



Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. — Psalm 119:105

Timothy Ministries

# Mini-Seminary

## ECCLESIOLOGY 1

### THE FIRST CHRISTIANS

#### Introduction: Living In The Dramedy Of Ages

Among the many historically illiterate persons of our current culture, a seeker beginning to look into Christianity might have the impression that it was started in the 20th century by Billy Graham in the United States or by Pope John Paul II in Italy. However, as Christians who have begun to learn about our spiritual heritage, we realize that we participants in a dramedy that began a much longer time ago and in an eastern Mediterranean country! The newest phase of God's redemptive plan that we call "Christianity" began with Jesus Himself around AD 30 (even if it wasn't know as "Christianity" until a few decades later) in Galilee and Judea. We know a little about that now. However, as Westerners of the 21st century we might still need to learn more about Christianity *at the beginning of its story in the east*. Did it look just like our Western Christianity of today? If the Christianity of today differs from the Christianity of the first century, have the changes been beneficial? ... Detrimental? ... Neutral?

#### **FACT 1: The first Christians were Jewish or taught by Jews.**

**1A. The Church would break completely from its Hebraic heritage by AD 135. Nearly until then, Christianity was understood as a Jewish sect.**

**1B. Christianity was Judaism universalized. The first Christians thought in Jewish categories and with a Hebraic worldview.**

1Bi. As Jews, the first Christians were "people of the book." Rather than illiterate, most had been taught to read the Hebrew Scriptures in synagogue schools. Scribes who copied, studied and interpreted religious texts were ubiquitous in the Holy Land. Religiously, all the Jewish people lived by the dictum, "**It is written.**" Jewish Christians from the diaspora probably spoke Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew, as did many in the Holy Land.



1Bii. As Jews, the first Christians had a supernatural worldview. They were not naive people who believed things that were not real, but they did believe in entities and events that other religions might reject. The first Gentile Christians, had a supernatural worldview as well, but even before conversion to Christ, they were not naive people who believed things that weren't real; **they only misinterpreted some demonic manifestations as manifestations of the divine.**

The classic work on ancient literacy by William Harris argued for minimal literacy across the Roman Empire, in part because publicly funded education for children was nonexistent in the ancient world. — John H. Walton, *The Lost World Of Scripture*

1Biii. As Jews, the first Christians continued to worship in the Jerusalem temple and offer sacrifices. They continued to receive circumcision along with Christian baptism, understanding the two customs as entirely different things. They continued to observe the Jewish holidays, celebrating Passover, for example, instead of the later Easter.

## **FACT 2: The first Christians were covenant people, i.e., they understood themselves as the family of God, and understood religion as relational (James 1.27).**

**2A. 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 and biblically address what we now see as issues of “social justice” (Jam 2.15-17; 1Jo 3.10,16-17).**

**2B. In the NT, the common apostolic phrase “in Christ” has varied connotations depending on context.**

However, 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.).

**2c. The OT priority on covenant kinship carried over into Christianity**

Thus, in the NT we find the 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).

**2D. Two models for church life compete in our current 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).



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.

## **FACT 3: The first Christians embraced the age of the Holy Spirit (Acts 3.16-18).**

**3A. They understood the Human-Divine Partnership (Act 4.29-30; 14.3).**

**3B. As Jews, they believed in the supernatural realm, and in a God of miracles.**

They had no problem with casting out demons or prophesying; they only concerned themselves with discerning the source of a person's supernatural power.

**3C. They ministered creatively to other cultures (Act 17), and ministered through spiritual gifts in the church, guided by common sense (Didache 11).**

## **FACT 4: The first Christians recognized Christ's lordship.**

**4A. Over Themselves: They depended upon hearing from God through Scripture, counsel (Acts 15.28), and corroborated revelation (Acts 16.10).**

**4B. Over All Creation: they obeyed God before man, and made strategic decisions on the basis of *rightness* rather than *feasibility* (Acts 13.1-3).**

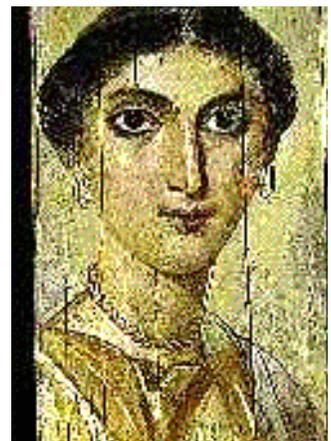
No Christian of the first two centuries was apt to say, "I'm called to the mission field, but I can't go because I don't have the training, and it's all very expensive and I don't have the funding."

