

## Chapter Thirteen

### New Covenant and Other Christianities, to ca. 185 CE

The disastrous revolt of 66-70 marks a sharp turning point in the history of both Judaism and Christianity. The militancy of the first *Christiani* did not survive the disaster (that an oracle ordered “the Christians” to flee from Jerusalem to Pella just before the war of 66-70 is a much later invention).<sup>1</sup> Two very different directions taken in the generation after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple led to the dramatic growth of two distinct religions: New Covenant Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. Although they had a common heritage these two religions differed widely not only from each other but also from the religion of Judaea during the Second Temple period. Rabbinic Judaism devoted itself fervently to the *torah*, in the belief that Adonai had punished Judaea because its people had been too lax in following his law. New Covenant Christians, contrarily, believed that God had ordained the destruction of the temple to make way for the *parousia* of Jesus the Christ and the End of Time. That religiosity and superstitious fanaticism were the cause of the disaster did not occur to either camp. A small minority of Judaeans, however, followed a third course in the aftermath of 70: these people gave up entirely on Adonai, his covenants, and the temporal world, and formulated - on the authority, they claimed, of Jesus the Christ - a mythical explanation of reality that scholars call “Gnosticism.”

Although we have more information about each of the three new movements than about traditional Judaism in the Greek-speaking Diaspora, it must be added that for a very long time after 70 CE the majority of Judaeans did not adhere to any one of the three. Most Judaeans in the Hellenistic Diaspora continued to worship at their synagogues on the Sabbath and to follow the laws of Moses that could be found in the Septuagint. For Hellenistic Judaism, however, its integration into the Greco-Roman world was a mixed blessing. Although Hellenistic Judaism would prosper for another three centuries, in the end it did not offer to classical culture and to the old gods the challenge and the alternative that most people desired. The future belonged to the rabbis and the churches.

#### Resurrection of the dead, Heaven, and Hell

By the first century CE many Judaeans had become convinced that at the End of Time the righteous dead would be raised and brought back to life. As developed by the Pharisees, the End of Time would feature a physical resurrection of either the righteous dead or of all the dead, in which case Adonai would judge them, sending them either to Heaven or to Hell. Although some Judaeans - the Sadducees especially - scoffed at this teaching, it was apparently taken to heart by a majority both in Judaea itself and in the Diaspora.

Almost as old as the belief in Jesus’ resurrection was the belief that his death and resurrection secured eternal life for all who acknowledged him to be the Son of Man and the Son

of God. In the Ekklesia at the Jerusalem temple, of course, this was not how most people understood the salvation provided by Jesus: they were certain that he would shortly reveal himself as the savior - the *soter* - of Jerusalem and Judaea from the Gentiles. Jesus was, that is, the Messiah of the Judaeans, who would soon come back from Heaven to overturn the Roman empire and establish a kingdom that would extend over all the world and endure forever. In the short run, the belief in Jesus as a savior from the Gentiles and Rome was dominant. After the destruction of the temple and much of Jerusalem in 70 CE, belief in Jesus as the Judaeans' Messiah quickly faded, and its place was taken by the belief that Jesus was the savior from death of all - Judaeans and Gentiles - who believed the gospel and were baptized in his name. The belief in a blessed eternity was therefore a prerequisite for New Covenant Christianity. It is summed up in the closing phrase of the Apostles' Creed, in which early Christians affirmed their belief in "the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting."

Belief in Hell was slower to materialize in New Covenant Christianity. Hell is entirely absent from the letters of Paul, and also from the fourth Gospel. Nor does it appear in the more traditional community that produced and preserved the *Didache*, written ca. 100 CE. This text looks forward to the resurrection of the saints, but says nothing about the fate of the wicked.<sup>2</sup> Many people who counted themselves as followers of Jesus the Messiah at the end of the first century seem to have believed that at the End of Time only the saints would arise from their graves. So long as this belief lasted, Jesus was seen as the savior from death. The author of the Gospel of John affirmed that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not perish but have eternal life."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the Book of Revelation and the synoptic Gospels - especially the Gospel of Matthew - described the horrors of Hell. As New Covenant Christians became familiar with these books in the early second century, they increasingly thought of Jesus as saving his followers not from the extinction of death but from everlasting punishment in Hell. An especially terrifying description of Hell was provided by the *Apocalypse of Peter*. This text was written between 125 and 150 CE, was soon believed (wrongly) to have been written by Peter, and was read in most churches well into the third century.<sup>4</sup>

## **The New Covenant**

In his first letter to his Corinthian converts Paul wrote that from Jesus himself he had learned what the eucharist signified: when Jesus, on the night of his arrest, had taken the cup he had said to those who were with him, "This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood" (I Cor 11:24 OSB). That the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ had ended the old covenant and established a new one was a central theme in the preaching and letters of Paul, but it was not original with Paul. He seems to have received this interpretation from "Hellenists" who had fled from Jerusalem to Syria after the stoning of Stephen. Some few people had all along, from 29 CE onward, believed that Jesus' death and resurrection marked the end, or fulfilment, of the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenant. The "Hellenists" seem to have regarded the risen Christ as nothing less than the Son of God. They understood Jesus' crucifixion as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and his resurrection as a demonstration that Adonai had accepted the sacrifice of his son and in return had ended the obligations of the *torah*. All that was required to be assured of

resurrection and eternal life in Heaven was to be baptized in Jesus' name and to believe that his death atoned for the sins of the world.

## **Paul and the Gentiles of “the way”**

Although “the way” of the New Covenant had begun immediately after Jesus' death and apparent resurrection, it became a much more significant movement after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. In the meantime, the doctrine had been set forward in the corpus of letters written by Paul from the late 40s to the early 60s. Paul himself was beheaded at Rome in early 68 CE, a victim of the Neronian roundup and execution of *Christiani* accused of having set the great fire. The apostle Paul, originally named Saul, had evidently been a man of single-minded purpose, with unflagging energy and absolute confidence in his convictions. As a young man Saul was a Pharisee, a student of Gamaliel, a scrupulous follower of the *torah*, and a persecutor of the “Hellenist” followers of Jesus the Christ. Early in the 30s CE he was converted to their beliefs because - he says in several places in his letters - Jesus appeared to him and instructed him to preach his gospel.<sup>5</sup> This gospel was that Jesus was not only the Messiah but a physical embodiment of God himself,<sup>6</sup> and that Jesus' death and resurrection had freed Judaeans from the obligations of the *torah*. For the first ten or twelve years after his conversion Saul repeated this message in various synagogues in Syria and Cilicia, but he does not seem to have been a full-time apostle in these years, was not yet reaching out to Gentiles, and was evidently not yet a leading figure in the tiny New Covenant movement.

That changed in the mid 40s, when the fellowship at Antioch commissioned Saul and Barnabas (a Levite, who had preceded Saul in joining the fellowship) to take the New Covenant gospel to Cyprus and Pamphylia. Although this mission was evidently intended to evangelize the synagogues in those places, Saul and Barnabas quickly found that Gentile “God-fearers” were more interested in the gospel than were Judaeans. According to Acts 13 one very important Gentile who gave Saul and Barnabas a sympathetic hearing was Sergios Paulos (as properly spelled in Latin, Sergius Paullus), the proconsular governor of Cyprus.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it is not coincidental that at about this time Saul changed his name to *Paulos*, and devoted himself specifically to bringing Gentiles into the communion of “the way.” During the later 40s and the 50s CE he traveled extensively in Anatolia and Greece, dividing his time among the many cities with well-established synagogues. His practice was to visit the city's synagogue and present his gospel there, usually to a cool reception, and then to concentrate his attention on the “God-fearing” Gentiles who were responsive to his gospel. In many cities he established a tiny “church” (*ekklesia*) alongside and in competition with the synagogue.

For all who would listen, Paul's gospel - his good news - was that Jesus' death on the cross fulfilled the Old Covenant, his crucifixion being a sacrifice that satisfied all of God's requirements. Worshipers of God (Adonai) therefore, according to Paul, not only were no longer obliged to keep the *torah* but were instructed to abandon the Old Covenant and to participate in the New Covenant instead. The obligations of the New Covenant were light: baptism in the name of Jesus the Christ, and belief that Jesus' death and resurrection paid all of humankind's debts to God. These requirements were accompanied by three prohibitions: fornication (intercourse with prostitutes), eating the meat of an animal that had not been properly

drained of blood, and eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. People of the New Covenant, like those of the Old, would be resurrected from their graves when Jesus returned in glory, and would spend eternity with him in his Kingdom. Paul's interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection was controversial, as more traditional Judaeans missionaries to Syria and Anatolia insisted that when Jesus returned in glory the only people who would reign with him would be those who had followed the *torah* of the Old Covenant (Paul's Letter to the Galatians objected strongly to what these Old Covenant missionaries had told the Galatians).

"Freedom" (*eleutheria*) was a very important word and concept for Paul. The heart of his gospel - that Jesus' death and resurrection freed the worshipers of God from the *torah* - was not necessarily "good news" for the Judaeans who heard it, because for most of them obedience to the *torah* was not so great a burden as it had been for Paul, who long had struggled to follow Pharisaic rules. But Paul's gospel was very good news to many of the Gentiles who had been attracted to the synagogues but had been reluctant to convert to Judaism because of what they regarded as its onerous obligations (circumcision, keeping the Sabbath and the holy days, abstention from all "unclean" meats, and avoiding the close company of Gentiles). For such "God-fearers," Paul's gospel opened the door widely, and as a result Paul was far more successful among the Gentiles than were the Old Covenant missionaries of Jesus the Christ.

The New Covenant community was necessarily separate from the Judaeans. Paul did not intend it to be permanently so: his goal was to bring everyone - Judaeans and Gentiles - into the New Covenant, but that was a hopeless project. In effect, Paul's "freeing" of his followers from the *torah* meant that they would form a distinct religious community. Although they shared their God with the Judaeans, and the sacred texts of the Septuagint, in their practice and life they were very different. The Judaeans kept the Sabbath and circumcised their sons, and the New Covenant people did not (far from imposing circumcision on New Covenant Gentiles, Paul expressly ordered them *not* to undergo circumcision).<sup>8</sup> The Judaeans avoided "unclean" meats, while the New Covenant people ate whatever they liked. And while Judaeans in the Diaspora continued to pay their temple tax, and at least once in a lifetime to visit Jerusalem for one of the great pilgrim festivals, the New Covenant people had no obligations at all to the Jerusalem temple.<sup>9</sup> This was the new "way," and its appeal among "the God-fearers" was great.

