

The Early Church

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Abstract

We often measure our modern-day churches against what we imagine the early church to have been. But what was it really like? Fortunately, we have many contemporaneous sources—the Didache, non-canonical gospels, apostolic fathers, Eusebius—that tell of the struggle of competing views on the proper interpretation of Christ's teachings. We will examine the development of the ideas which govern modern religious practice.

1 Sources [OSU Library]

1.1 Background of Jewish Disciples

1. Primary Sources:

- (a) Old Testament & Apocrypha (*e.g.*, Oxford or Jerusalem bibles)
 - i. Septuagint (Greek)
 - ii. Tanakh (Hebrew)
 - iii. Targumim (Aramaic & Syriac)
- (b) Pseudepigrapha (*e.g.*, “Testaments of the Patriarchs”) [229 O44 vols. 1–2]
- (c) Dead Sea Scrolls [296.155 D278 vols. 1–2]
- (d) Rabbinic Writings: Talmud (Mishna & Gemara)

2. Secondary Sources

- (a) Chaim Potok “Wanderings ... history of the Jews” [909.04924 P864w]
- (b) James H. Charlesworth [229 C477o]
- (c) Géza Vermès “Dead Sea Scrolls” [296.81 V223d]
- (d) Bart D. Ehrman "Lost Christianities" Oxford Univ. Press 2003 [OSU: 229.9206 E33L; Stillwater Public Library 229 EHR]

3. Textbooks

- (a) H. Bettenson (editor) "Documents of the Christian Church" Oxford Univ. Press 1943
- (b) C.K. Barrett "The New Testament Background: Selected Documents" Harper 1956
- (c) D.R. Cartlidge & D.L. Dungan "Documents for the Study of the Gospel" Fortress Press 1980
- (d) Henry Chadwick "The Early Church" (Vol. 1 of "The Pelican History of the Church") 1967
- (e) Paul Johnson "A History of Christianity" Atheneum 1976

1.2 Background of Greek, Roman, & Egyptian Disciples

Historical accounts of Roman State Religions, of Greek Philosophers, and of Oriental Mystery Rites; Philo Judæus of Alexandria.

1.3 Teachings of Christ

Canonical and non-canonical Gospels; John P. Meier "A marginal Jew: rethinking the historical Jesus" [232 M511m vols. 1–3]

1.4 Early Church History

- 1. New Testament (*e.g.*, "Acts of the Apostles")
- 2. Apostolic Fathers (*e.g.*, "the Didache," and letters of Clement of Rome) [281.1 A645f vol. 1]
- 3. Josephus (*e.g.*, "Jewish Wars") [933 J83w Boomer Annex; 933 JOS at Stillwater Public Library]
- 4. Eusebius [270.1 E91e]
- 5. Greek & Roman Fathers of the Church [281.1 A645f vols. 2–114]
- 6. Oxyrrhynchus and Chenoboskion (Nag Hammadi) papiiri

2 Competing Religions

2.1 Jews in Judea

- 1. Pharisees (building a fence around the Torah)
- 2. Sadducees (Temple-centered).
- 3. Zadhokites (split off from Sadducees, in Qumran).

4. Essenes (lived Rigorism).
5. Visionaries (wrote Apocalypses).
6. Gnostics (more below, in Section 4.5).
7. Zealots & Sicarii (rebelled against the Romans).

2.2 Jews in Diaspora

Much more numerous, Greek-speaking, cosmopolitan, Synagogue-centered, proselytizing.

2.3 State Religions

Emperor-worship (esp. Caligula, Nero).

2.4 Regional and Family Worship

Zeus/Jupiter etc.; Lares & Penates.

2.5 Greek Philosophy

Plato, Stoics, Epicurus; also re-interpreted via Cicero.

2.6 Zoroaster

Compare Magi legends.

2.7 Buddhism

Reached at least as far as Alexandria.

2.8 Oriental Mystery Rites & Hermetic Magic

Initiation, immortality.

3 The Didache

[Included in the "Apostolic Fathers" cited above, and many other collections of early Christian documents; Henry Bettenson "Documents of the Christian Church" includes an older translation; Bart D. Ehrman "Lost Scriptures" includes a newer translation.]

3.1 Second Part: Church Manual

Rite of Baptism; role of traveling Revivalists.

3.2 First Part: Catechism

Two Paths: Good and Evil.

4 Crises in the Early Church

4.1 The Shame of Crucifixion

Punishment for common criminals, not Roman citizens.

4.2 The Expectation of a Political Kingdom.

Revolts from Machabees to Bar-Kochba.

4.3 The Expectation of the End of Days

The end of Jesus' life, or of the Temple, or of each individual, or of the world?
Apocalyptic writings.

4.4 The Conflict between Jerusalem and Diaspora Jews & God-Fearers

Documented in Acts and in Letters of Paul; continued until the Ebionites disappeared.

4.5 Heresies

- The nature of Christ, and why it matters — rejection of Dualism.
- Gnosis (Kurt Rudolph "Gnosis" 1977).
- Enthusiasm (Ronald Knox "Enthusiasm" 1950).

4.6 Authority

Apostolic *versus* Scriptural

5 Growth and Transformation

5.1 Church Fathers

- Clement, fourth Bishop of Rome (died ~ AD 100)
- Irenæus, heresy-hunter (born ~ AD 125)
- Tertullian "tres personae, una substantia" "τρεις υποστασεις, ομοουσιος"
(~ AD 155 – 230)

- Origen and the Hexapla (~ AD 185 – 254)
- Eusebius, Church Historian (~ AD 270–340)
- John Chrysostom, Greek "Doctor of the Church" (~ AD 347 – 407)
- Augustine "Confessions" & "City of God" (AD 354 – 430)

5.2 Regional Blocs

- Western Catholic; centered in Rome.
- Greek & Slavonic Orthodox; Constantinople.
- Oriental (Egypt, Ethiopia, Syria, India); Alexandria.

5.3 Authority

- Papacy
- Councils of Bishops

5.4 Institutionalization

Church/State relations, in Rome and in the East

5.5 Monasticism

Stylites, Anchorites, Hermits, Monks, and Nuns.

6 Aftermath

6.1 The Dark Ages

- Fall of Rome AD 476
- Thomas Cahill "How the Irish Saved Civilization"

6.2 The Great Schism

Filioque controversy; the date of Easter.

6.3 Scholasticism

Thomas Aquinas

6.4 Humanism

Erasmus etc.

6.5 Reformation

- Luther
- Calvin
- Anabaptists

6.6 The American Experience

- Religious immigrants from Puritans through Jews.
- Churches and TV-ministries as enterprises.
- Personal Salvation.
- Prosperity Gospel.
- Religion + Democracy + free-enterprise-Capitalism = Economic Success?

7 Further Study...

- Library Resources, cited above.
- Internet Resources — consume with a grain of salt...
- "Biblical Archeology Review" www.bib-arch.org/ — often controversial!
- Lecture Tapes www.teach12.com