**Didache (c. AD 100) ch. 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**



# Spiritual Gifts

## In Early Christian History

AD 30

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...even on my servants, both men and women...and they will prophesy’ ...the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off.” Acts 2.17-21, 39 (NIV).

c. 100

First Epistle Of Clement of Rome: In this epistle written to exhort younger people who were rebelling against the elders, Clement wrote, “let each man be subject unto his neighbor, according as also he was appointed with his special grace” (38.1). This exhortation using a form of the term “charisma” in the original seems to parallel 1 Peter 4.10, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...”

c. 115

*Epistle to Polycarp*: in one of the seven epistles written by Ignatius en route to martyrdom in Rome, he exhorted Polycarp, “as for the invisible things, pray thou that they may be revealed unto thee; that thou mayest be lacking in nothing, but mayest abound in every spiritual gift” (2.2).

c. 150

Justin Martyr wrote in *Dialogue With Trypho*, ch. 88, “it is possible now to see among us women and men who possess gifts of the Spirit of God,” and in chapter 39, “daily some [Jews] are becoing disciples in the name of Christ, ... who are also receiving gifts, each as he is worthy, illumined through the name of this Christ. For one receives the spirit of understanding, another of counsel, another of strength, another of healing, another of foreknowledge, another of teaching, and another of the fear of God.”

c. 155

*Shepherd Of Hermas*: in this work written by a brother of the Roman bishop Pius, the Eleventh Mandate deals at length on discerning a false from a true prophet. True prophecy is described in these words: “the man, being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaketh to the multitude, according as the Lord willeth.”

c. 185

Irenaeus, describing many spiritual gifts in the Church of his day said, “Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole...In like manner we do hear many brethren in the church...who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages...” (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1).

c. 200

Tertullian joined the Montanist reform movement, in which prophecy and visions were commonplace. In *Concerning Baptism*, 20, Tertullian wrote: “ask from the Lord that His own specialties of grace *and* distributions of gifts may be supplied to you.” The Church became wary of supernatural manifestations of the Spirit because of the excesses of the Montanists who claimed to be “mouth-pieces of the Paraclete,” prophesied, spoke in tongues, had visions, taught asceticism, and sought martyrdom. See Hummel, *Fire In The Fireplace*, p. 165; Dowley, *Eerdmans’ Handbook To The History Of Christianity*, p. 74.

c. 250

Novation, in *The Trinity*, ch. 29, assumes a full range of spiritual gifts still active for the perfecting of the Church. Origen in *Against Celsus* 1.46 and 3.24 writes, “And there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events, according to the will of the Logos. . . . we too have seen many persons freed from grievous calamities, and from distractions of mind, and madness, and countless other ills, which could be cured neither by men nor devils.”

c. 300-450

The desert fathers in Egypt said to have raised the dead, walked on water, cured the sick, mastered wild beasts, etc. See Benedicta Ward’s *Lives Of The Desert Fathers*.

330-379

Basil the Great, medically trained, and founder of the first public hospital, spoke of miracles and gifts of healing as contemporary phenomena (*On The Spirit* 19.49 and 26.61; Hummel, p. 211, says that Basil practiced healing through prayer).

c. 400

Chrysostum wrote of the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 as happening “then,” but “now do so no more” (Chrysostum, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 29.1).

424

Augustine of Hippo testifies of many and diverse miracles, some of which he witnessed first hand (*The City of God* 22.8). Protestant theologians discount many of these miracles that are associated with the relics of martyrs.

1491

Proto-Reformer Savonarola preaches, prophesies and claims to receive special revelation.

1521

In a sermon, Martin Luther writes, “the same power and efficacy of Christ remains in Christendom. If it were necessary, such signs could even now be performed. It often took place, and still does, that devils were cast out in Christ’s name; likewise the sick are healed by prayer in his name, and many receive help in great distress of both body and soul. The Gospel is now being preached in new tongues, where it was unknown before. Signs are given to all Christendom, as Christ says—to those who believe. True, we do not always observe this gift in every Christian believer, and even the apostles did not do these wonders with equal power.”

## **FACT 5: The first Christians had a moral character that set them apart from the surrounding population.**

### **5A. They did not set themselves apart by wearing strange clothes.**

They blended in with their culture in most ways; they just didn't engage in idolatry and immorality. See "The Manners Of The Christians," on p. 8.