Publication of Luke's Acts of the Apostles brought Paul vividly to the fore among New Covenant believers everywhere, and in fact made him the most important of all the apostles. Luke himself, oddly, does not seem to have had access to the letters written by Paul (there are so many discrepancies between Acts and the letters that it is difficult to imagine that the author of Acts knew the letters). But the letters had obviously survived from the 50s CE, and were probably circulating narrowly in Anatolia. In the wake of Acts, followers of the New Covenant throughout the eastern Mediterranean sought out copies of Paul's letters. That Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla, Aquila and other preaching evangelists may have written letters to their converts is probable, but no such letters have been preserved.<sup>10</sup> Paul's fortunes were very different. Around 100 CE Clement of Rome spoke of Paul as the equal of Peter in authority. And the New Testament book called II Peter assumes that its readers had access to Paul's letters (remarking on the occasional obscurity of their language).

Although he was probably the most important, Paul was not the only Judaeen who sought to bring Gentiles into the New Covenant community. Barnabas was for a while Paul's companion, and other evangelists went their own way in Anatolia and Greece. Very little is known of Priscilla and Aquila, who seem to have been active both at Corinth and at Ephesus. In the latter city they met Apollos, a Judaeen from Alexandria, who evangelized in western Anatolia and then crossed the Aegean to the province of Achaëa. Apollos was "an eloquent man, powerful in his use of the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was full of spiritual fervour" (Acts 18:24-25 OSB). Thanks to the efforts of these men and women the New Covenant gospel attracted many, especially in Anatolia, where the language in almost all the cities was Greek. When the Judaeen revolt began in 66 CE the *ekklesiai* of the New Covenant were not nearly so familiar to the Greco-Roman public at large as were the Jerusalem *ekklesia* and the communities of Old Covenant *Christiani* in various Diaspora cities. But that was because the *Christiani* were disruptive and even belligerent, while the New Covenant converts stayed out of the public eye.

The speed with which the New Covenant gospel was carried over a large area is remarkable. A letter of Pliny the Younger to the emperor Trajan provides evidence that by the late 80s CE the New Covenant gospel had won at least a few converts in Pontus (the Black Sea coast of eastern Anatolia), far to the northeast of any point that Paul had reached in his Anatolian journeys. By 112 CE - when the letter was written - so many men and women of all ages and ranks were joining the sect, not only in the cities but even in the villages, that attendance at temple sacrifices was lagging and markets were having a hard time selling the meat of animals sacrificed to the traditional gods (Pliny assures the emperor that repressive measures against the Christians have been taken, and that the markets are again beginning to sell the meat).<sup>11</sup> We must assume that although Paul's travels were very important in the initial spread of the New Covenant gospel, the mission was continued by many preaching evangelists about whom nothing at all is known.

## **The Gospel of Mark**

Almost immediately after Titus' legions left Jerusalem, an anonymous Judaeen wrote the earliest of what were to become the four canonical Gospels of the Christian New Testament. This was the text that has traditionally been called the Gospel according to Mark.<sup>12</sup> The author was convinced that Jesus *Nazoraios* was indeed the Christ, and the Son of Man of whom the prophet Daniel had seen a vision. The mistake made by the crowds in Jerusalem, according to the author, was first to imagine Jesus as a temporal ruler, and then - after his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven - to think that Jerusalem, the temple, and the *torah* would be central to the everlasting Kingdom that he would soon establish. The *ekklesia* of Jesus the Christ in Jerusalem had been wrong from the beginning, and the Twelve who oversaw it had never properly understood what Jesus had said and done. The destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem, so Mark 13 "prophesied," was the necessary preliminary to the imminent End of Time, when the sun would be darkened, the stars would fall from the skies, and Jesus as the Son of Man would return in power and glory.

In the brief interim before the End of Time the followers of the Christ were not obliged to

keep the separatizing laws of the Mosaic covenant, because - so the author of Mark believed - Jesus himself had been indifferent to them. According to Mark, Jesus insisted that all of the Law and the Prophets could be reduced to two commandments: love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. These two commandments were stated in the Pentateuch (at Deuteronomy 6:5 and at Leviticus 19:18 respectively), but Jesus extracted them, made them fundamental to his Kingdom of God,<sup>13</sup> and then took the extraordinary step of virtually discarding the ritual laws of the *torah*. The Sabbath, he said, was only a convention, as were the Pharisees' ritual washings. And by making "all foods clean" (Mk 7:19) Jesus rendered meaningless the distinction between "clean" and "unclean" meats.

The Gospel of Mark helped to spur the growth of the New Covenant movement. It is true that the new Gospel did not express the central doctrine of the New Covenant: that Jesus' death and resurrection secured eternal life for believers. It did, however, provide a story of Jesus' life and death that was congruent with the doctrine. Stated negatively, the Gospel of Mark contained nothing that presented Jesus in a guise that people baptized by Paul would have found difficult to accept.

### **The Gospel of Matthew: the struggle for Judaism**

The Gospel according to Matthew was written in the late 70s or early 80s, some years after the destruction of the temple. Superficially it resembles Luke, because both Matthew and Luke based their narratives on the Gospel of Mark, and supplemented it with parables of Jesus that they found in a text that New Testament scholars have long postulated and have called "Q" (standing for *Quelle*, the German word for "source"). Despite Matthew's parallels with Luke, the two Gospels had very different purposes. As we shall see, the Gospel of Luke tried to show "Theophilus" and other Roman officials that Jesus and his followers were not at all Judaeen zealots and enemies of Rome, and in fact were persecuted by the Judaeans. The Gospel of Matthew has a very different agenda. The author of this Gospel was himself - unlike Luke - a Judaeen, and he spoke most directly to Judaeans.<sup>14</sup> As he saw it, in the aftermath of the temple's destruction, Judaism was at a crossroads: either Judaeans would follow Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, or they would follow the "hypocritical" Pharisees and the conservative rabbis, who looked upon Jesus as a charlatan. The recent destruction of the temple and much of Jerusalem seemed to the author a clear proof that the right path was to follow Jesus.

The Gospel of Matthew tells its readers that Jesus is indeed the long-expected Messiah of Israel. The genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel presents him as the descendant not only of Abraham but of David. The author has combed the Tanakh for prophetic passages which, as he sees it, have been fulfilled by Jesus. The evangelist confronted directly the charge that Jesus tried to abolish the Torah, or the Law. Jesus was sent by God, according to Matthew, not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. Matthew's Law, however, is very different from that of the Pharisaic rabbis. This was almost inevitable because Jesus himself had reduced the Law to the two essentials of Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), therefore, Jesus ignores the purity and ritual laws of the Torah. At the same time, however, Matthew presents Jesus as radically tightening the moral laws. Only by keeping these stringent moral laws, Matthew's Jesus warns, can one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. To refrain from

killing a man is not nearly enough: if you curse him or call him “Fool!” you risk the fires of Hell. That a man never commits adultery is not enough either: if he even imagines doing so, he breaks the Law.

By shifting the focus of the Torah from ritual purity to moral purity, the Gospel of Matthew tried to reassure Judaeans that the Law remained very important for followers of Jesus the Christ. At the same time, the shift of focus removed many of the barriers between Judaeans and Gentiles. The text did not, however, proclaim the freedom from the Torah that Paul proclaimed. Nor did it make eternal life contingent only upon baptism and belief. In order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven a person must lead a life in conformity with the moral commandments. If you have not fed the hungry, visited the sick, clothed the naked and given shelter to the homeless, you will at the End of Time be sent to the fires of Hell.

### **Luke, and the New Covenant community’s attitude toward the Roman government**

Contributing enormously to the development and spread of the New Covenant community were two books written in the late 70s or the 80s: the Gospel according to Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles. Luke’s Gospel made liberal use of Mark, and took from “Q” many of the same “sayings” that can be found in Matthew. Whether or not the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles were in fact written by Luke, the companion of Paul mentioned in the letters to Philemon (24) and to the Colossians (4:14), is uncertain. Early Christian traditions were unanimous in affirming that they were, but the traditions were also unanimous in ascribing the two books to the period before not only the destruction of the temple but also the death of Paul (the traditions of the early Church were that Luke was in Paul’s company while writing both books, just as Mark was supposed to have written his Gospel while in Peter’s company).<sup>15</sup> It will be convenient to refer to the author of the two books as Luke, without thereby intending that they were indeed written by Paul’s companion.

One of Luke’s objectives in writing both of his books was to persuade the “most excellent Theophilus” and other Roman officials that followers of “the way” were not enemies of the Roman order. At some time between the great fire in Rome in 64 and the death of Nero in 68 that emperor had issued an edict that *Christiani* throughout the Roman empire were to be arrested and executed. This edict, which with Tertullian we may call the *institutum Neronianum*, remained on the books for centuries and was the basis for the persecution of Christians.<sup>16</sup> Roman emperors of course had no idea of the wide variety of beliefs and behavior among the people who looked forward to the return of Jesus the Christ. The *Christiani* that Nero had in mind, as we have seen, were the militants who expected Yeshua ha-mashiach to return in glory, shatter the Roman empire, and establish a worldwide and eternal kingdom. This kingdom, of course, would be centered in Jerusalem and its temple, and under Yeshua’s regimen the whole earth would bow to the *torah*.

Paul and the people of the New Covenant had a quite different expectation. While looking forward to Jesus’ return in glory, they had staked their eternity on the belief that his kingdom would *not* be based on the *torah*. Although their God was Adonai, they had parted ways with the Judaeans religious community. In his missionary work to the Gentiles Paul

insisted (opposing the Jerusalem *ekklesia* on this point) that his Gentile converts not be compelled to become Judaeans. This in effect excluded them both from the rolls of the local synagogue and from ecumenical Judaism. Had an uncircumcised man of the New Covenant attempted to join the Judaeans at the Jerusalem temple for any of the great festivals he would have been risking his life. Although they were expected to send gifts of money to “the poor” at Jerusalem (not to the temple), Gentiles of the New Covenant community clearly remained Gentiles. In writing his Acts of the Apostles, Luke hoped to persuade “Theophilus” that these Gentile converts were the true followers of Jesus the Christ, and the central figure in Luke’s story was therefore the apostle Paul.

For a time the people of the New Covenant were outnumbered by *Christiani* and other Old Covenant Judaeans who looked forward to the return of Jesus the Christ. But after the catastrophic revolt of 66-70 the proportions were reversed. Many of the militant *Christiani* had died in the revolt, the Jerusalem *ekklesia* had almost ceased to exist, and the surviving Old Covenant followers of Jesus the Christ were no longer welcome in the synagogues (the Twelfth Benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, as noted in Chapter 11, specifically cursed the *Nazirim*). By the 80s CE it was therefore possible for Luke to claim that “the brethren” not only were distinct from Judaeans but even were opposed by them. Acts ends (Acts 28:25-28) with a bitter soliloquy by Paul, in which the apostle declares that God had intended his salvation for the Judaeans but in their hardness of heart they are unwilling to accept it; God has therefore now offered his gospel to the Gentiles, who will accept it.

