The apostles certainly never referred to baptism as a mystery. The NT does speak of mysteries, particularly in Paul's epistles, but these mysteries are always truths (pertaining to God's redemptive plan and eschatological agenda) *not rituals*. New Testament mysteries are truths once hidden (or not clearly understood) but now made clear and publicly proclaimed (see the comparison on page 19). Nowhere does the NT speak of baptism, the Lord's supper or any other religious ritual as "a mystery." Nevertheless, as the Church's understanding of Christianity evolved from a Hebraic conception to a Hellenistic one, the Church Fathers began speaking of Christian rituals as mysteries.

At the time when the Fathers began speaking of baptism as a mystery, i.e., around the end of the second century, the *lingua franca* of the Empire was beginning its slow shift from Greek to Latin. As Latin gradually took hold in the Church, the Fathers began to translate the Greek word *mysterion* with the Latin word *sacramentum*. Thus, in the later works of the Church Fathers, we see baptism and other Christian rites referred to both as mysteries and as sacraments. We realize, therefore, that when we speak today of "the mystery of baptism" or "the sacrament of baptism," we unwittingly testify to the influence of the ancient mystery religions upon the vocabulary *and theology* of the Church in the second and third centuries.

THE ADVENT OF SALVIFIC SACRAMENTS

Indeed, the rituals of the mystery religions were understood to have salvific, or at least apotropaic, power. In contrast, the rituals of Judaism were never understood in this way: Old Testament rituals were didactic and typological; everyone understood that the power to cleanse or forgive sin resided in the very person of God alone (Mark 2.7). Nevertheless, in the Hellenistic synthesis with Christianity, Christian rituals began to be thought of as mysteries/sacraments, and as such came to be seen as rites with inherent salvific or apotropaic power. And then, everybody wanted these sacraments, for themselves *and for their children*.

THE LOSS OF CHILDHOOD INNOCENCE

In Judaism and in apostolic (Jewish) Christianity, infants and little children were considered innocent for most religious purposes. This does not mean that infants and children were thought of as *sinless*; only that they were considered as not yet conscious of sin nor able to take on religious obligations. However, as soon as the Hellenized Church began to think of baptism as salvific, parents wanted baptism for the salvation of their children, i.e., for the washing away of their children's sins (the Church Father Tertullian, c. AD 200, resisted this trend). And once the Church started

baptizing little children for the cleansing of sin, people (who retained a more Hebraic worldview?) started asking what sins children had that needed washing away (the Church Father Origen, c. AD 250, gave the earliest answer to that question: sins from an angelic pre-existence in heaven). This began the multi-century development of the doctrine of original sin, which doctrine culminated in the teaching of Augustine (c. AD 400), but was modified by the later Scholastics (c. AD 1100) and Reformers (c. AD 1525 and following).

AN INITIATION FOR CHRISTIANS

Today, we often use the word initiate in its most rudimentary meaning of “beginning something” or “welcoming someone into the membership of a group.” When that group is a local church, initiation may come to mind as a word to describe a person’s introduction or induction into the membership. Fine, no problem, but stop and consider what religious initiation meant in antiquity. Historically the verb to initiate was always used ecclesiastically in association with a ritual or rituals, and had a more technical meaning derived from the pagan mystery religions. That technical meaning of the verb to initiate is: “to induct a member into a sect or society by rites, ceremonies, ordeals or instructions.” We must understand that this kind of **initiation** (by ancient religious definition) is considered the effective means by which a person is incorporated into his or her new faith *and by which he or she is saved*. In biblical Christianity, Christ saves us and incorporates us into His Church by virtue of His atoning work and by the agency of His Holy Spirit, His word, and the gift of faith. The New Testament never speaks of a ritual initiation by which one is saved or inducted into the faith.

Nevertheless, the Mystery Religions of the Hellenistic world, though secretive, touted their **initiations** (for which one had to pay; these were *for-profit* religions). Some of the initiation rituals were public (like immersions at the seashore or at public baths). It is clear from the writings of the Greek Church Fathers that some of them were saved *after* having been initiated into one or more Mystery Religions, and it was easy for them to begin thinking of Christianity as the one and only true Mystery Religion. When they thought about what the Christian counterpart to the pagan initiation ceremonies might be, they immediately seized upon Christian baptism as the obvious choice.

THE SACRED/SECULAR SPLIT

Because the Mystery Religions had to keep their ceremonies secret in order to remain profitable, their sacred symbols, rituals and reenactments were kept utterly separate from the rest of the adherents’ public lives. This introduced a sacred/secular division of life experience that was utterly foreign to Judaism and the apostolic Christianity that emerged from it. Nevertheless, the more Hellenism influenced early Christianity, the more Christians began to think of some (instead of all) aspects of life as sacred, and other aspects of life as spiritually irrelevant, i.e., secular.

GNOSTICISM

It was perhaps inevitable that as the Christian Church became more and more Hellenized, false prophets would arise who would push the Christianity-Hellenism mix to the extremely Hellenistic (mystical and Platonic) end of the doctrinal spectrum. It was this extreme syncretizing of Christianity and Hellenism that gave rise to Gnosticism. While Gnosticism had differing forms of outward expression in its varied sects, the name of this heresy derives from its emphasis upon gaining a salvific knowledge of one’s own divine nature. Battling Gnosticism in the second century required that the Christians emphasize the unique divinity *and* true humanity of Christ, and the exclusive authority of the apostolic Scriptures recognized by the catholic (i.e., universal) Church.