### **5B. Conditions for women took a great leap forward in the early Christian subculture.**

Sociologist Rodney Stark describes how Christianity improved conditions for women in three of his books (see resources at the end of this packet). Christianity improved conditions for women in the ancient world by:

- **Prohibiting infanticide and abortion.**

Infanticide and abortion were rampant in Greco-Roman culture, with female babies especially at risk, since pagan fathers often considered daughters

not worth their cost to the family resources. Female birth rates soared within Christian communities.

- **Lowering the divorce rate**, and rejecting the pagan "double standard" regarding sexual license. Christian husbands were held to the same standards of fidelity as their wives. Christianity also raised the typical marriage age for once-pagan girls who had often been married off before puberty.

- **Elevating the status of women as witnesses and ministers.** Women served within the Christian community as evangelists, teachers, and deacons. A few possibly served as apostles, or at least as part of an apostolic team. These roles represented positions of honor and authority not typically available to women in secular society.

#### **The Didache, Ch. 2**

1 NOW the second commandment of the teaching is 2 Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not corrupt children, thou shalt not commit fornication, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not use magic arts, thou shalt not use sorcery, thou shalt not destroy a child by abortion, neither shalt thou slay him that is born.

## **FACT 6: The first Christians had a concise creed.**

The doctrinal confession of the apostolic church was expressed most briefly in statements of Jesus' essential identity:

**Jesus is Lord** (Rom 10.9; 1Co 12.3), or **Jesus is the Christ** (Act 5.42; 9.22; 1Jn 2.22; 5.1), or **Jesus is the Son of God** (Act 9.20; 1Jn 4.15; 5.5).

From such minimal statements, the confessional wording grew slightly to:

**Jesus Christ is Lord** (Php 2.11),

or

**Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God** (Jn 20.31).

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended into Hell (or Hades).  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.

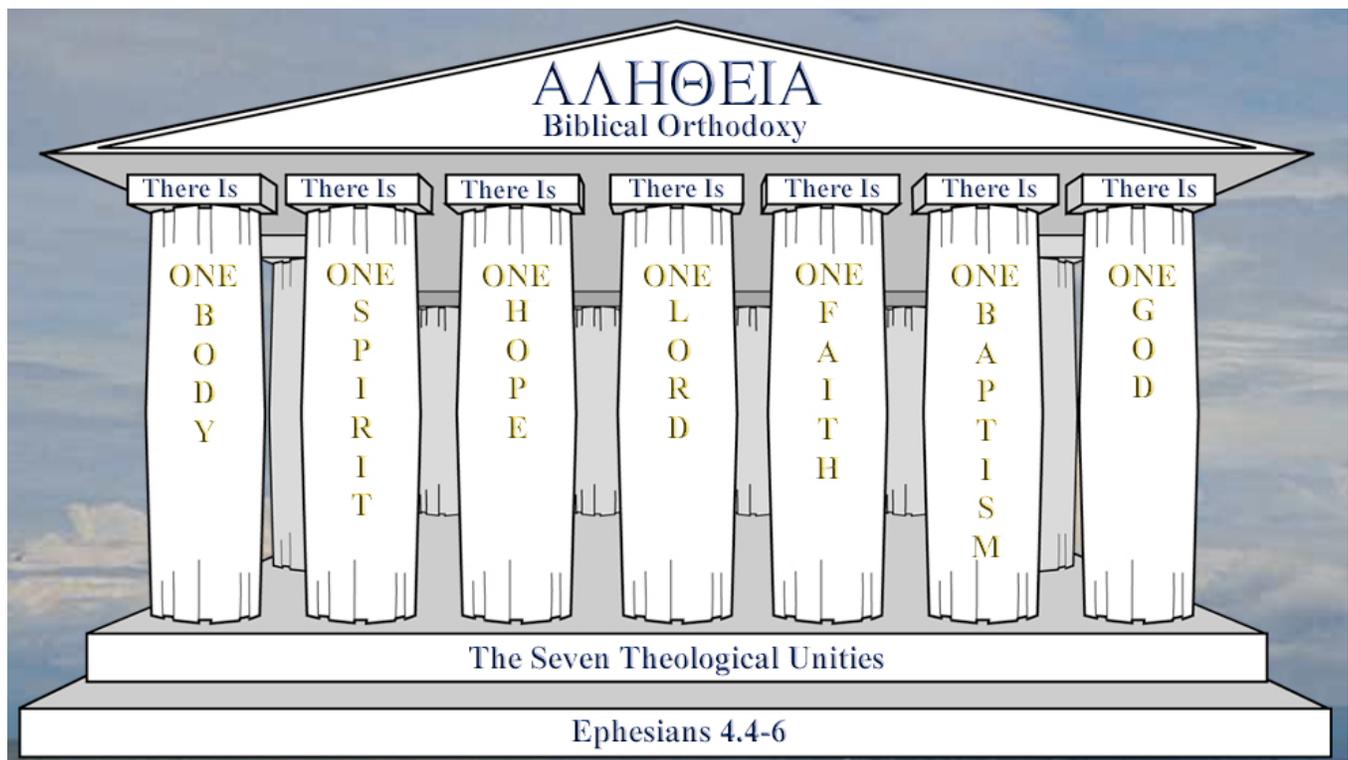
**From core confession of Christ's lordship, the credal passages of the NT expanded to succinct statements about Christ's nature and mission:**