In order to convince Roman authorities in the 80s that the people of “the way” had no quarrel at all with the Roman empire Luke had to pass over in silence some of the most important things that had happened to believers in Jesus during the years between 30 and 70. Thus Luke said as little as possible about the vitality and importance of the Jerusalem *ekklesia* and mentioned *Christiani* only once. He said nothing at all about the fire at Rome in 64, the unsavory reputation of the *Christiani* there, and Nero’s execution of many believers, including Peter and Paul (the closing chapters of Acts in fact vaguely imply that Judaeans rather than Romans were responsible for Paul’s death).

Luke was nevertheless correct that - for the present, at least, and thanks in large part to his own efforts - “the brethren” posed no danger to the Roman empire. Neither Jesus nor Paul had instructed them to oppose the empire, and in the late first century and the early second the followers of “the way” had not yet taken the offensive against the Greco-Roman gods and Greco-Roman culture. They were content to live quietly, converting friends by word of mouth, and hoping that the imperial authorities would take no notice of them. The hatred of Rome that seethes in the Book of Revelation reflects the attitude of Old Covenant *Christiani* much more than of New Covenant Gentiles in the first century. Luke’s Gospel and his Acts of the Apostles strongly encouraged New Covenant believers to look upon the Roman government as their protector against their Judaeans “enemies.” As a result, in the catastrophic massacres of 115-117 CE (which we will look at in the next chapter) the New Covenant churches seem to have taken no part and to have suffered relatively little. The execution of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was perhaps a consequence of the massacres (or of the earthquake that devastated Antioch in 115), but apart from Ignatius we hear of few New Covenant martyrs during the reign of Trajan. And



in the reign of Hadrian (117-138) “the brethren” seem to have had nothing to fear from the Roman authorities.

## **The Gospel of John and the “incarnation of the *logos*” doctrine**

Toward the end of the first century CE the Gospel of John issued from a circle of New Covenant believers in western Asia Minor and perhaps at Ephesus, where the New Covenant gospel had attracted many. The author or authors included in this Gospel several recollections of an elderly and respected Judaeen, who claimed not only that in his youth he had been one of Jesus’ disciples but also that Jesus had been his lover. If Jesus’ beloved was in fact named John, as Christian tradition claimed, he was very likely the man known to Bishop Papias - writing ca. 135 - as “John the Elder” (*presbyteros*). During the reign of Domitian (81-96) John the Elder, who was said to have been the last surviving disciple of Jesus the Christ, was living in Ephesus and it was there that Papias had heard him speak. Jesus’ beloved disciple has traditionally been identified by Christians as John the son of Zebedee, familiar from the synoptic Gospels, but that identification is doubtful at best. More likely is that John the Elder was, in his younger years, the “John who is called Mark,” who is mentioned at Colossians 4:10 and several times in Acts.<sup>17</sup> The beloved disciple did not write the fourth Gospel, but his presence in the church at Ephesus gave to that church considerable prestige and authority in the wider network of Christ-followers. As Raymond Brown described him, the beloved disciple was “obviously the hero of the community,”<sup>18</sup> and the anonymous authors of the fourth Gospel were therefore keen to keep him before the reader’s eyes.

Despite this personal link to Jesus, the Johannine circle’s beliefs about Jesus the Christ were shaped in large part by the teachings of Paul or other “Hellenists,”<sup>19</sup> and then by the controversies of the 70s and 80s, when Christ-followers were being expelled from synagogues. In response to the rabbis’ condemnation of Jesus, the Johannine circle in western Anatolia elevated him far beyond anything suggested by earlier Gospels. The fourth Gospel described Jesus not only - as in Paul’s letters - as an incarnation of deity, but more precisely as the *logos* of God.

By the reign of Domitian Judaeen theologians and philosophers had for a century and a half been speaking about the *logos* (the “Word”) of Adonai. The Septuagint had provided many stories in which the Lord spoke to or interacted with mortals, and to many Judaeen teachers it seemed almost blasphemous to portray the Lord in so anthropomorphic and anthropopathic a way. In the Aramaic translations - the targums - of the Hebrew Bible YHWH does not himself act or speak: it is rather “the word (*memra*) of YHWH” or “the word of Elohim” who acts and speaks. So, for example, at Exodus 3 the Hebrew Bible recounts a conversation between YHWH and Moses at the Burning Bush. In the Jerusalem targum of this passage Moses’ interlocutor is not YHWH but “the word (*memra*) of YHWH. Even the creation of the world was, in the targums, accomplished not directly by YHWH but by “the word of YHWH.” In the Greek-speaking Diaspora, where the influence of Plato and Stoicism was keenly felt by philosophically minded Judaeans, the “word” of *Kyrios* was the *logos*. The *logos* began to appear in Greek pseudepigrapha in the first century BC, and a half century later was central to the theology of Philo of Alexandria. According to Philo, the *logos* was intermediate between God

and the created world. The Greek noun *logos* meant not just “word” but also “reason,” or “rationality,” and in Philo’s works the *logos* is similar to the divine *nous* or Intelligence in Greek philosophy. In Philo’s system, it was the *logos* of God that created the world.<sup>20</sup>

While many Judaeans identified the risen Jesus as the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God, others (the “Hellenists”) had gone much further, describing him as incarnate deity. This was the Christology that Paul had brought to western Asia Minor. It was apparently after Paul’s time that Christ-following Judaeans in western Anatolia began identifying Jesus as the incarnate *logos* of God. The opening sentences of the fourth Gospel declare, “In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God.... And the *logos* was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:1 and 14, adapted from AV). The doctrine of “the incarnation of the *logos*” is a Christology much higher than that found in the synoptic Gospels and in Acts, and is in some ways parallel to the Christology in Paul’s letters. In the fourth Gospel, Jesus as the pre-existent *logos* created the world. Through the long monologues and prayers that the fourth Gospel puts into the mouth of Jesus it underscores the message that Jesus - the *logos* of God - came down from Heaven briefly to assume human form. This theme of the fourth Gospel cannot have originated in the actual teachings of Jesus, because it presupposes his resurrection and ascension into Heaven.

For forty or fifty years the Gospel of John must have been of little importance, since it is not mentioned or quoted by the early Church Fathers, who frequently cite the synoptic Gospels.<sup>21</sup> By the middle of the second century, however, in some New Covenant churches the Gospel of John was beginning to be read regularly. In the fourth century the Christology of the fourth Gospel and of Paul became orthodox Christian belief.

### **Extension of the Christian name to the people of the New Covenant**

In the letters of Clement of Rome, at the end of the first century, he and his fellows in the New Covenant (they treasured the letters of Paul) do not yet call themselves “Christians.” They are “the people of God” or “the Lord’s people” or “the *ekklesia* of Jesus the Christ.” During the reign of Trajan (98-117 CE), however, the name “Christians” began to be accepted in New Covenant churches. The followers of “the way” whom Pliny found in Pontus in 112 CE seem to have been called “Christians” by their neighbors. The letter called I Peter - evidently written in the early second century - expresses the hope that no reader will be put to death as punishment for murder or other crimes, but that “if anyone suffers as a Christian, he should feel it no disgrace, but confess that name to the honour of God” (4:16 NEB). In his Letter to the Magnesians (chapter 10), Ignatius - the bishop of Antioch - exhorts his readers to be proud of the name, and in order to encourage them he cites Isaiah’s prophecy that “You will be called by a new name, which the Lord himself will announce” (Isaiah 62:2 OSB). From this point onward, accordingly, we may without anachronism use the term “Christians” for the people of the New Covenant.

It would be a serious mistake, however, to imagine that in the early second century the Christian name belonged exclusively to the New Covenant movement. Judaeans Christians, who circumcised their sons and followed the *torah*, had a much stronger claim to the name “Christians.” The Gnostics also insisted that they followed the teachings of Jesus, and at some

point they too began calling themselves “Christians.” The several Christian groups diverged considerably from each other, each tended to indict its rivals for having either through ignorance or wickedness deviated from the original gospel, and eventually each claimed to be *truly* Christian while castigating its rivals as pseudo-Christians.

### **The *Didache* community, Ebionites, and Nazoraeans**

In the closing decades of the first century the gulfs between the various Christian communities were especially wide. Over the next four or five centuries centripetal forces gradually reduced this diversity, until a more or less uniform set of practices and beliefs was achieved - in large part by coercion - during the reign of Justinian (525-565). The New Covenant Christianity that eventually prevailed is called catholic and orthodox. But in the late first century it was not at all clear which of the several communities would some day become catholic and orthodox.

Until the calamities of the 60s it was the *ekklesia* at the Jerusalem temple that served as a center for Christ-followers, even those who proclaimed the New Covenant. In 62 James, brother of Jesus, was killed by the temple police during a Passover riot. Then came the fire in Rome (in 64) and the suspicion that the *Christiani* had set it, the war of 66-70, and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The center was now gone. In the aftermath of these disasters several traditions about Jesus the Christ pushed forward, competing with each other for primacy. Not much is known about traditions other than the New Covenant, because over the centuries their history and their sacred texts were for the most part obliterated by their New Covenant competitors. Traces, however, remain.

Toward the end of the first century we find a community of Greek-speakers who may have considered themselves Judaeans but whom scholars tend to call Christians. The community retained much of Judaism but produced - probably in Syria - the text titled *Didachē ton dodeka apostolon* (“Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”).<sup>22</sup> This text, which evidently originated in the Levant, was important in early Christian times, being translated into Latin, Coptic and Ethiopic. In Late Antiquity, however, it went out of circulation and remained lost until 1883, when a manuscript of the original Greek text was discovered in a Greek Orthodox monastery. The *Didache* presents itself as the set of instructions issued by the Twelve Apostles, who in the 30s and 40s had provided leadership for the Jerusalem *ekklesia*. How much of the text actually reflects what rules the Twelve had made is unclear, but some connection with the old Jerusalem *ekklesia* is probable.

Itinerant prophets (*prophetai*) were important to the *Didache* Christians. The text, which is a community rule, instructs the readers to give food and shelter to these travelers for two days but not for three, and on their departure to give them supplies for the road but to refuse requests for money. The oral messages of these itinerant prophets were important, because the community had few written texts that supported their beliefs. The only Gospel known to the community of the *Didache* was the Gospel of Matthew (which, it will be recalled, was written specifically for Judaeans). The author and the readers of the *Didache* either did not know the letters of Paul or did not think much of them, and the community seems not to have understood

Jesus as the savior from death or Hell. The eucharist was celebrated, but entirely as a ceremony of thanksgiving, with no reference to Jesus' body and blood. Nor does the text mention his crucifixion. It looks forward to the *parousia* of Jesus the Christ, when he will return in triumph through the clouds.