The Christian CENTURIES

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QUOTATIONS

Illustrating The Hellenistic Synthesis With Christianity

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

Come, ... I will show thee ... the mysteries of the Word ... dramas of truth ... O truly sacred mysteries! ... I become holy whilst I am initiated. The Lord is the hierophant, and seals while illuminating him who is initiated, ... Such are the reveries of my mysteries. If it is thy wish, be thou also initiated....”

— Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus, or Exhortation To The Heathen (Greeks)*, c. AD 200

I am, indeed, of opinion that, as the end and consummation of the saints will be in those (ages) which are not seen, and are eternal, we must conclude ... from a contemplation of that very end, that rational creatures had also a similar beginning. And if they had a beginning such as the end for which they hope, they existed undoubtedly from the very beginning in those (ages) which are not seen, and are eternal. And if this is so, then there has been a descent from a higher to a lower condition, on the part not only of those souls who have deserved the change by the variety of their movements, but also on that of those who, in order to serve the whole world, were brought down from those higher and invisible spheres to these lower and visible ones, although against their will—“Because the creature was subjected to vanity, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected the same in hope;” so that both sun, and moon, and stars, and angels might discharge their duty to the world, and to those souls which, on account of their excessive mental defects, stood in need of bodies of a grosser and more solid nature; and for the sake of those for whom this arrangement was necessary, this visible world was also called into being.

— Origen explaining that since man has a heavenly destiny, he must have had a heavenly pre-existence, *De Principiis* 3.5.4, c. AD 250

It is on this account as well that the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to little children. For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were committed were aware that in everyone was sin's innate defilement [*genuinae sordes peccati*], which needed to be washed away through water and spirit. Because of this defilement as well, the body itself is called the body of sin; it is not because of sins the soul committed when it was in another body, as they who introduce the doctrine of [reincarnation] imagine. But because the soul was fashioned into the body of sin, and the body of death and lowliness, and just as he said, “You have lowered our soul to the dust.”

— Origen introducing the idea of baptism for an innate defilement from a heavenly pre-existence, *Commentary On Romans* 5.9 c. AD 250, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, (Catholic University Of America Press, 2001).

They also claim that souls, though not parts but merely creatures of God, have sinned by withdrawing from the Creator and, according to the gravity of their sins, have been imprisoned in bodies ranging, by degrees, from heaven down to earth, and that such souls and bodies constitute the cosmos. Thus, they, too, explain creation by saying that it was not for the sake of producing things that were good but merely for imprisoning things that were sinful.

Origen has been rightly reprov'd for holding and expressing such views in his work, which he calls *Perì Archōn*, that is, *Of Origins*. I am inexpressibly astonished that a scholar so versed in ecclesiastical literature should have failed to observe, first, that he was contradicting the plain meaning of highly authoritative Scriptural texts.

— Augustine reprov'g the Platonic/Gnostic teaching of Origen regarding the imprisonment of pre-existent souls in physical bodies, *City of God* 11.23, c. AD 400, trans. by Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952).

The Savior, although he did not himself sin, nevertheless **by the assumption of human flesh** is said to have become sin.

Origen, *Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans*, in connection with Rom 5.12, c. AD 250. See Gerald Lewis Bray, *Romans, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT 6*. Cf. 2 Corinthians 5.21.

Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life.... we little fishes ... are born in water ...

[In the creation] water was the first to produce that which had life, that it might be no wonder in baptism that waters know how to give life.

All waters, therefore, in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin, do, after invocation of God, **attain the sacramental power of sanctification**; for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens, and rests over the waters, sanctifying them from Himself; and being thus sanctified, they imbibe at the same time the power of sanctifying.

Grant that, in days gone by, there was salvation by means of bare faith, before the passion and resurrection of the Lord. But now that faith has been enlarged, and is become a faith which believes in His nativity, passion, and resurrection, there has been an amplification added to the sacrament, viz., the sealing act of baptism...

— Tertullian *On Baptism* chapters 2-6 and 13, c. AD 200, exalting the sacrament of baptism and explaining that the bare faith of Abraham is no longer sufficient for salvation.

Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. ... This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing: washing, by which we cleanse away our sins; grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are remitted; and illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly.

Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Pædagogus)*, 1.6, c. AD 200.

And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." He it is who effects with water the second birth, as a certain seed of divine generation, and a consecration of a heavenly nativity, the pledge of a promised inheritance, and as it were a kind of handwriting of eternal salvation ...

Novatian, *Concerning The Trinity* 29, AD 257.



The Christian CENTURIES

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The Conversion Of Constantine

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay



Constantine's father, the successful and long-lived co-emperor Constantius, was a pagan monotheist who worshipped the Roman Sun God, and was kindly disposed toward Christians. Another writer said that Constantius was Χριστιανόφρων, i.e., a man who "thought like a Christian." It was partly due to his father's influence, therefore, that Constantine — when facing the decisive battles for the control of Rome — was inclined to seek the protection and help of the supreme God rather than trust his fate to the seemingly impotent idols of his political competitors. Thus, seeking God's help against his numerically superior foe, Maxentius, Constantine saw a sign and a following vision, both related by Eusebius in his *The Life Of The Blessed Emperor Constantine*:

THE SIGN

ACCORDINGLY [Constantine] called on [his father's God] with earnest prayer and supplications that he would reveal to him who he was, and stretch forth his right hand to help him in his present difficulties. And while he was thus

praying with fervent entreaty, a most marvelous sign appeared to him from heaven, the account of which it might have been hard to believe had it been related by any other person. But since the victorious emperor himself long afterwards declared it to the writer of this history, when he was honored with his acquaintance and society, and confirmed his statement by an oath, who could hesitate to accredit the relation, especially since the testimony of after-time has established its truth? He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS. At this sight he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which followed him on this expedition, and witnessed the miracle.