...[God's] Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace... (Rom 1.3-5)

Jesus our Lord ... He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. (Rom 4.24-25)<sup>1</sup>

Beyond these Christological statements, only Ephesians 4.4-6 gives us what could be called a doctrinal summary, with its strikingly concise seven unities (graphically portrayed below).

Thus, even the short Apostles' Creed, dated to the 4th century, goes well beyond the "creeds" of the first Christians (especially with its unbiblical idea of Christ's descent to hell).



<sup>1</sup> Biblical quotations are from the NASB, 1995. Cf. also Php 2.5-11; Col 1.15-20; 1Ti 3.16; Heb 1.2-3; 1Pe 3.18

## The Manners Of The Christians

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. **They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners.** As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. **They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.** They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the [non-believing] Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

—**Epistle to Diognetus, ch. 5**, emphasis added

The *Epistle To Diognetus* may be the lost *Apology Of Quadratus*, and if so would date to AD 125. The authorship and origin of this document remains uncertain, however, and the consensus is that it dates to AD 150 to 200.

## FACT 7: The First Christians were city oriented.

**A. They worshiped and served as part of a city church; they did not see their particular gathering as competing with other house churches in the city.**

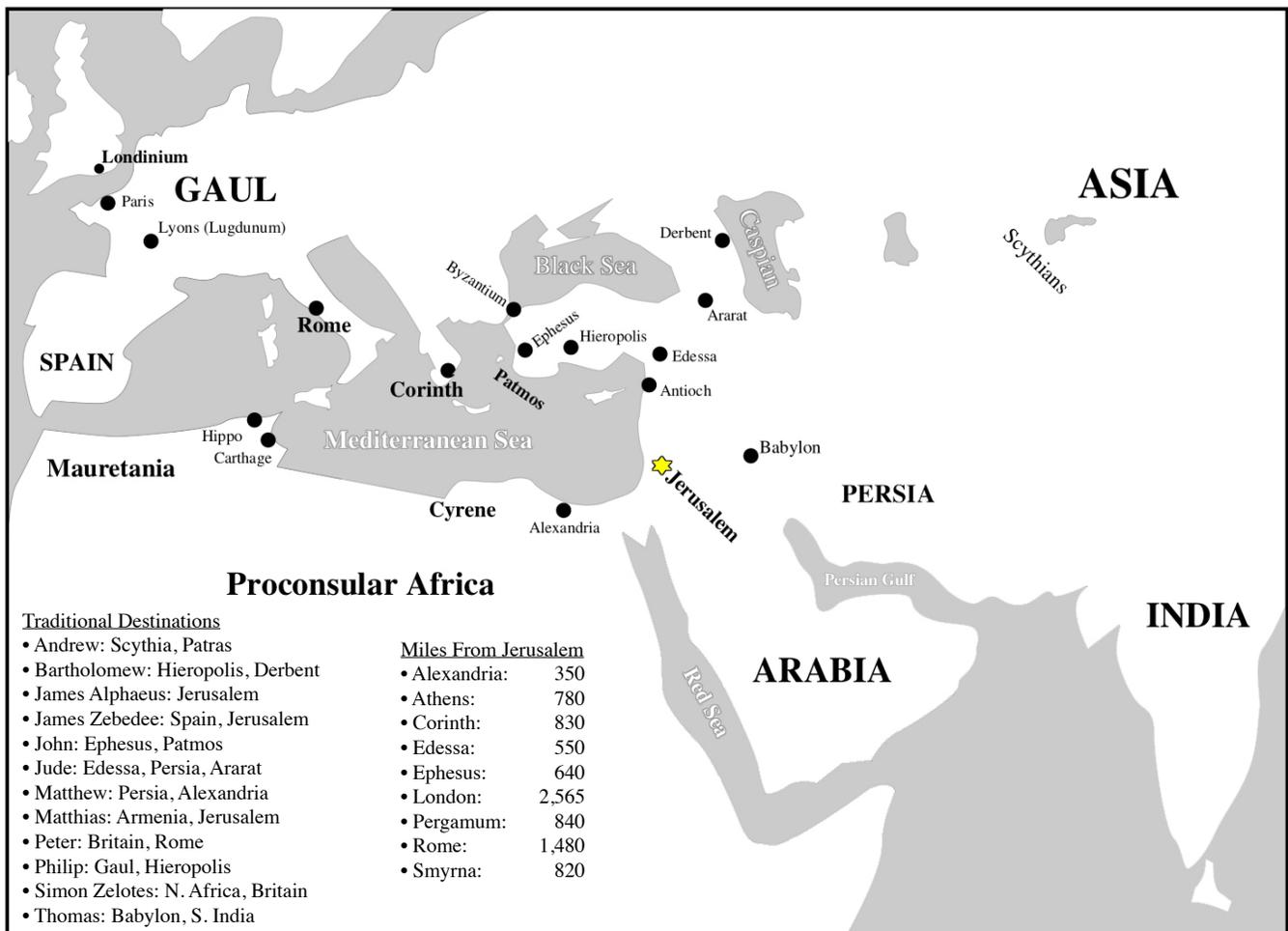
This does not mean there was never competition among leaders or congregants (cf. 1Co 10-13), but the squabbles were “in house,” not between competing congregations.