Although the author or authors of the *Didache* remain close to mainstream Judaism, they try to distance themselves from it. The text prescribes three daily prayers, for example, but instead of the long prayers recited by many Judaeans the Christian is to recite the Lord's Prayer (which is given in full). The brethren are to fast twice a week, but on the fourth and sixth days and not on the second and fifth, "as the hypocrites (mainstream Judaeans) do." Keeping the Ten Commandments is of great importance. The text opens with a lengthy description of "the two ways," one of which is the way of wickedness and the other of righteousness, which consists essentially in carefully keeping each of the Ten Commandments. Although unclean meats are not strictly prohibited, the text urges the Christian to avoid them. Thus the community of the *Didache* was scarcely in the New Covenant, although neither did it locate itself under the Old Covenant.

Still closer to Judaism was the Ebionite tradition of Christianity, which had no use at all for the New Covenant.<sup>23</sup> This sect of Christians in the Levant read a Gospel conventionally called the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, although among the Ebionites themselves it seems to have been called the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*. All that survives of this text are quotations by New Covenant heresiologists, especially Epiphanius of Cyprus. The name "Ebionites" (*evyonim*) meant "the poor ones" and their community at the end of the first century may have been a continuation of "the poor at Jerusalem" to whom converts in Anatolia had in Paul's time been asked to send money. The Ebionites regarded the Twelve as representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel, which in the Jerusalem *ekklesia* the Twelve may have been. Although the Ebionites revered Jesus as the Messiah, they did not believe he was either God or the son of God, and did not believe he was born of a virgin. They knew about Paul's letters but denounced them. They circumcised their sons and in the main they adhered to the written Torah. Not surprisingly, New Covenant writers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus roundly condemned the Ebionites.

The self-proclaimed "Nazoraean" were probably yet another Jewish Christian sect. Although it is possible that these Nazoraean were identical with the *Didache* community, it is more likely that they were not. The sect's single Gospel, called simply the *Gospel of the Nazoraean* by New Covenant writers, seems to have been an Aramaic version of the Gospel of Matthew, along with several additions and expansions.<sup>24</sup> If their Gospel contained the birth narrative found in the Greek text of Matthew, the Nazoraean will have differed from the Ebionites in accepting the story that Jesus was born of a virgin. Perhaps the Nazoraean were separated from New Covenant Christianity not because of doctrinal disputes but because they knew little or no Greek, and thought it sufficient to have available a single Gospel translated into Aramaic.

### **The Gnostics, and disagreements about God**

If the Ebionites stood at one end of the Christian spectrum toward the end of the first

century the Gnostics were at the opposite end. The Ebionites retained as much as they could of traditional Judaism, while the Gnostics rejected most of it and ventured into terra incognita. They did so with confidence, because at this time there was a lively belief in the Holy Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, or the *hagion pneuma*), through whom Wisdom (*Sophia*) was conveyed to mortals like themselves.

The most blatant disagreement among Christians was about God. Ebionites, Nazoraeans and the *Didache* community, like Christians of the New Covenant, believed that God was Adonai: the god of Israel and of the Old Testament. Gnostic Christians, contrarily, downgraded the Old Testament. For the Gnostics, God - whom they declared had first been revealed by Jesus the Christ - was much more like God of the Greek philosophers. The Gnostics often referred to God as “the Father” but he was also the Ultimate, a transcendent reality beyond the material world. Although it is very likely that the earliest Gnostics were themselves Judaeans, in their myths Adonai - whom they often refer to as Yaldabaoth - is a distant subordinate of “the Father,” and an imperfect and somewhat misguided deity. Yaldabaoth is the creator of the world, but as Gnostics saw it the world is not very good. The Gnostics found a considerable discrepancy between the acts of Adonai - which filled the Septuagint - and the absolute goodness of the philosophers’ God, who does none of the things that Adonai was supposed to have done.

In addition to being mystics, who claimed that through *gnosis* (“knowledge”) a person could have direct knowledge of God, the Gnostics were also dualists. The body and the material world are evil, they taught, and the soul and the spiritual world are good. They ridiculed the idea of physical resurrection, and insisted that at death a person’s soul ascends to the *pleroma*, the “Fullness” of God. Gnostics tended to present their *gnosis* in the form of myths, all of them fantastic, rather than in rational discourse. Delighting in abstractions and speculation, they had no use for history.

It may be that the writings of Philo Judaeus, the Alexandrian who attempted to merge Judaism with Greek philosophy, made a significant contribution to Gnosticism.<sup>25</sup> Philo, of course, tried to equate Adonai with the philosophers’ God, but in order to do so he had to substitute his allegorical reading of the Pentateuch for the literal reading. It seems also to have been at Alexandria that the first Gnostics tried to merge philosophy with the gospel proclamation that the Old Covenant had come to an end. Gnostic Christians were more a philosophical - or theological - school than a religious sect. They had few local churches, and although they may have formed a loose intellectual community they had no ecclesiastical structure resembling the “catholic church” of the New Covenant.

In the second century Gnostic Christianity was seen by New Covenant Christians as a dangerous and Satanic heresy, and New Covenant heresiologists inveighed against it. Ca. 185 Bishop Irenaeus of Lyon (Lugdunum, in southern Gaul) wrote in Greek a five-book diatribe, translated into Latin as the *Adversus haereses*, against Gnostic Christianity. In the fourth and fifth centuries monks and vigilantes persecuted Gnostics and destroyed all of the Gnostic texts that they could find. As a result, until recently the only information on Gnosticism available for scholars was the polemic in anti-heresy writings of New Covenant Christians. In 1945,

however, a cache of thirteen Gnostic codices (manuscripts in the form of a book rather than a scroll) was discovered in the desert near the Upper Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi. The cache had evidently been buried by Gnostics late in the fourth century, as New Covenant monks began to search out and destroy their opponents' sacred books. In the codices were more than fifty texts, all of them Coptic translations of Greek originals: the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and many more. Thanks to this Nag Hammadi "library," a somewhat better understanding of Gnostic Christianity is now possible.<sup>26</sup>

The roots of Gnosticism may go back to the Alexandrian milieu in which Philo lived and wrote, and they matured after Jesus' crucifixion. While not believing that Jesus arose bodily from the tomb, Gnostics accepted some stories and invented others describing how he appeared to his followers after his death.<sup>27</sup> They hailed Jesus the Christ as the revealer of God and the bringer of Wisdom. Certain Gnostic texts, the *Gospel of Thomas* among them, seem to date from the first century, and in the letters of Paul are warnings against doctrines that are apparently proto-Gnostic. According to New Covenant polemic the founder of Gnosticism was a Samaritan magician, Simon Magus, but Simon's connection with Gnosticism is unclear. After the destruction in 70 of Jerusalem and its temple, the Gnostics' demotion of the god of Israel to the role of Demiurge was more widely shared, and Gnosticism grew accordingly.

## **Gnostic teachers in Alexandria and Rome**

The first Gnostic teacher about whom we have reliable (although meager) evidence was Basileides, who taught at Alexandria during the reign of Hadrian (117-38). He wrote voluminously and perhaps can be called the first Christian theologian, even though his theology was repudiated by New Covenant Christians almost as soon as it was published.<sup>28</sup> Soon after Basileides, or even contemporary with him, was Karpokras, another Gnostic teacher at Alexandria. The "Carpocratians," according to Irenaeus, were libertine Gnostics who regarded themselves as completely free from the Laws of Moses, whether moral or ritual. In Irenaeus' day the Carpocratians claimed to have in their possession the *forma Christi* - an image or imprint of Jesus - that had been made on Pontius Pilatus' orders.<sup>29</sup>

Although it probably emerged in Alexandria, it was at Rome that various Gnostic sects especially flourished. In the 130s CE two eloquent and forceful young men, Valentinus and Marcion, arrived in Rome and each began to attract a considerable following (both of them spoke and wrote in Greek). Valentinus claimed to have received secret doctrines passed down from Paul. Although he may have spent his life in a series of New Covenant churches, and even was a candidate to become bishop of Rome, Valentinus was more a prophet than an institutional man. He wanted to be remembered as a man of the Spirit, a *pneumatikos* to whom the Holy Spirit had revealed the great truths that solved the mysteries of the world, of the relationship of the *psyche* to matter, and of humankind to God. In the tradition of Philo, Valentinus imagined a philosophers' God, very different from the Kyrios of the Septuagint. Valentinus held to no canon, but had a Gnostic Gospel of his own, evidently called the *Gospel of Truth*. Valentinian Gnosticism prospered for a while, as it generated small cells elsewhere in Italy and also in Gaul, where Irenaeus of Lyon encountered them.

Marcion was the son of the bishop of Sinope, on the Black Sea, and was himself not only a presbyter in Rome but - like Valentinus - had aspirations to become the bishop of Rome. Despite a large gift to the Roman Christians he failed in his ambition, perhaps because of his extreme views. Like other Gnostics, Marcion rejected not only the *torah* of Moses but the entire Septuagint, and with it the traditional god of Israel and Judah. According to Marcion, the True God was first revealed by Jesus.

When Marcion was excommunicated from the Roman churches that had elected Pius as their bishop (ca. 140), Marcion responded by establishing his own communion of churches.<sup>30</sup> For his followers - and there were many in the Greek-speaking East and in Rome - Marcion set up a strict and narrow canon of sacred texts: this canon included nothing of the Old Testament, and was limited to the letters of Paul and to Marcion's own edition of the Gospel of Luke. This edition contained no references to Jesus as the Son of Adonai, or passages in which Jesus seemed to attach himself to the Old Testament god.

The second century was the high-water mark for Gnosticism, which tended to recede as New Covenant Christianity grew. Although polemic such as that served up by Irenaeus may have contributed to the Gnostics' decline, a more important factor was their lack of any organization or discipline. It is also remarkable that Gnostics seldom if ever became martyrs. Unlike New Covenant Christians in the third century, the Gnostics did not set themselves against Greco-Roman civilization and did not have the fervor necessary for martyrdom.

## **The New Covenant communities**

The New Covenant communities that Paul had founded were called *ekklesiai*, or "assemblies" and came eventually to denote what in English are called "churches."<sup>31</sup> So we have references to "the *ekklesia* of God in Corinth," "the *ekklesia* at Laodikeia," or "the *ekklesia* of the Thessalonikeians." Each of the local churches was very close-knit, more so even than a Judaeen synagogue. A sense of family pervades Paul's letters, as the members of a church were "brothers and sisters in the Christ." Normally the church met in a private house, or - if the assembly was larger - at several private houses, but believers could also meet in a tenement shop, on the ground floor of a multi-storied *insula*.