THE CHRISTOPHANY

HE said, moreover, that he doubted within himself what the import of this apparition could be. And while he continued to ponder and reason on its meaning, night suddenly came on; then in his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he

had seen in the heavens, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies.

THE LABARUM

As a result of these visions, Constantine ordered the construction of the standard, called the Labarum, described also by Eusebius:

NOW it was made in the following manner. A long spear, overlaid with gold, formed the figure of the cross by means of a transverse bar laid over it. On the top of the whole was fixed a wreath of gold and precious stones; and within this, the symbol of the Saviour's name, two letters indicating the name of Christ by means of its initial characters, the letter P being intersected by X in its centre: and these letters the emperor was in the habit of wearing on his helmet at a later period. From the cross-bar of the spear was suspended a cloth, a royal piece, covered with a profuse embroidery of most brilliant precious stones; and which, being also richly interlaced with gold, presented an indescribable degree of beauty to the beholder. This banner was of a square form, and the upright staff, whose lower section was of great length, bore a golden half-length portrait of the pious emperor and his children on its upper part, beneath the trophy of the cross, and immediately above the embroidered banner.

The emperor constantly made use of this sign of salvation as a safeguard against every adverse and hostile power, and commanded that others similar to it should be carried at the head of all his armies.

THE VICTORY

As Constantine advanced upon Rome, his rival Maxentius fortified himself within the city and dared not go out to meet Constantine's troops in open battle. Maxentius might have withstood a seige by Constantine for some time, but Eusebius wrote that "God himself drew [Maxentius], as if bound in chains, some distance without the gates."¹ In other words, Maxentius did eventually sally forth on October 27, 312, was driven back and was drowned in the Tiber River when attempting to cross a booby-trapped, floating bridge of his own making.

The victorious Constantine gave thanks to the God of the Christians by erecting a statue of himself in Rome, holding forth a cross. Soon followed the Edict of Milan in early 313, granting toleration to religions, ending persecution against the Christians, and even granting restitution of possessions lost by churches since the most recent persecution. Under Constantine's growing favor toward Christianity, the clergy received financial support from him, the Church was allowed to have wills written in its favor, laws unfavorable to Christianity and its principles were repealed, the punishment of crucifixion was ended, and criminals were no longer sentenced to be killed in gladiatorial games but sent to work in the mines instead. Furthermore, laws were enacted against adultery and seduction, provision was made for child support to those without able fathers, and the manumission of slaves was facilitated with the proviso that it should take place in the church in the presence of the priest. Finally, Constantine made "the venerable Day of the Sun," Sunday, a public holiday giving birth to the weekend we now take for granted.²

As to the Emperor's own spirituality, Gerhard Uhlhorn reasonably concludes that Constantine's conversion was a gradual process. Constantine's change of heart toward Christianity after the vision was real, but his understanding of Christ and conformity to Christian practice (such as it was) came only over time.

1 *History* 9.9.4.

2 See Gerhard Uhlhorn, *The Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism*, ed. by Egbert C. Smyth and C. J. H. Ropes, trans. by C. J. H. Ropes and Egbert C. Smyth, Revised Edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908).



The Christian CENTURIES

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The Constantinian Synthesis

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

The Constantinian synthesis with Christianity was a continuation of the Hellenistic synthesis, with an important addition: the beginnings of a Roman overlay. While the most fundamental component of Hellenistic culture was **magic**, the most distinctive addition from Roman culture was a greater emphasis upon **legal process**.

LEGAL BENEFITS FOR THE CHURCH

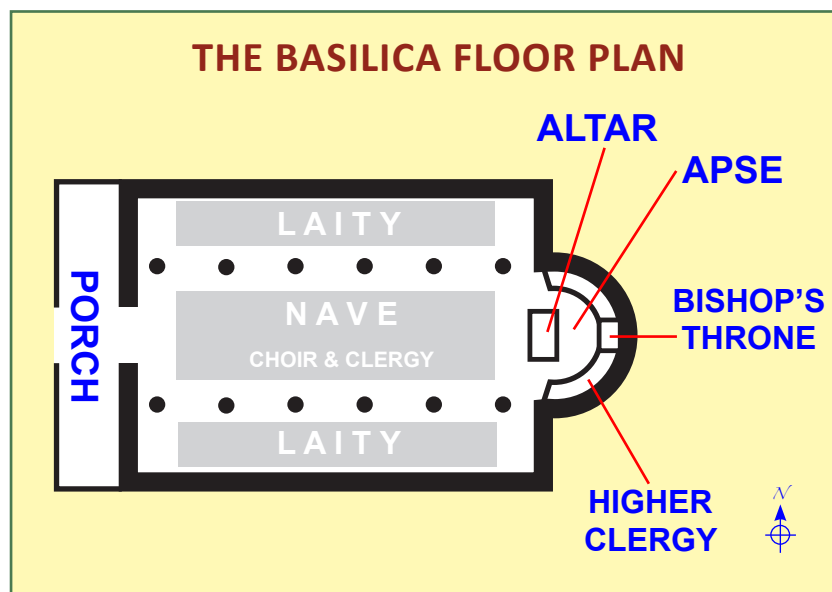
Christianity was certainly not opposed to legal benefits, anymore than Judaism was opposed to Persian decrees that allowed for the rebuilding of the temple and city of Jerusalem. However, until Constantine, the Church was utterly dependent upon Spirit-empowered proclamation and testimony (often to the point of martyrdom) for its forward progress in the world. When the Christian clergy began receiving financial support from Emperor Constantine, and when Christianity received official status under Theodosius, it was the government favor upon the Church and its corresponding suppression of paganism that swelled the ranks of Christian congregations.