**B. They began to identify their leaders with the name of their cities.**

The later church fathers would each be known by the name of their city: Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch, Aristides of Athens, Francis of Assisi, and so forth. These leaders’ names became inextricably linked to the cities, not necessarily where they were born, but where they invested their lives. Catherine of Siena (AD 1347-80), for example, ministered “to the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned of Siena.”

**C. They recognized cities as strategic for spreading the gospel, through the channels of commerce.**

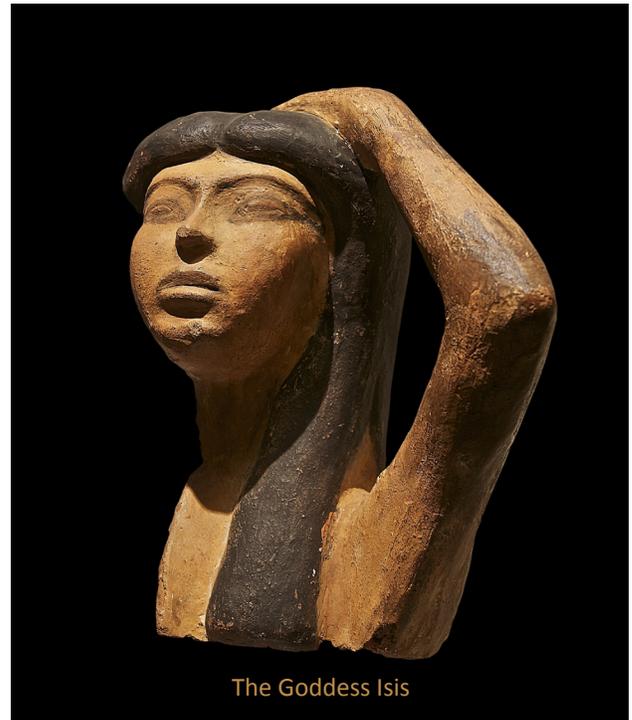
## FACT 8: The First Christians proclaimed the gospel boldly throughout the known world.



## FACT 9: The first Christians shared better news than the mystery religions and the gnostics.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. — Paul of Tarsus, 1 Corinthians 15.1-8 (ESV)

**The mystery religions were cults** that (a) offered ritual religious initiations for salvation, and (b) planted the idea of religious initiation by ritual in the minds of Hellenized Christians. 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



The Goddess Isis

seemed to be, as Newman said, “lying in wait, as it were, for nascent Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

History refers to these cults as mystery religions precisely because of their secretiveness. Most etymologists trace the Greek 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

“through speech, pantomime, dance, or depiction.”<sup>2</sup> 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 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....”<sup>3</sup>

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.”<sup>4</sup>
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.