Initially, these meetings centered around a modest sacramental meal that Paul called "the Lord's Supper" (*kuriakon deipnon*) and that came to be called the eucharist.<sup>32</sup> This "Lord's Supper" was meant to be a communal as well as a sacramental meal, in which the bread and wine consumed by the participants conveyed to them the body and blood of the Christ, and therefore also salvation from death. These sacramental and symbolic meals soon became, however, full-blown feasts, to which all the members of the *ekklesia* were expected to contribute.<sup>33</sup> At Corinth, so Paul's first letter to the Corinthians informs us, the feasting and drinking soon obscured the essential meaning of "the Lord's Supper," and Paul urged the Corinthians to sate their hunger and quench their thirst in their own homes.<sup>34</sup> Although in many churches it was differentiated from the more symbolic Lord's Supper, throughout the first century and into the second the shared meal (or potluck dinner) remained an important feature of the New Covenant communities. The shared meal was often called the *agapē* or "love feast," a name which gave

rise to much ribald speculation by outsiders.

Meetings of the churches, in private homes or street-corner shops, were initially frequent and variable. In imitation of the Sabbath observance in Judaism, however, Christians came to devote a single day of the week to their Lord. The first day of the Judaeon week - or what astrologers called the "Day of the Sun" - was for Christians "the Lord's Day." In addition to the eucharist and *agapē*, the meetings featured prayer, singing, the baptism of new members, and a "sharing of the Holy Spirit."<sup>35</sup> The "sharing" of spirit, meals, and sometimes even property was in Greek the *koinonia* of the church's members. The Latin equivalent of *koinonia* was *communio*. The words express the remarkable social solidarity of the Christian believers, and this aspect of the early church was extremely important. In all of the "Greek" cities of Egypt and the Near East clubs or associations had been important since the cities had been founded in the fourth or third century BC. The Hellenistic cities had none of the intimacy of a village nor even the political camaraderie of the classical city-state, and the small club (membership seldom rose above a few dozen) filled this social void very well. Professional or cultural clubs and guilds gave men and occasionally women a steady social life, and most of these groups had a nominal religious dimension, often beginning their meetings with a sacrifice to some god. The typical club (*hetaireia*) excluded slaves, and it depended either on monthly fees from its members or on an endowment. In a large city such as Antioch in Syria or Alexandria in Egypt hundreds of such clubs met regularly.

The local Christian *ekklesia* was thus, at the beginning, just another "club," but in important ways it was different from all the others, and its cohesion far greater. Unlike the others, it was heterogeneous and egalitarian, being open to women, slaves, the uneducated, and even to people too destitute to make a monthly contribution. Because "Christians" were technically subject to arrest, even though the *institutum Neronianum* was seldom enforced, the local *ekklesia* had a slightly clandestine character that reinforced the solidarity of its members. Most important of the ties among a church's members, as among a synagogue's members, was its religious exclusiveness: if you belonged to *this* club you were assured of resurrection and an eternity of bliss, but you could not belong to other clubs, and you could have nothing to do with the civic cults of your city. To an extent that a polytheist could hardly comprehend, the Christian *ekklesia* monopolized its members' social and religious life. To exclude or "excommunicate" someone from the *koinonia* was therefore a drastic punishment: it deprived the person not only of the sacramental eucharist, necessary for salvation, but also of the precious and almost familial ties that the local church provided.

Beyond the community of the local church was the Church at large, the *ekklesia katholicē*. This was the network of churches, spread through all the larger cities in the Greek-speaking world and scores of smaller cities. Like the Judaeon synagogues, the Christian churches functioned as "homes away from home" for believers who found it necessary to travel to a strange city: co-religionists in another city would welcome wayfaring Christians as new-found "brothers" and "sisters." So, for example, at Romans 16:1 Paul urges the brethren at Rome to look out for Phoebe, who has traveled to Rome from Cenchreae (a harbor city near Corinth): "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a *diakonos* of the church at Cenchreae, so that you welcome her in the Lord, in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you assist her in



whatever business may need your help.” Thus the *ekklēsia katholikē* provided on the ecumenical level a community almost as helpful as was the individual *ekklēsia* on the local level.

### **The problem of heresy: priests, bishops and apostolic authority**

The Christian communities, unlike the Judaeans, were based on faith rather than on practice. Judaeans were accustomed to wide variations in belief, even on matters as basic as the canon of sacred texts. You might deplore another Judaeans’ beliefs about angels, the literal truth of Genesis, or the immortality of the soul. But if he was circumcised, followed the written *torah*, and - until 70 CE - worshiped Adonai at the Jerusalem temple, you would not challenge his Judaeans credentials. The New Covenant, on the other hand, required faith rather than practice. Your entrance into Heaven on the Day of Judgement depended (the stipulations at Matthew 25 were not stressed in New Covenant churches) on your baptism and your believing the gospel that had been divinely revealed through Jesus, his disciples and apostles. A false gospel, or one that had been distorted, was as bad as no gospel at all, and so it was urgent to know the truth: orthodoxy - “straight” or correct belief - was indispensable for Christians. If one of the sisters in a church, for example, declared that Jesus had appeared to her and told her that Satan had been cast into Hell and was now powerless, it was urgent to settle the matter: if the sister was right, everyone in the church had better believe what she believed, and if she was wrong the sister should be banished from the congregation, lest she take the congregation with her into perdition.

What you and your fellow communicants believed, then, was the truth, and those Christians who believed something else were “heretics.” The noun *hairesis* came from a verb meaning “to choose,” and a *hairesis* was therefore a doctrine wilfully and perversely “chosen” or “taken” rather than humbly and passively received through a tradition that was supposed to stretch in an unbroken line back to Jesus himself. The difficulty of course was that what one group considered the received truth was considered a heresy by the other groups.

A wide spectrum of Christ-followers, from the Ebionites to the Gnostics, thought of themselves as Christians, and New Covenant Christians were therefore confused by the latitude of Christian teachings on God, the Old Testament, the soul, resurrection, and the nature of Jesus the Christ. When Gnosticism first appeared, the New Covenant canon (the New Testament) was not yet in place, and for most New Covenant Christians the first resort was necessarily not to a book but to itinerant prophets or to the leaders of the church: the custodians of the gospel that had been preached by Paul and other early preaching evangelists. Preserving the correct beliefs for New Covenant Christians was the responsibility of the *presbyteroi*, the “elders.” A committee of elders was evidently important in first-century synagogues, and the New Covenant congregations simply reproduced that Judaeans institution. Initially each church was led by a group of elders, but by the early second century it was becoming common for a single *presbyteros* to lead a church (from the Greek word *presbyteros* comes our English word *priest*).<sup>36</sup> Often, but not always, this *presbyteros* depended for his livelihood on contributions from the members of his church. The discipline that the *presbyteroi* had to enforce included both doctrine and behavior. The freedom that the New Covenant gospel introduced applied only to ritual law, and not to the ethical commandments that Gentiles as well as Judaeans knew. A

murderer, thief or adulterer was not fit to be a brother or sister of the early Christians and if unrepentant had to be excommunicated. Such actions were relatively rare, however, and the main responsibilities of the *presbyteroi* were to preside at the eucharist and the *agapē*, to maintain correct belief and to identify false teachings.

In a small city in the early second century all the Christians might belong to a single church. Larger cities, however, had several churches (each meeting in its own physical space), and the *presbyteroi* of these several churches were in turn monitored by an *episkopos*. This Greek word, meaning “overseer” or “supervisor,” was transliterated into Latin and eventually made its way into English as “bishop.” In a megalopolis such as Alexandria, Antioch or Rome the city’s Christians were scattered over many churches and the bishop of such a city was therefore a man with great responsibilities. Above all, the bishop was the man who was supposed to know the true gospel, and who was expected to be vigilant in guarding against heresy.

The *episkopoi* were in turn subject to the authority of “the apostles,” whether transmitted in written texts or in reliable oral tradition. The apostles were the men whom Jesus himself was supposed to have commissioned to preach his gospel. They therefore knew first-hand what Jesus had said and what it was that believers were required to believe. Oral traditions were still strong, and claims that an apostle had said this or that had to be taken seriously. As the second century wore on, however, oral traditions lost value and written texts came to be more and more authoritative. The texts that were highly regarded were said to have been written by the apostles or others who had known Jesus personally.

### **The canonizing of scriptures in the *ekklesia katholicē***

The canonization of sacred texts by the catholic church began as a reaction to the Gnostics. It was in response to the flagrant heterodoxy of Valentinus and Marcion that New Covenant bishops began exercising tighter control of their churches, and drawing up a list of texts approved for reading in the churches. For the bishops, as for Marcion, the letters of Paul were most important, because they spelled out what the Christian was to believe. Genuine letters of Paul were Romans, I and II Corinthians, I and II Thessalonians, Galatians, and perhaps Philemon, Philippians and Colossians. To these Pauline letters more were added, of uncertain authorship: Hebrews, Ephesians, and the pastoral letters (I and II Timothy and Titus). Some letters, such as the Epistle of Barnabas, were for a time read in the churches but were eventually dropped. Still other letters went the other way: what are now called the Epistles of James and Jude (ascribed to two of Jesus’ brothers) were not widely known in the second century but by the fourth had found a place in the canon of the *ekklesia katholicē*. The authority of II Peter and II and III John was for a long time disputed but was ultimately accepted.<sup>37</sup>

The Gospels were more problematic, because there were a fair number of them and their narratives did not all agree. The *Gospel of Thomas* was probably in circulation by the end of the first century, but the 114 sayings of Jesus that it included were too Gnostic for New Covenant tastes. At the other end of the spectrum, the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* was given some attention by Papias, Hegesippos, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. It gave a place of great

honor to James, the brother of Jesus, and it may have been the oldest of all the Gospels. The *Gospel according to the Hebrews* was probably - so a statement by Papias indicates -<sup>38</sup> the text in which first appeared the "story of the adulterous woman" (this story is now positioned at John 7:53 to 8:11, but clearly was not there in the early texts of the fourth Gospel). Although the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* may have been composed in either Hebrew or Aramaic it must also have been available in a Greek version long before Jerome claims to have made his own Greek and Latin translations of the old Gospel.<sup>39</sup> Also of importance for second-century Christians was the *Gospel of Peter*, resting as it did on the immense although spurious authority of Peter. But some stories in that Gospel - the sensational account of Jesus' resurrection, for example - must have struck many bishops as incredible. Although for a time the *Gospel of Peter* was regularly read in the churches, eventually the bishops ordered it to be set aside.