Of course entanglement with the state government always comes with a price. The Church accepted benefits from Constantine, but also had to accept his headship! Constantine retained the pagan title of *pontifex maximus* and famously presided over the Council of Nicea.

BASILICAS & THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EPISCOPACY

Legalized, and then preferred, Christianity's new status in the empire allowed Christians to hold public worship services without fear of reprisal, and in fact resulted in the need for more spacious worship venues. Hellenistic Christianity naturally gravitated to the familiar architecture of the Greek (by now overtaken by the Romans) **basilica**. The word *basilica* is probably from the Greek adjective *vasilikos* (βασιλικός) meaning "royal." The public basilicas of the early Christian centuries were the Roman halls of justice (*basilicae forenses*) where government business was held, and business transactions were completed.

One naturally wonders why Christians would choose government-business architecture for Church meetings, and why (according to various history books) many existing basilicas were taken over by the Church in Constantine's time and repurposed for Christian worship. Generally, Christians of the time eschewed taking



over abandoned pagan *temples*, but the architecture of the basilicas was ideally suited to emphasize the distinctions between classes of worshippers, and this fit very well with the **episcopacy** that was rapidly institutionalized in the Hellenized Church.

Under the apostles, Christianity organized on a family model, with leadership provided by the apostles, i.e., individuals with direct knowledge of the Lord Himself. Subsequently, leadership was provided by individuals recognized for their mature experience in the faith handed down by the apostles. Just as in Jewish homes, and in Hebrew towns and cities of old, leadership was invested in those with the lengthiest experience, and so, the first Christian churches recognized **elders** (*πρεσβύτερος*, presbyter) as their leaders as a matter of course (Acts 11.30). When mixed or *Gentile* congregations required organization, apostles like Paul instructed that elders be appointed or recognized, on the basis of godly character, in each city (Titus 1.5). In every biblical case, leadership is described as provided by *a plurality* of elders (e.g., Acts 20.17). One or more of a city's elders could rise to prominence by virtue of their experience, leadership skills or other gifts, but they neither claimed nor were recognized as having greater authority than their fellow elders, *nor were they ever given a superior title*.

It is a bit of a mystery, therefore, why Ignatius (in AD 117) made such an issue — unlike the other Fathers of his time — of submission to the “one Bishop” of each city (*Philadelphians* 4). The word *bishop* (*ἐπίσκοπος* from which we get *episcopal*) simply means *overseer* and in the NT is applied to *all* the elders of the church (Acts 20.28). However, Antioch, the city of Ignatius, was the third most prominent city of the Roman world, and the Romans were profoundly conscious of rank and status. Consequently, Roman religion involved an extensive and intricate **hierarchy**. The love of hierarchical authority seems to have infected Ignatius, but he was surely not alone in this among Christians of the second century. By the time of Constantine and the proliferation of Christian basilicas, Church leadership had become professionalized and hierarchical. By this time the word *Bishop* was widely used as the title for the highest ranking Christian priest who sat on the throne in the apse of the basilica. The architecture of the basilica served to mark off the distinction between the Bishop and the lower ranks of clergy, *and* between the professional clergy and the laity. I wonder if Ignatius ever dreamed that the trend in the church toward hierarchical authority would reach its zenith with Constantine exercising his authority over the affairs of the Church (it was the emperor Gratian, c. AD 375, who finally renounced the title *pontifex maximus*, a title to be later taken up by the bishop of Rome).

NEW HOLIDAYS

Christian worship had already shifted from the Sabbath to the first day of the week (see Time Line of 2nd century) probably as a protest against Jewish practice (see Ignatius, *Magnesians* 9-10; observance of the first day of the week is not mandated in the NT, though one example is given of meeting on that day, Acts 20.7). Constantine mandated the cessation of business (with the exception of necessary harvesting in the countryside) on the first day of the week, naming it “the venerable day of the Sun.” By this decree, the Emperor ended the seven-day work week of the Gentile world and created the weekend.

With Christianity given favored status in the empire, and with paganism soon outlawed, the pagan populace found it easy to profess Christianity (and flooded into the churches), but did not find it so easy to renounce their pagan traditions. Therefore, by AD 336 the Church found it expedient to attempt to de-emphasize the pagan Saturnalia revelry at the winter solstice by celebrating Christ's birth at that time with the Christ mass.



The Christian CENTURIES

ABCtoAD Series
By Timothy Ministries

QUOTATIONS Relating To The Constantinian Synthesis With Christianity

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

The following law is to apply to all, without any exception. No one is allowed to have a private sanctuary in his own house. But if someone feels moved to offer a sacrifice, he should carry out this intention in one of the public sanctuaries and hand over the sacrificial gift to the priests and priestesses, whose duty it is to see that all pollution is avoided. United with them, he and all those who wish to take part should make his prayers to heaven.