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

3 Ibid.

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

# CHRISTIANITY and THE MYSTERIES Compared

## 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 figurative

God saves

## Mystery Religions

Very little influence in Palestine

Mythological basis for events

Syncretic, 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

## The Gnostics

- **Historical Period:** Since before the Christian era and continuing into our time, but impacting the Church powerfully in Century 2.
- **Theology:** The God of creation was a demiurge (not supreme God). Jesus was a man temporarily inhabited by the heavenly Christ. Gnostics denied a true incarnation.
- **Sin:** For the Gnostics, matter was evil, and the physical body was a prison for the spirit. However, some Gnostic sects were libertines, teaching that body and spirit are so completely separate, that nothing done in the body can affect the soul.
- **Scripture:** The Gnostics randomly rejected or mutilated the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. They claimed to have secret traditions handed down from the apostles, and presented them as their own inspired texts. **This gave impetus to the official recognition of the Christian biblical canon.**
- **Salvation:** Gnosticism teaches redemption through transcendence of the material world by means of “gnosis,” i.e. exclusive knowledge (generally having to do with recognizing ones own inner divinity). Much as in Hinduism, ultimate salvation (for those with gnosis) is final (impersonal) reunification with supreme God, as spiritual sparks returning to the eternal spiritual flame. Some taught an inferior reward for those with faith only, who had not achieved gnosis. Everyone else is destined for destruction.

## Christianity vs Mysteries

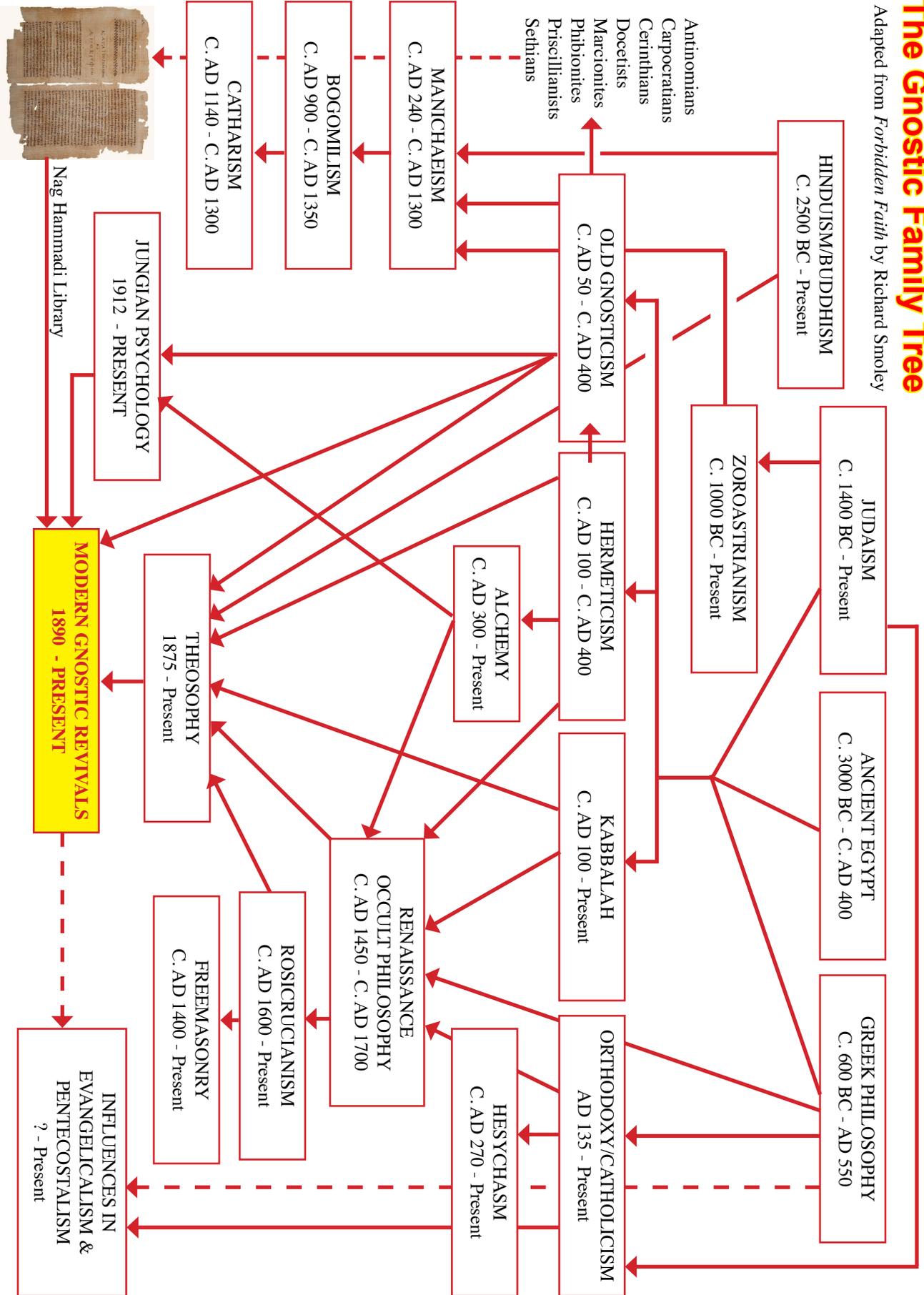
- No fees
- Historical resurrection and healings vs. mythical return of the god
- Actual basis for expiation of sin and propitiation of God
- Value of individual as created in the image of God vs. loss of personal identity in unification with a deity