In reaction to Marcion's narrow canon of one Gospel (Luke), and in order to bind Jesus more securely to the Septuagint or to what they called "the Old Covenant," most of the bishops advocated the regular reading of no less than four Gospels. Of the four found to be true and edifying two were assigned to Jesus's disciples, and two to other men mentioned with affection in the letters of Paul.<sup>40</sup> The high standing of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is evident in a project of a Syrian Christian named Tatian. Perhaps in the 160s or 170s Tatian wrote a harmonization of the four Gospels, which he called the *Diatessaron* ("By Way of the Four") and published it in both Greek and Syriac. For well over a century either the Syriac or the Greek version of the *Diatessaron* was read in the churches of Syria.

The last book of the New Testament, Revelation (or Apocalypse of John), was also the last to become part of the regular readings in the churches. In the fourth century Eusebius (*HE* 3.25.2) expressed some uncertainty about its inclusion in the canon, and even as late as the eighth century some Christian bishops did not include it in their New Testament. In the second and third centuries the book may have been regarded as dangerous because of its fiery prophecies, its unmistakable hatred of the Roman empire, and its indifference to the New Covenant.

The requirement that the authoritative texts be written or dictated by a disciple, apostle, or a brother of Jesus led eventually to the exclusion of some texts that were much loved in the early second century but could not be plausibly attributed to any of the above. The *Shepherd of Hermas* and the letters of Clement of Rome were among the casualties. The *Didachē*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, was for a long time regarded by many bishops as true scripture. But late in the second century it seems to have lost ground, almost certainly because of the Montanist controversy, and by the fourth century it was virtually unread.

### **Tension between "correct" belief and the desire for unity**

The highly prized fellowship of the Christians put immense pressure on a local congregation to accept as sacred texts what kindred spirits in neighboring churches and cities accepted, and to set aside texts and beliefs that "the brethren" rejected. The desire to belong to the wider Christian community was thus the driving force behind the group-think of Christian orthodoxy. Orthodoxy was not so much something imposed on the individual church and individual Christian as something toward which Christians strove.

At the same time, nevertheless, Christians had to be certain that their beliefs were *true*. If your beliefs were shared by most other Christians but were *false*, you would not be among the elect at the End of Time. It was therefore of vital importance to get things right, even though most other Christians disagreed with you. As a result, the early Christian felt a great tension, between the centripetal force of wishing to belong to a single, unified Church, and the centrifugal force of needing to believe the true doctrine, however unpopular the doctrine may have been. For most people, the tension was resolved in favor of the centripetal force. For a minority, purity of doctrine prevailed over the desire for conformity. Thus we have in the second and third centuries several widely divergent Christian movements, each convinced that it was right and each demonizing the groups with whom it disagreed. A Judaeian Christianity remained close to the Old Covenant, regarded Paul as heretical, and had its own Gospel or two, none of which survived into the Middle Ages. At the opposite end of the pole, Marcionite Christians rejected the Old Testament entirely and centered themselves squarely on Paul. Other Gnostic Christians were certain that the belief in physical resurrection was not only wrong but lamentable (the Gnostics looked forward to being rid of physical existence, and to living as immortal souls). Each group strove to establish its doctrines as the Truth, and vituperated those who believed otherwise. As a result, each group - with the possible exception of the Gnostics - maintained its own ecumenical network, spread over various cities and provinces. Until the reign of Justinian in the sixth century the history of Christianity is in fact a history of various and competing Christian communions.

Nevertheless, New Covenant Christianity, which was rooted in Paul's missionary work, was easily the most widespread communion. The centripetal attraction of a widespread communion kept the New Covenant churches growing while other communions - after a brief spasm of vigor - shrank into marginal significance. Christians of the New Covenant with good reason regarded their communion as the *ekklesia katholicē*. The larger it became, the more certain were its members that its doctrines were correct.<sup>41</sup>

## **The Holy Spirit and Montanism**

Just as unsettling as Gnosticism for the wider Christian community was the "new prophecy," which was eventually labeled "Montanism" by its detractors.<sup>42</sup> Prophets and oral prophecy had been essential for the spread of the gospel in the sixty or seventy years after Jesus' crucifixion and the discovery of the empty tomb. Paul is by far the best known of the traveling evangelists who spread the "good news" to Judaeians far away from Judaea and Galilee. Among the Christians of the *Didache* community, as we have seen, itinerant prophets still played an important role ca. 100 CE. The brief letters called II and III John also show how important traveling emissaries were in spreading the gospel and in stamping out what the writer of the letters regarded as false doctrines. Itinerant prophets, or oral evangelists, were often more revered than leaders of local congregations, some of whom had few charismatic gifts.

By the middle of the second century, however, by which time oral reports of the gospel story were at best third-hand, written texts had largely replaced the spoken *kerygma*. Once a congregation had become familiar with the writings of Paul, Luke and other early figures, the

leader of a congregation did not welcome into town a prophet who hoped to enlighten his hosts with yet more or different doctrines. It was therefore disconcerting when, in the 160s, excitement built about the revelations that the Holy Spirit - the *Hagion Pneuma* - was communicating to people in Phrygia (northwestern Anatolia). The leader of the “Pneumatic” Christians was Montanus, who had recently converted to Christianity, and he was assisted by two women, Priscilla and Maximilla. The three lived in the small Phrygian village of Pepuza, but their brand of Christianity - which today would be called Pentecostal but in the second century was called Pneumatic - quickly spread through much of Phrygia and beyond. The Pneumatic Christian would become “possessed” by the Holy Spirit, and would then - usually in an emotional state - speak words that came directly from God. What the Holy Spirit was telling the Pneumatics was that the End of Time was very close,<sup>43</sup> and that in the brief time that was left before the *parousia* of Christ all Christians should conduct themselves with complete sobriety and moral purity. The new prophets counseled sexual abstinence, a sharing of property, and a readiness or even eagerness for martyrdom. The movement was radically egalitarian, because the Holy Spirit spoke at least as often to women as to men, to the literate and the illiterate, and to slaves as well as to slave-owners.

Although the admonitions of the Pneumatics were not very different from what could be read in the New Testament, the idea that the Holy Spirit was communicating directly and regularly to assorted individuals was incompatible with the organization and discipline of the *ekklesia katholikē*. The priests (*presbyteroi*) and bishops were the leaders of the churches, and among their chief duties was preservation of the gospel as they had learned it. The first ecclesiastical synod, held ca. 177 and attended by most of the bishops of western Anatolia, was convened specifically to confront and condemn the new prophecy. The bishops there decided that the “Montanist” prophets should be excommunicated from the *ekklesia katholike*.

On the other hand, many ordinary Christians found it exciting that the Holy Spirit was still communicating directly to believers. According to the New Testament, Jesus had promised his followers that the Holy Spirit would give them words to say when words were needed, and the Pneumatics believed that was indeed what was happening with them. Although the movement began in Phrygia, it quickly spread beyond Anatolia, by 200 CE having attracted many Christians in North Africa and other parts of the Latin-speaking west. Perpetua, one of the famous Christian martyrs, believed that her dreams were prophetic. For many Christians, the story of her heroic death at Carthage seemed to validate her belief. Tertullian, the first Latin apologist for Christianity, fully believed in the new prophecy. In his writings Tertullian railed against the opposition of the bishops, charging that they objected to the new prophecy mostly because it undermined their role as supervisors of what should and should not be taught in the churches.

## **The Virgin Mary**

Mary, mother of Jesus, has been a very important figure in Christianity for most of its history. Protestants tend to ignore her and therefore to underestimate her role, but for more than a millennium almost all Christians - Orthodox, Catholic, Monophysite and even Nestorian - regarded the Virgin Mary as a supernatural agent just below the trinity. The nearly unanimous

Christian belief was that the Blessed Virgin is in Heaven with the trinity, and that there she functions as an intermediary or intercessor between believers and God. In much of the world Mary is still so regarded. Her exalted role was not well established until the end of the fifth century, but once in place it remained unchallenged until the Reformation. In the seventh century icons of Mary were so ubiquitous in the Middle East that most Muslims - until they learned more about Christianity - assumed that the Christian trinity consisted of Allah, Jesus, and Mary.

Except for the stories about Jesus' birth, the New Testament says very little about Mary. Among the early Fathers, Clement and Justin speak of her only in passing, as the virgin mother of Jesus, and Ignatius and Tatian do not mention her at all. In the Christian laity, however, Mary was clearly of great interest already in the late second century, and much more information was desired. The prizing of virginity and the denigration of marriage in some Christian circles - especially those in which Paul's letters were paramount - suggested to many that Mary must have remained a virgin all her life, and that her marriage to Joseph must have been merely a ritual formality. Against this idealization of abstinence were the New Testament references to Jesus' brothers and sisters.

A pseudepigraphon now called the *Gospel of James* or the *Protevangelium of James* offered a way out while elaborating the story of Mary's birth, childhood, betrothal to Joseph, and bearing of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> The overall design of the text presented her as the Virgin, implying that Mary not only was still a virgin when she conceived Jesus but remained a virgin throughout her life. The text begins by furnishing Mary with parents: Joachim and Anna, a hitherto childless couple whose prayers for a child are answered when an angel announces to them that they will have a child who will be celebrated throughout the world. We then are told that when Mary was three years old Joachim and Anna took her to the Jerusalem temple, to be raised in the company of other young girls. "And Mary was in the Temple nurtured like a dove and received food from the hand of an angel."<sup>45</sup> When Mary and the other girls reach the age of twelve the high priest orders that they be betrothed, but an angel instructs him that Mary is to be betrothed only to a man distinguished by miraculous signs. That turns out to be Joseph, an elderly widower who already has grown sons and daughters (this detail disposed of the problem that Jesus had brothers and sisters) and who has not expected to remarry.

After repeating the Annunciation story from Luke 2, the *Protevangelium* describes Mary's giving birth to Jesus in a cave near Bethlehem. Joseph goes out to find a midwife to help with the birth, and the midwife is astonished to find that even after giving birth Mary is still a virgin. Salome, wife of Zebedee, hears the report, cannot believe it, comes to the cave, and in disbelief thrusts her fingers into Mary's vagina. Salome's hand immediately withers, but she prays that her disbelief be forgiven and an angel appears, commanding Salome to touch Mary's newborn baby. When Salome does that, her hand is miraculously made whole again.

The author of the *Protevangelium* then takes up the nativity story from Matthew 2, revising and expanding it. The wise men from the east come to the Bethlehem cave, bringing gold, frankincense and myrrh. When Herod orders the slaying of all infants, Mary hides her baby by wrapping him in swaddling clothes and laying him in an ox-manger. John - the future

Baptist - is also in danger because he is not yet two years old. Elizabeth takes him to a mountain, which miraculously opens and then encloses mother and child. Old Zacharias, the priest, is threatened with death if he does not reveal where Elizabeth and John are, but he refuses to say and is murdered. As he dies, the panel-work of the temple ceiling utters a wail, Zacharias' body disappears, and his blood congeals to stone.