— Plato, *Laws* 10.16 (909 d-e), c. 370 BC

You know that **those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them**; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.

— Jesus, Mark 10.42-44, c. AD 33

But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; ... They love the place of honor at banquets and the **chief seats** in the synagogues,.... But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and **you are all brothers**. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

— Jesus, Matthew 23.5-12, c. AD 33

However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands.

— Stephen, Acts 7.48, c. AD 33

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders** of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, ... "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers** (*ἐπίσκοπος*, **bishops**), to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

— Paul, Acts 20.17-18, 28, c. AD 54

Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, **bishops** [= overseers] and **deacons** [= ministers] worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved; for **they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers**. Despise them not therefore, for they are your honoured ones, together with the prophets and teachers.

— *The Didache* 15.1-2, c. AD 100

Our widows must be sober-minded as touching the faith of the Lord, making intercession without ceasing for all men, abstaining from all calumny, evil speaking, false witness, love of money, and every evil thing, **knowing that they are God's altar** ...

— *Epistle of Polycarp*, 4.3, c. AD 117

It [is] His will that we, too, should offer a gift at the altar, frequently and without intermission. **The altar, then, is in heaven** (for towards that place are our prayers and oblations directed); the temple likewise [is there], as John says in the Apocalypse, “And the temple of God was opened” ...

— Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 18.6, c. AD 185

We are the true adorers and the true priests, who, praying in spirit, sacrifice, in spirit, prayer,—a victim proper and acceptable to God, which assuredly He has required, which He has looked forward to [or provided] for Himself! This victim, devoted from the whole heart, fed on faith, tended by truth, entire in innocence, pure in chastity, garlanded with love, we ought to escort with the pomp of good works, amid psalms and hymns, unto God’s altar, to obtain for us all things from God.

— Tertullian, *On Prayer* 28, c. AD 200

Are not even we laics priests? It is written: “A kingdom also, and priests to His God and Father, hath He made us.” It is the authority of the Church, and the honour which has acquired sanctity through the joint session of the Order, which has established the difference between the Order and the laity. Accordingly, where there is no joint session of the ecclesiastical Order, you offer, and baptize, and are priest, alone for yourself. But where three are, a church is, albeit they be laics.

— Tertullian, *On Exhortation To Chastity* 7, c. AD 204

Why have they no altars, no temples, no acknowledged images?

— Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 10, describing complaints by the pagans against the Christians, c. AD 210

But do you think that we conceal what we worship, if we have not temples and altars? And yet what image of God shall I make, since, if you think rightly, man himself is the image of God? What temple shall I build to Him, when this whole world fashioned by His work cannot receive Him? And when I, a man, dwell far and wide, **shall I shut up the might of so great majesty within one little building?** Were it not better that He should be dedicated in our mind, consecrated in our inmost heart?

— Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 32, c. AD 210

And ... we do not object to the erection of temples ... , but ... we do refuse to build lifeless temples to the Giver of all life, ... we are taught that our bodies are the temple of God

— Origen *Contra Celsus* 8.19, c. AD 250

Having shown briefly how impious and infamous are the opinions which you have formed about your gods, we have now to speak of their temples, their images also, and sacrifices, and of the other things which are nailed and closely related to them. For you are here in the habit of fastening upon us a very serious charge of impiety because **we do not rear temples for the ceremonies of worship, do not set up statues and images of any god, do not build altars, do not offer the blood of creatures slain in sacrifices, incense, nor sacrificial meal, and finally, do not bring wine flowing in libations from sacred bowls;** which, indeed, we neglect to build and do, not as though we cherish impious and wicked dispositions, or have conceived any madly desperate feeling of contempt for the gods, but because we think and believe that they—if only they are true gods...—... scorn such honours....

— Arnobius, *Against The Heathen* 6.1, c. AD 300

COMPARING PRIESTHOODS

Items highlighted in yellow on this page and the next are principles that carried over into the 4th century.

JEWISH

- Priesthood originated in covenant with God
- Priesthood hereditary
- **Only male priests**
- Priests representative (Levites represented the nation as a whole)
- Material needs of priests provided by co-religionists
- Garments of high priest symbolic and prophetic
- **Priests preside over temple rituals**
- Sacrifices typological and didactic, symbolize atonement
- Priests teach about God
- Priesthood guides the king and the populace
- Simple and practical hierarchy: High priest, priests, Levites (by NT times, a priestly aristocracy had arisen, such that “chief priests” is added to the other three groups)

GREEK

- Priesthood originated with magicians evolving into priests
- Priesthood received by inheritance, election or purchase
- Priests and priestesses
- **Material needs of priests provided by the State**
- Priests wear no special uniform, just traditional tunic (χιτών)
- **Priests preside over temple rituals**
- Sacrifices are gifts to appease and oblige the god(s)
- Priests do not teach
- **Priesthood serves the State**
- Little or no hierarchy

ROMAN

- Priesthood filled by election
- Priests and priestesses
- **Material needs of priests provided by the State**
- **Priests preside over temple rituals, augury, treaties and more; responsible for “scrupulous attention to all the minutiae of ritual”¹**
- Sacrifices propitiatory, expiatory
- Priests do not teach the people
- **Priesthood serves the State; king and Senate control priests**
- King or Caesar is Pontifex Maximus and sometimes Augur
- **Extensive (to the point of bewildering) hierarchy designed to keep classes separated by rank, and of which King/Caesar is head**

¹ Hastings, James, John A. Selbie, and Louis H. Gray, eds., *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh; New York: T. & T. Clark; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908–1926)

COMPARING PRIESTHOODS

Items highlighted in yellow on this page and the previous are principles that carried over into the 4th century.