## Christianity vs. Gnostics

- Basis for morality in the character of God
- Morality that is not demeaning of physical existence
- Not exclusively for those “in the know”
- No unwarranted belief in divinity of self
- Value of individual as created in the image of God vs. loss of personal identity in reunification with the supreme flame

# The Gnostic Family Tree

Adapted from *Forbidden Faith* by Richard Smoley



# The Church Severed From Her Hebraic Roots

## Chronological Summary

Anno  
Domini

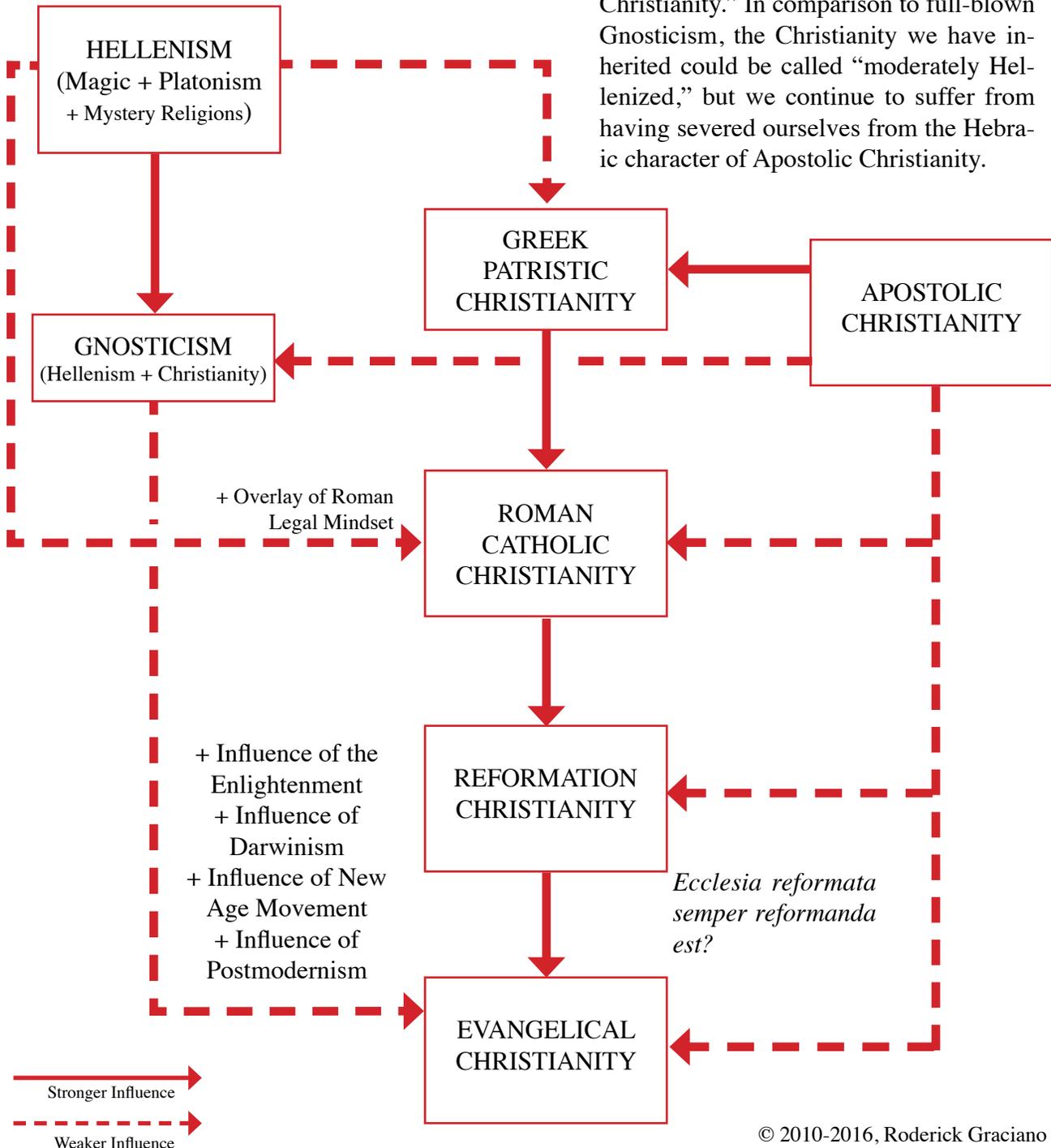
- 30-33 Jesus offends Pharisees and Sadducees as One “greater than the temple.”
- 33 Mass conversions on the day of Pentecost worry temple authorities (Act 2-4).
- 34 Persecution led by Saul spreads Christianity throughout the empire and biases Holy Land synagogues against followers of the Way (Act 9.2; 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 almost entirely from the Sabbath to Sunday.
- 132-135 Jewish followers of Jesus refuse to join Second Jewish Revolt with its competing messiah, Bar Cochba. 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.