This fantasy upon the nativity stories in Luke and Matthew was written in Greek in the second century, and by the end of antiquity it had been translated into most other literary languages of Christendom. The bishops of the early church obviously did not think much of the text, and in the 490s Pope Gelasius included it among those books "not to be kept."<sup>46</sup> In the eastern half of the Roman empire, however, the *Protevangelium* was very popular with ordinary Christians, especially those who spoke Greek. Only two Latin manuscripts are extant, along with a handful written in Syriac, Ethiopic and Georgian, and of a Coptic version only a few papyrus fragments have been found. But in Greek no fewer than a hundred and forty manuscripts of the *Protevangelium* have been identified. The most ancient text of the *Protevangelium* is a papyrus found near Luxor in Egypt and dating to the third or - more likely - the fourth century.<sup>47</sup>

With the beginning of monasticism early in the fourth century, "Ever-Virgin Mary" became a role model for monks and nuns. Whether they were dependent upon the *Protevangelium* or not, most Christians believed that Mary preserved her virginity throughout her life. A few disagreed. In the 370s a Roman Christian named Helvidius wrote a treatise arguing that Mary could not have remained a virgin: Matthew 1:25 says that Joseph did not have intercourse with Mary "until she bore a son," and it is clear that Joseph did have intercourse with her thereafter, because Jesus had brothers and sisters. Jerome soon responded to Helvidius' argument. In his *The Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, published in 383, Jerome ridiculed Helvidius and insisted that the New Testament references to *adelphoi* of Jesus must be translated not as "brothers" but as "cousins." Like Jerome, Augustine was highly critical of heterosexual intercourse and likewise declared that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. By the end of the fifth century the matter was settled.

### **The bishops of Rome in the struggle with "heresies"**

It is unlikely that in the first century CE Rome had a monarchical bishop. Like the churches in dozens of other cities, the first *ekklesia* in Rome seems to have had no single head but was guided by a group of elders (*presbyteroi*). As churches in Rome proliferated, each was likewise guided by one or more presbyters. Later tradition in Rome claimed that the Apostle Peter established the church in Rome very soon after Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, and for the next thirty-five years served as the city's monarchical bishop until his martyrdom under Nero. That tradition is difficult to square with the best evidence we have. Paul's letter to the Romans (16:3-15) salutes by name twenty-seven members of the Roman *ekklesia*, but Peter (Cephas) is not among them, nor does Paul recognize anyone as the head of the Roman church. At Gal 2:9, however, Paul did describe Peter - "Cephas" - as one of the three leaders of the Jerusalem *ekklesia* (the other two were John and James, the latter being the brother of Jesus). Luke, likewise, writing his Acts of the Apostles in the 80s CE, gives Peter a prominent place in the

Jerusalem *ekklesia*, but says nothing about his going to Rome. When describing how Paul arrived in Rome and then lived in the city under house arrest Luke mentions (Acts 28:15) the assistance that “brethren” in Rome gave to Paul, but makes no mention of Peter.

It is nevertheless quite certain that late in Nero’s reign Peter did go to Rome, either on his own volition or as a prisoner and bound for execution. He was crucified at Rome and was buried there (according to tradition the place of Peter’s burial was the spot where St. Peter’s basilica now stands). The date of his execution, as of Paul’s, was late in 67 or early in 68, when the revolt of Judaea was raging and when Nero was arresting and executing *Christiani* on the charge of setting the great fire that had destroyed much of Rome. The charge against Peter is likely to have been that he abetted either the fire or the revolt, or both.

Except for Clement, the first five of the supposed successors of Peter as monarchical bishop - Linos, Kletos (or Anakletos), Clement, Evaristos, Alexander - are little more than names. Their function is to provide an unbroken chain of bishops from the beginning of Christianity in Rome until the time of Xystos - in later and Latin spellings, Sixtus - during the reign of Hadrian. By the early second century the old pattern of several *presbyteroi* leading a church was in many cities being replaced by a new pattern, in which a single *episkopos* headed the church in each city. Xystos (traditionally, bishop from 117 to 126) may have been Rome’s first monarchical bishop.

The bishops of Rome came to the fore during the doctrinal controversies that deeply divided Christians during much of the second century. It was at Rome in the 130s and 140s that the quarrel between Gnostic and New Covenant Christians was most heated, after the arrival in the city of Marcion and Valentinus. Both of the newcomers hoped to be made bishop of Rome, but lost out to the man simply known as “Pius.”<sup>48</sup> The Montanist controversy likewise, although it began in Phrygia, soon embroiled the Latin west and deeply involved the bishop of Rome.

In all of these doctrinal controversies the views of the bishops of Rome were especially sought, because it was assumed that their teachings had been transmitted from the two greatest apostles: Paul and Peter. An appeal to the authority of the Roman church is first met in the *Adversus haereses* of Irenaeus of Lyon, an indefatigable warrior against false doctrines and a declared foe of “the Montanist heretics.” When Irenaeus was writing this lengthy work, ca. 185, the bishop at Rome was Eleutheros (Eleutherius, in Latin spelling), whose episcopal dates are ca. 175-89. Eleutheros apparently approved of the new prophecy when first informed about it, but later - under Irenaeus’ urging - retracted his approval and joined in condemning it. Irenaeus met Eleutheros in 177, when the Lyon persecution was beginning and the Lyon congregation commissioned Irenaeus, then a presbyter, to deliver a letter to Eleutheros. Eleutheros was himself neither authoritarian nor especially eminent, but his (eventual) doctrinal stance commended him to Irenaeus, who called the Roman church

the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the



faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition.<sup>49</sup>

In the early second century, when the text known as I Clement (“Clement’s letter to the Corinthians”) was written, many New Covenant Christians were seeking guidance from the Roman church on matters of doctrine and practice. When Irenaeus was writing, ca. 185, his understanding seems still to have been that Peter and Paul were equally “founders” and leaders of the Roman church, and that neither apostle had been a monarchical bishop. The identification of Peter as the first monarchical bishop of Rome was apparently a development of the late second or early third century, and is met for the first time in letters written in 252 by Cyprian.<sup>50</sup> By the early third century the churches in all the great cities claimed to have been governed by an unbroken chain of monarchical bishops reaching back to one of the great figures of the New Testament. If a city’s gospel tradition had all along been maintained by a chain of named monarchical bishops the tradition seemed sounder than if in its early stages it had been maintained by an anonymous committee of *presbyteroi*. Christians of a city in which no continuous list of bishops was yet available were therefore strongly motivated to produce one. The list produced in Alexandria went back to Mark, in Antioch and Rome to Peter, in Ephesus to Timothy, and in various cities in the Aramaic east to Thomas. Even in Byzantium, as the city rose in prestige to become the imperial Constantinople, Christians constructed an unbroken chain of monarchical bishops going all the way back to the apostles: the Byzantine Christians settled on Andrew, Peter’s brother, as the founder of their church, followed by Bishop Stachys and then by Bishop Onesimus, two minor figures known from the letters of Paul.<sup>51</sup> The first Christian writer to publish any of the lists may have been the chronographer Julius Africanus, in the 220s, but our earliest surviving evidence is in most cases the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius.<sup>52</sup> In none of the lists can the early entries withstand critical scrutiny.

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1. As told by Eusebius at *HE* 3.5.3, a *chrēsmos* is revealed to the Jerusalem Christians instructing them to flee the imminent disaster, and after they have all left the city God begins to vent his wrath on it and on all the rest of Judaea. In later tellings it is an angel, or Christ himself, who warns the Christians. For a critical study of the myth see Lüdemann 1980. At pp. 165-66, Lüdemann suggests that it may have originated with Ariston of Pella, who wrote a Christian dialogue ca. 150 CE, but a third-century origin is perhaps more likely (neither Justin Martyr nor Clement of Alexandria nor any other writer before Eusebius mentions the story). For arguments against the Pella tradition see above, note 21 of Chapter 12.

2. This is puzzling because apparently the only Gospel known to the author(s) of the *Didache* was the Gospel of Matthew, which was a principal source of Christian doctrines about Hell.

3. John 3:16 OSB. For Jesus as “the savior of the world” (*ho soter tou kosmou*) see John 4:42 and I John 4:14. At John 1:29 John the Baptist calls Jesus the lamb of God, who takes away the

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sins of the world.

4. The *Apocalypse of Peter* drew on very old traditions about the Afterlife. Peter is shown a few happy scenes of Heaven and many dreadful scenes of Hell. Those who are condemned to Hell are not unbelievers or heretics, but the morally wicked. They include murderers and those who persecute Christians, but especially those who are guilty of sexual sins: adulterers, homosexuals, and women who had abortions or who lost their virginity before marriage. Fire is a major form of punishment, but Peter witnesses many other types of punishment, including immersion in excrement. On the place of this text in the formation of Hell see Bernstein 1993, pp. 283-291.

5. In his letters (I Cor 9:1 and 15:8; Gal 1:15-16) Paul says that Jesus “appeared” to him and appointed him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, but Paul does not describe the circumstances of the “appearance” (according to the chronology he gives at Gal 1:13-2:1 the “appearance” occurred at least 18 years before the time of writing). This may not have been the only occasion on which Paul believed that he had received a message directly from Jesus or from God. Acts 18:9 reports that when Paul was in Corinth “the Lord” appeared to him at night in a dream, assuring him that no harm would there befall him. Similarly, at Acts 22:17-21 Paul recounts an extended conversation that he had with Jesus in Jerusalem (here Paul falls into a trance and both sees and hears Jesus, who tells him to leave Jerusalem quickly, and go to the Gentiles). Paul believed that he had also received a direct instruction from God to make one of his rare visits to Jerusalem (Gal 2:2). Luke’s discrepant descriptions of the conversion “appearance” may go back to what Luke heard from Paul, although in Luke’s descriptions there is no “appearance” (Paul hears the voice of Jesus but does not see him). At Acts 9:2-9, 22:6-11, and 26:12-18 Paul carries letters from Jerusalem to Damascus, instructing the synagogue authorities to arrest anyone following “the new way.” Near Damascus a bright light from heaven shines upon him and a voice from heaven asks, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (AV). When Paul inquires of the voice who it is, the voice answers, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” Paul’s companions see the light and either hear the voice (Acts 9:7) or do not hear it (Acts 22:9). Paul alone is blinded by the light, and his companions lead him by the hand to Damascus. Three days later a believer named Ananias, to whom Jesus also has spoken (instructing him to find Paul and heal him), lays his hands on Paul and restores his sight. Paul is then baptized.

6. The high Christology, according to which Jesus created the world and is the physical embodiment of God, is expressed most clearly in Colossians. See especially Colossians 1:13-20 and 2:9-10. It is likely that Colossians was written by Paul, although some scholars think that it was written by one of Paul’s converts. Although Paul did not explicitly identify Jesus as the pre-existent *logos*, his Christology was compatible with the *logos* Christology of the Johannine circle.