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIAN

- Priesthood originated in God's ideal that His covenant people reach the nations (Ex 19.6; 1Pe 2.5,9; Rev 1.6; 5.10)
- All believers priests; Jesus the high priest (Heb 4.14; Poly 12.2); one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus (1Ti 2.5)
- Church led by apostles and elders; later by elders appointed on the basis of character qualifications
- Material needs of preaching and teaching elders provided by co-religionists (1Tim 5.17)
- No special garments for Church leaders
- Any believer can perform ordinances; baptism is a consecration of new believers to Kingdom work
- **Services held in Jerusalem Temple**, subsequently in homes
- Once for all sacrifice of Christ (Heb 7.27; 10.12,26) commemorated during meals; no altars, nor special table for Lord's supper; all believers sacrifice in good works, generosity and praise (Rom12.1; Phil 2.17; 4.18; Heb 13.15-16)
- Church leaders teach and disciple (1Tim 3.2; 5.17; 2Tim 2.2)
- Separate authority of Church and State
- Simple and practical hierarchy: *Bishops* (overseers) functional synonym for *Presbyters* (elders), and sometimes for *Deacons* (ministers)

4TH CENTURY CHRISTIAN

- Distinction between professional clergy and laity emphasized by architecture of church building; only male priests
- Bishops appointed by congregations or by other bishops
- Material needs of priests provided by the State and co-religionists
- Specifically clerical garments not until c. 6th century.
- Priests preside over religious rituals; baptism is a means of regeneration
- Services held in basilicas
- Eucharist commemorative of Christ's sacrifice; evolving into a sacramental repetition of Christ's sacrifice.¹ Special tables for the Lord's supper have evolved into "altars"
- Church under the emperor's authority
- Bishop head of extensive local church hierarchy, distinguished from Presbyters and Deacons (cf. Ignatius, *To Polycarp* 6.1; *To Ephesians* 2.2; 4; *To Trallians* 7)

¹ Kurtz, Johann Heinrich, *Church History*, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll, trans. by John Macpherson, The Foreign Biblical Library (New York: London: Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889–1894), I–III.



The Christian CENTURIES

ABCtoAD Series
By Timothy Ministries

Solving Problems In The Early Christian Centuries

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Addressed By</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Polytheism's resistance to the idea of only one God	Christians evangelizing Gentiles	Economic Trinitarianism that emphasized the oneness of God
Sects competing against orthodox Christianity	Ignatius (c. 117)	All must submit to the authority of the local Bishop
If there is only one God, then why is there evil in the world?	Gnostics (and earlier Platonists)	There is one ultimate God, but a lesser and evil Demiurge created the imprisoning material world
If material existence is abhorrent, then who/what is Jesus? ¹	Gnostic Docetists	Jesus was a spirit who only <i>seemed</i> to come in human flesh (cf. 1John 4.2-3; 2John 1.7)
If the material world was created by an evil Demiurge, then the God of the Old Testament must be that cruel Demiurge	Marcion (c. 144)	Gospel is Gospel of Love to the exclusion of Law; the Old Testament must be completely rejected and only Paul's writings and an edited gospel of Luke accepted
Charismatic manifestations wane as the Church becomes more institutionalized	Montanus and the Montanists (c. 160)	A reemphasis upon prophetic utterances and an anticipation of the imminent parousia
The inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament and apostles being disparaged by Marcionites	Melito (d. c. 190); Origen (c. 250); Eusebius (c. 300)	A long process of canonizing the apostolic scriptures begun c. AD 200 and concluded at the Council of Carthage in AD 400
Gnostics claim that their doctrine handed down from apostles in secret traditions	Irenaeus (c. 190); Tertullian (c. 200)	Lists of the apostolic successions of Bishops begin to be drawn up
If baptism regenerates, then the Church should baptize infants ²	Tertullian (c. 200)	Children should not be baptized until old enough to understand the meaning of baptism

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Addressed By</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Since baptism washes away sin, why are some baptizing infants? ²	Origen (c. 250)	Newborns have an innate defilement from sins committed in an angelic preexistence
Influx of “converts” from paganism	Christian congregations (c. 300)	Repurpose existing — and build new — basilicas to accommodate larger congregations while maintaining class distinctions
Spiritual compromise in the increasingly institutionalized Church, together with political corruption and urban crime, while paganism still strong on the frontiers of the empire	Antony (c. 269); Pachomius (c. 290); subsequent ascetics	Pursuit of God in the solitude of the desert; other monastic lifestyles
If Jesus truly came in the flesh and there is only one God, who/ what is the Son of God?	Arius (d. 336) and subsequent Arians	Jesus is the <i>one direct</i> creation of God; he is not co-eternal with God, but the one through whom God created the world
If Jesus is not truly both man and God, there is no real atonement for sin	Emperor Constantine and council of Nicea (325)	The Son is coeternal, coequal and consubstantial (<i>homoousios</i>) with the Father.
Man must have free choice with regard to the pursuit of God; it’s absurd and debilitating to say man is <i>born</i> with sin and guilt ³	Pelagius (c. 370), and subsequent Pelagians	Doctrine that man is born innocent as Adam and Even when they were created; may achieve salvation by own effort
If all people are born innocent, then the Church practice of baptizing infants is absurd ²	Augustine (c. 400)	All persons inherit guilt from Adam and from their own parents’ concupiscence
Where is the proof that all persons inherit guilt from Adam and their own parents?	Augustine (c. 400)	The proof of original sin is in the Church’s long tradition of baptizing infants