# Hellenism & Christianity

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.



## FACT 10: The early Christians (AD 135-325) changed the demographics of their world by sacrificial love.

Adapted from Rodney Stark's

*The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, 1996)

Beginning with a 10,000-person sample of the Mediterranean population in the second-century world, sociologist Rodney Stark reconstructed how the Christian demographic grew from .4% of the population to 25% in 100 years, through the course of two plagues. First, there was a 40% per decade conversion rate. This means that from a 10k sample of the population as a whole, in the first ten years, the Christian population of 40 (in that sample) gained 16 converts, reducing the pagan population by the same number. Second, the lower mortality rate among Christians, due to their sacrificial care of the sick, meant that at the end of each decade, and with a jump after each plague, the Christian segment of the population experienced a percentage-wise net gain, while the pagan percentage of the population steadily declined. Historians speculate that the epidemics of AD 160 and 251 were of some kind of flu.

<b>PAGANS</b>	<b>CHRISTIANS</b>	<b>RATIO</b>
<i>After the EPIDEMIC OF AD 160 (Plague of Galen)</i>		
<b>9,960</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1/249</b>
X 30% Mortality	X 10% Mortality	
<b>6,972</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1/197</b>
...plus a 40% per decade Conversion Rate		
= -16	= +16	
<b>6,956</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>1/134</b>

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

X 30% Mortality	X 10% Mortality	
<b>4,062</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>1/4</b>

**Want To Continue Learning About This Topic?**  
Here are some recommended resources:

## A Few Books & Articles

**Note: Inclusion of a book in this list does not imply complete endorsement of a work's contents by Roderick Graciano or Timothy Ministries.**

Dowley, Tim (editor). *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed., (Fortress Press, 2018). A beautiful book full of helpful photos, insets and charts.

**Gonzalez, Justo L.** *Church History: An Essential Guide* (Abingdon Press, 1996). Available as Kindle or softcover on Amazon, or as a Logos resource on logos.com.

— ***The Story Of Christianity: Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*** (Kindle or softcover from HarperOne, 2014).

— ***The Story Of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day*** (Vols. 1 and 2 combined in hard cover from Prince Press, 1999).

Graciano, Roderick. *Puden's Ring: A Retelling Of A True Story of Martyrdom In AD 202*. <https://www.tmin.org/pdfs/pudens.pdf>

**Stark, Rodney.** *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (1996; available as Kindle or paper on Amazon); *Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief* (2007; available as Kindle or paper on Amazon, and as a Logos resource on logos.com); *The Triumph of Christianity: How The Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (2011; available as Kindle or paper on Amazon, and as a Logos resource on logos.com).

Wilson, Marvin R. *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Eerdmans, 1989).

## E-mail The Instructor

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