7. Probably Q. Sergius Paullus, whose name appears on an inscription found at Kythraia in Cyprus (*Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes* vol. 3, no. 935). See also *IGRR* vol. 3, no. 930, for another reference to Paullus, this one identified as a proconsul, in an inscription from Cypriote Soli. The Cypriote governor may have been the brother of L. Sergius Paullus, one of the curators of the Tiber river in Claudius’ principate (*CIL* vol. 6, no. 31545).

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8. Far from requiring circumcision, Paul forbade it. See Galatians 5:2 (NEB), “Mark my words: I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision Christ will do you no good at all.”

9. Paul was exasperated that Old Covenant missionaries had persuaded some of the Galatians to keep the Sabbath and Judaean festival days. At Galatians 4:10-11 (NEB) he says, “You keep special days and months and seasons and years. You make me fear that all the pains I spent on you may prove to be labour lost.” See also Colossians 2:16-17 (NEB) “Allow no one therefore to take you to task about what you eat or drink, or over the observance of festival, new moon, or sabbath. These are no more than a shadow of what was to come; the solid reality is Christ’s.” The Letter to the Romans, sent to a largely Old Covenant community of Christ-followers in Rome, is much softer. See Rom 14:5-6: “Again, this man regards one day more highly than another, while that man regards all days alike. On such a point everyone should have reached conviction in his own mind.”

10. The lengthy text called the *Epistle of Barnabas* is in fact anonymous, and seems to date from ca. 100 CE.

11. Pliny, *Epist.* 10.96, with Trajan’s reply (10.97).

12. The second Gospel is called “the Gospel according to Mark” in the Muratorian Fragment, ca. 200 CE, and the ascription to Mark evidently goes back to an earlier date. Papias, a bishop at Hierapolis in southwest Anatolia well before 150 CE, wrote that the Gospel was written by Mark from recollections by Peter (see Eusebius, *H.E.* 3.39.15). The Mark in question is an enigmatic figure in the New Testament. His given name was John, but he was called Mark. The “John who is called Mark” is mentioned at Acts 15:37: there he is the subject of a dispute between Paul and Barnabas (having to choose between Paul and John Mark as a traveling companion, Barnabas chose Mark, who was his own cousin [Colossians 4:10]). Mark is also a strong candidate for “the beloved disciple” whose recollections are included in the fourth Gospel. See below, note 18. If John who was called Mark was indeed “the beloved disciple” we would have to conclude that Mark had nothing to do with the second Gospel, but furnished some of the material included in the fourth Gospel.

13. This reduction of the *torah* to the two commandments - love God, and love your neighbor as yourself - was central to several early Christian traditions and must have been central to Jesus’ own “good news.” See note 38 of chapter 11.

14. The author was hardly Matthew, who in the 30s was one of the twelve leaders of the early Jerusalem *ekklesia*. Matthew would have had his own personal memories of Jesus and would not have had to rely on the Gospel of Mark for his narrative and on Q for Jesus’ parables. It is nevertheless possible that Matthew may have been the ultimate source for some of the “discourse” material that is found in the first Gospel but not in the second and third.

15. The order of the canonical Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - reflects the supposed sequence of their composition. The Church Fathers believed that Matthew, the disciple of Jesus otherwise called Levi, wrote the first Gospel, and that the second was written by John Mark, to whose mother’s house in Jerusalem Peter had come after his miraculous deliverance from prison

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(Acts 12:12). On the authorship of the anonymous books of the New Testament see Fox 1991, pp. 126-36.

16. See Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.7: Principe Augusto hoc ortum est, Tiberio disciplina eius inlucit, sub Nerone damnatio invaluit, ut iam hinc de persona persecutoris ponderetis: si pius ille princeps, impii Christiani, si iustus, si castus, iniusti et incesti Christiani, si non hostis publicus, nos publici hostes; quales simus, damnator ipse demonstravit utique aemula sibi puniens, et tamen permansit hoc solum institutum Neronianum.

17. On “John who is called Mark,” see above, n. 12. Culpepper 1994, pp. 73-76, inclines against identifying the beloved disciple of the fourth Gospel with John the son of Zebedee. Culpepper notes that contributions by John Mark, who apparently was a Jerusalemite rather than a Galilean, would explain why the fourth Gospel situates much of Jesus’ activity in Jerusalem, during his pilgrimages to the great festivals (the synoptics, contrarily, locate it almost entirely in Galilee). Evidently the beloved disciple was an acquaintance of Caiaphas the high priest (John 18:15-16), an unlikely relationship for a Galilean youth. For John Mark’s mother’s house in Jerusalem see Acts 12:12.

18. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: the Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 31.

19. A considerable “church” was established at Ephesus by the middle of the first century. According to Acts 20:31 Paul spent three years in the city (Pauline scholars usually date his stay at Ephesus to ca. 54-57).

20. For the *logos* as intermediate between God and creation, see Philo, *Who is the Heir of Divine Things?* 42.205-06. At *Creation of the World* 24 the θεοῦ λόγος is the maker of the visible world. For Philo, the Genesis story that man was “made in the image of God” meant that humankind, being created by God’s *logos*, had a share in that *logos*.

21. Culpepper 1994, p. 108, explores “the nearly complete absence of any explicit reference to the apostle or to the Gospel of John in the first half of the second century.”

22. See Koester 1982, vol. 2, pp. 157-60, and Crossan 1989, pp. 363-406, for discussion of the *Didache*.

23. On the *Gospel of the Ebionites* see Koester 1982, vol. 2, pp. 202-03.

24. According to Koester 1982, vol. 2, pp. 201-02, the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans* was translated into Aramaic (or Syriac) from an original Greek text of Matthew, rather than the other way round.

25. Sandmel 1979, pp. 135-139, discusses Philo’s possible relationship to Gnosticism and concludes that Philo may well have played a role in the development of Gnosticism, especially by his elevation of a spiritual reality over physical reality. “Compared with Christian gnostics, his dualism was not extreme; compared with the rabbis in the normative tradition it was extreme” (p.

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138).

26. For general introductions to Gnosticism see Pagels 1979, Perkins 1993, or King 2003. For the Nag Hammadi texts see Coptic Gnostic Library Project 1988.

27. See, for example, the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, pp. 265-70, in Coptic Gnostic Library Project 1988.

28. Eusebius *HE* 4.7.7 reports that Basileides wrote 24 books dealing with the gospel, and that his ideas were quickly refuted by Agrippa Castor, whose refutation was still available in Eusebius' time.

29. Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 1.25.6.

30. It is possible that "Pius" is a Latin cognomen, and that the bishop's given name was Greek. Little is known about Bishop Pius (ca. 140-155), but he is said to have been the brother of Hermas, whose book called *The Shepherd of Hermas* was for a long time read in the churches.

31. The English "church" derives from the Germanic *kirk*, which in turn derived from the Greek adjective *kyriakē*. In Greek, *kyrios* was "Lord," and so the *ekklesia kyriakē* was "the Lord's assembly."

32. The word "eucharist" comes from the Greek verb, *eucharistein*, "to give thanks." In the various accounts of Jesus' last supper he "gives thanks" before breaking the bread and pouring the wine. So at I Cor 11:23-24 (OSB) Paul reports that according to the tradition given to him, "on the night of his arrest the Lord Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks (*eucharistēsas*) to God broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me'." See also Luke 22:17-19.

33. See Crossan 1998, pp. 423-444, a chapter entitled "The Common Meal Tradition."

34. I Cor 11:17-34.

35. On the frequency and place of meetings see Meeks 1983, pp. 142-150.

36. Here again a Jewish precedent may have been important: a synagogue was typically led by a single *archisynagogos*. Unlike the synagogue official, however, the Christian *presbyteros* was responsible for performing the sacraments (baptism, eucharist), and these gave him an authority that the *archisynagogos* never acquired.

37. Eusebius *HE* 3.25 shows the consensus in the early fourth century.

38. Eusebius *HE* 3.39.17.

39. For Jerome's claim to have translated the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* into Greek and Latin see his *De viris illustribus*, chapter 2. According to Koester 1982, vol. 2, pp. 223-24, this gospel came from a Jewish Christian milieu, "but this gospel was composed in Greek."

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40. The Gospels of Matthew and John were assumed to have been written from their own recollections by Jesus' disciples. Luke was supposed to have been informed by Paul, and Mark by Peter. See note 13.

41. It is no surprise that in every contest between orthodoxy and heresy the winner was always orthodoxy. Adapting Sir John Harrington's famous lines about treason, we may say that whenever heresy did prevail, none dared call it heresy.

42. The most recent study of Montanism and the bishops' reaction against it is Tabbernee 2007.

43. A few Pneumatics prophesied that a New Jerusalem would come down from Heaven and be located at Pepuza, a prophesy seized upon and ridiculed by opponents of the group.

44. For the *Protevangelium of James* see Schneemelcher 1991, pp. 421-439. A third- or fourth-century papyrus (Papyrus Bodmer V) of the text was found and published in 1952.

45. *Protevangelium* 8.1 (Schneemelcher 1991, p. 429).

46. In the *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis* ("Gelasius' decree about the books to be kept and the books not to be kept") one of the books to be discarded is *The Book of the Nativity of the Savior and of Mary, or the Midwife*.

47. This is Papyrus Bodmer V. In the papyrus the text is titled *The Birth of Mary, the Revelation of James*. The Bodmer Papyri, 22 in all, were discovered in Pabau, Egypt in 1952, were smuggled out of Egypt to Switzerland, and there were soon purchased and published by Martin Bodmer. About half of the Bodmer papyri are in Greek and half in Coptic. Pabau is a hamlet near the city of Dishna, a few miles downstream from Nag Hammadi and some thirty miles downstream from Luxor.

48. "Pius," whose episcopate is traditionally dated ca. 140-155, is said to have been the brother of Hermas, whose book *The Shepherd of Hermas* was much read by second-century Christians. It is likely that *Pius* is the Latin cognomen of a Greek resident in Rome.

49. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.3.

50. Cyprian *Epist.* 55.8 and 59.14. These letters were written after the death of Bishop Fabian in the Decian persecution, and after the contested election of Cornelius as Fabian's successor.

51. In the chronologically elaborated list, still affirmed in Istanbul, Andrew established the local church in 38 CE, Stachys served as bishop from 38 to 54, and Onesimus from 54 to 68. It was not unusual for a New Testament figure to be pressed into service to help fill gaps in various cities. So Onesimus, the runaway slave of Philemon, was claimed as an early monarchical bishop not only by the Christians of Constantinople but also by the church at Ephesos. Stachys is known only from Paul's affectionate greeting to him at Rom 16:9.

52. On the *HE* see Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).