- 1 That “material existence is abhorrent” is of course a false premise, and therefore the solution is equally invalid.
- 2 Many false assumptions were made in connection with baptism in the early centuries (see p. 39), including the beliefs that baptism regenerates and washes away sin. The doctrinal solutions to the problems based on these false assumptions were inevitably bogus.
- 3 Heresy has been defined as “truth out of balance.” Pelagius recognized some problems with the emerging doctrine of original sin in his day, but made some false assumptions of his own and went too far in the opposite doctrinal direction.



The Christian CENTURIES

ABCtoAD Series
By Timothy Ministries

QUOTATIONS

Relating To The Desert Fathers

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

If you see a man pure and humble, that is a great vision. For what is greater than such vision, to see the invisible God in a visible man.

— Pachomius (Ward, *Lives*, p. 45)

For in Egypt I saw man fathers living the angelic life They do not busy themselves with any earthly matter or take account of anything that belongs to the transient world. ... Consequently, when one of them lacks something necessary, he does not go to a town or a village, or to a brother, or friend, or relation, or to parents or children, or family to procure what he needs, for his will alone is sufficient. When he raises his hands to God in supplication and utters words of thanksgiving with his lips, all these things are provided for him in a miraculous way.

— *Historia Monachorum*, Prologue 4 and 7

Prayer is hard work and a great struggle to one's last breath.

— Abba Agathon (Ward, *Sayings* p. xxi.)

The aim of the monks' lives was not asceticism, but God, and the way to God was charity [i.e. generous and compassionate love]. The gentle charity of the desert was the pivot of all their work and the test of their way of life. Charity as to be total and complete.... The monks went without sleep because they were watching for the Lord; they did not speak because they were listening to God; they fasted because they were fed by the Word of God. It was the end that mattered, the ascetic practices were only a means.

— Ward, *Sayings*, pp. xxiv-xxv

This aspect of warfare with the demons was a major concern in the desert. The desert itself was the place of the final warfare against the devil, and the monks were 'sentries who keep watching the walls of the city.'

— Ward, *Sayings*, pp. xxv-xxvi

As ascetics physically moved away from Roman society, they also began to disengage from its culture. Trappings that revealed their social class, such as fine clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles, were dropped in favor of the common and simple. The ascetic sought to "disappear" by becoming one with other seekers....

The ammas sought out remote geographical locations, often those with hostile environments. Chosen sites were characterized by the presence of strong winds, wild animals, lack of water and foliage, and little access to basic necessities. The desert ammas felt they were doing battle in the wilderness. The desert refined their inner strength and resolve and deepened their sense of utter dependence on God. It was a place of death — the place to die to the false self and false supports, bury old ways and attitudes — and it was the realm of the spiritual and demonic. The desert ascetics believed that close proximity to the forces of nature quickened their spirit in prayer.

— Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, pp. 10 and 15

As Christianity consolidated its position in the cities, many believed demons were forced to flee to the desert. So Antony and other monks went to the desert to do battle, much as Christ had gone into the desert and was “tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts” (Mark 1:13).

— Christian History Magazine, Issue 64

Desert spirituality was deeply intimate and vulnerable. It was taught one on one. The aim was an honest and intimate relationship with the Beloved. The stripping inherent to the desert journey required and deepened the capacity for vulnerability.

— Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, p. 22

This understanding of their true humanity, created fully in the image and likeness of God and yet still on the journey toward full maturity, made desert ascetics deeply humble people.

— Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, p. 26

For some, it was clearly an attempt to earn God’s favor, a classic case of “works righteousness.” For others, it was clearly an expression of spiritual pride, an attempt to be one up on fellow believers. For others still—let’s call them the kooks—it was a great way to work out their pathologies.

But I, for one, believe most monks yearned to know and love God in a way that was not possible in the hubbub of city life. Furthermore, I believe their disciplines allowed them to discover something about God that cannot be discovered unless one does what they did.

— Mark Galli, *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 64

Abba Agatho said, “If an angry man raises the dead, God is still displeased with his anger.”

— Christian History Magazine, Issue 64

Scripture served as the ultimate guidebook for these men and women. They read it carefully and committed large portions of it to memory. Antony paid such close attention when he heard the Scriptures read that his memory served him in place of books. Pachomian monks memorized large portions of Scripture, especially the Psalms, and meditated upon them. In an ancient rock-cut tomb used by a monk as a cell, the owner painted the first line of each Psalm on the wall to aid him in his recitation of the entire text. The memorized text was then embodied in the ascetic’s life.

The tales of the desert monks are replete with examples of such “lived” Scripture. When Abba Macarius returned to his cell one day, he found a man stealing his belongings. He reacted calmly and helped the thief load his donkey with the objects from his cell. As the man departed, Macarius recited the words from Job, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

... Obedience to God’s Word is the first mark of the spiritual theology of the early monks. Like Pachomius and his brother, they set out in a simple and childlike way to take Scripture literally, obeying without hesitation even Christ’s “hard sayings.” They trusted God’s word not only in its commands but in its hope for the coming kingdom.

— Christian History Magazine, Issue 64

I know of no fall that happens to a monk that does not come from trusting his own judgment.... Do you know someone who has fallen? Be sure that he directed himself. Nothing is more grievous than to be one’s own director, nothing is more pernicious.

— Dorotheus of Gaza, *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 64

Athanasius encouraged young women to become “brides of Christ” within their parents’ home or in a house of virgins.

— Christian History Magazine, Issue 64



The Christian CENTURIES

ABCtoAD Series
By Timothy Ministries

Seven False Assumptions Behind The Early Practice Of Infant Baptism

Contending For The Faith During The Bridegroom's Delay

The Mystery Religions

1. Baptismal water is sacramentally efficacious.

Hellenized Christianity

2. Baptism saves (regenerates).

3. Baptism should be administered to all members of a family.

4. There is no sin where there is no conscious intent.

5. Baptism remits sins.

6. Infants have no actual sin of their own.

7. The church baptizes infants because they have "sin's innate defilement."

Origen

Augustine

Doctrinal Conclusion
Infants clearly have original sin, or else the church would not baptize them.

Diagram from
Magic Baptism & The Invention Of Original Sin
by Roderick Graciano

The Syntactic Ambiguity Of Acts 2.38

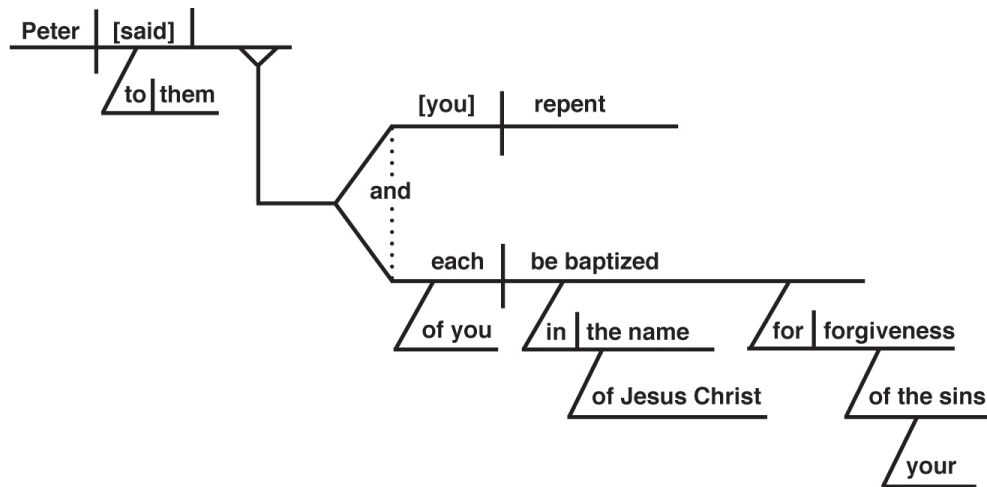


Figure 1

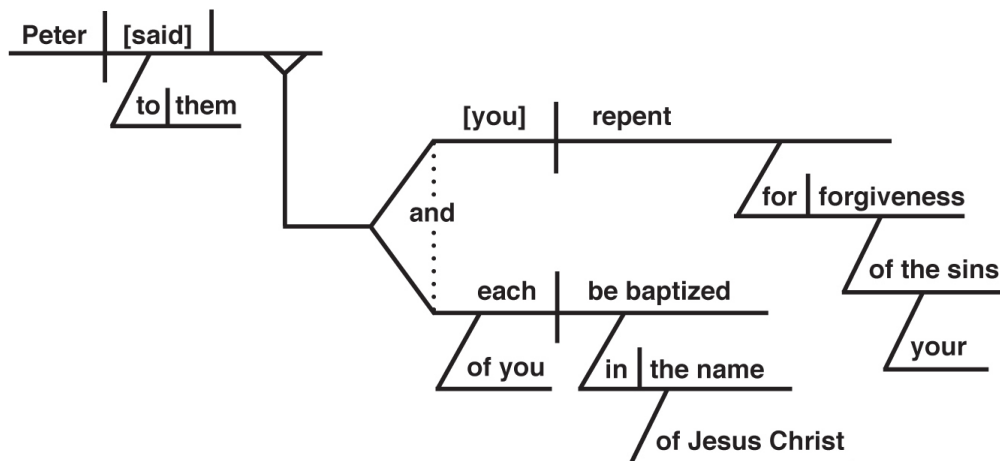


Figure 2

Because Koine Greek has very little dependence upon word order, a few statements in the New Testament are syntactically ambiguous: their meaning depends upon how one arranges the words in translation. In the rare instances in which syntactic ambiguity is doctrinally significant, the correct interpretation of a passage must be made on the basis of the greater context of Scripture. In Acts 2.38, the phrase “for the forgiveness of your sins” can grammatically follow to command “to repent,” OR the command “be baptized”; either interpretation would be *grammatically correct*. The correct interpretation, therefore, must be decided by what the rest of Scripture says about the prerequisite to forgiveness. Upon thorough examination, one finds that the Scriptures overwhelmingly present **repentance** as the doorway to forgiveness, whether with God or man, and never proposes an external ritual as the means to forgiveness with God. Therefore, we may conclude that Peter’s Pentecost audience would have understood forgiveness to attach to repentance rather than to baptism.