The Early Church

From the beginnings to 461

W.H.C. FREND

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and winning the admiration of their enemies by their hopeless valor.[22] The Christians were neutrals. They played no part in the heroic sacrifice of the Jewish nation; and like other "moderates" they were to receive no thanks. Their position in Palestine was damaged beyond repair. There, orthodox Judaism was to be permanently the victor. The work of James perished with him. The Christian hope now lay in the Dispersion. The next fifty years would decide whether the missionary labors of Paul would bear fruit, or whether the Jews and pagans would prove too strong there also.

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The Old Israel and the New 70–135

The years that followed the fall of Jerusalem are among the most obscure in the life of the primitive Church. The Church is still basically a Jewish body, its organization and worship modeled on that of the synagogue and its relations with the outside world seen principally through Jewish eyes. In Palestine it fights for survival, while in the Dispersion it begins gradually to win over the outer circle of synagogue inquirers and to make headway among the pagan provincials. Despite eschatological expectations portrayed in the darkest of apocalyptic hues, in which the pagans are represented as enemies and persecutors doomed to everlasting destruction, it seldom comes to the notice of the authorities. The repression under Domitian, if such it was, the brief correspondence between Pliny and Trajan in 112–13, and Hadrian's rescript to Minucius Fundanus, Proconsul of Asia in circa 125, are isolated events amid decades of silence.

The main problem confronting the Church in the sixty years separating the two great Jewish wars was its relations with Judaism. The speed and extent of the Jewish recovery after 70 both in Palestine and the Dispersion have sometimes been underestimated. In these two generations Judaism was far from being a spent force politically or culturally. After the surrender of Jerusalem Roman treatment of the Jews had not been vindictive. They were no longer an "allied people," Jerusalem ceased to exist as the Jewish capital, the payment of two drachmas previously made to Yahweh by the Jews was now handed over to his conqueror, Jupiter Capitolinus, but Judaism remained *religio licita*, and in the Dispersion no serious brake was put on Jewish proselytism. Soon Palestinian Judaism found new leaders in Gamaliel ii, who was recognized by the Romans as Nasi or Prince of Jewry, and his younger contemporary Rabbi Akiba. The academy at Jamnia (Jabneh) provided the Jews with a new cultural and theological center. Here, toward A.D. 90 the Jewish canon of the Old Testament was codified and a special "benediction" added to the Shema,

cursing the Christian heretic and excluding him everlastingly from the fellowship of the synagogue. The Church in Palestine sank to the level of a despised minority, known only as Jews who had abandoned inconvenient parts of the law; and in that obscurity it was to remain until the Constantinian epoch.

In the Dispersion, however, the struggle was more even, as Christian and Jew vied with each other in pursuit of Gentile proselytes. It was about A.D. 95 that Josephus wrote his two books of Jewish apologetic against the Egyptian, Apion, in which he sought to present Judaism as the "reasonable man's religion," and recorded the welcome given by Jews to those who accepted their advice and became converts. The intensity of Jewish hostility toward Rome shown in apocalyptic works such as iv Ezra and iii Baruch did not extend to the Greek inhabitants of Asia Minor, and indeed, Judaism made some progress there. In Phrygia there were Jewish commercial guilds,[1] while Jewish inscriptions continue to record the benefactions of wealthy patrons. On the Greek mainland the enormous sum left by Ti. Cl. Polycharmus[2] to the Jews of Stobi was probably not an isolated example of affluence. A wealthy community and synagogue flourished at Ostia also. There was, too, the prestige of leaders such as Josephus, men of worldwide repute and possessed of social status superior to any Christian leader of the day.

Yet with all these advantages Judaism faltered and the victory in the Dispersion went to the Christians. Jewry could never free itself from the shackles of the law. Trypho's advice to Justin circa 137, "If you desire salvation, first be circumcised, and then follow God's new moons,"[3] was repellent absurdity to many admirers of Hebrew monotheism and Hebrew ethics. "The fussiness and stupidity" of the Jews became a byword among these inquirers.[4] Christianity benefited correspondingly and spread. By the turn of the century we hear of communities in the provinces of Asia Minor north of the Taurus, in Bithynia, in Pontus where Marcion's father was Bishop of Sinope, and perhaps before the disaster of 79 at Pompeii and Herculaneum.

At each stage, however, Jewish heresy and Jewish malediction dogged the Christians. In the Pastorals the writer of the letter to Titus denounced "evil teachers" spreading false doctrine "especially from among the circumcised" (Titus 1:10). In 107 or so, in Antioch and the cities of Asia Minor, Ignatius on his way to martyrdom at Rome found himself at grips with some form of Jewish Docetic heresy which was misleading the faithful. His hatred of the Jews burns through his letters. "It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism,"[5] he cries in his letter to the Christians of Magnesia. Jewish teaching could be dismissed

as "strange doctrines and ancient fables,"[6] useless for the Christian to pursue.

The Epistle of Barnabas (probably Alexandrine, 100–30) contains a bitter attack on the Jews and denies them any right to the prophecies of the old dispensation.[7] It is noticeable too, that the apocryphal but non-Gnostic Gospels attributed to the early second century and found in Egypt, paint the Jews in the worst of lights and Jesus' denunciation of them is made correspondingly strong.[8] But it is in the pages of Revelation with their terrible comparison between the "true" and the "false" Jews and the denunciation of the "synagogue of Satan" whose members were enemies and persecutors of the saints that the intensity of ill-feeling between the two groups can most easily be seen.[9] In the province of Asia the struggle between Jew and Christian was bitter and incessant. By the end of the first century it was contributing toward the hostility which the Christian would soon encounter throughout the Greco-Roman world.

All the time, however, the demands of Jesus' message were breaking up the Jewish mold in which the primitive Church had been set. There could not be a Jewish counterpart to the Eucharist, with its solemn memorial and sacrificial elements, because the rite referred only to Jesus. Similarly, water baptism as the sole means of initiation had meaning only in virtue of Christ's baptism. If Judaism generally provided the outward form of the Christian service, it contributed little or nothing to its inner meaning. Moreover, with the fall of Jerusalem the Temple and its ceremonial ceased, and there was no longer anything to tie the growing Christian communities of the Dispersion to the traditional center of Jewry.

Meantime, the Church had been evolving its own organization and liturgy suited to its own needs. In the first generation after the Crucifixion the Christians had seen themselves as the bearers of a unique message of Jesus of the lineage of David who was Messiah, who had wrought mighty works, had given a new and authoritative teaching and law, had died and risen again. Victorious over the evil powers of the universe he would return and judge the living and the dead and establish a kingdom which would have no end. The Christians were living in a brief interim which would precede the Coming, but however brief, some form of organization and outward means of preparing for the events to come must be presupposed.

Like the legal position of the Christians after 64, the question of the ministry has been bedeviled by the demands of various Christian traditions. On the one hand, we are told that "the foundation of the Christian *ecclesia* and the establishment of the germs of a formal ministry go back

to Our Lord himself."[10] Moreover, "the Christian society was to be an hierarchical society governed by the Apostles with St. Peter at their head." This view accepted by Roman Catholics is ably set out by A. Fliche and V. Martin in the first volume of their monumental *Histoire de l'Église*.[11] On the other hand, the school of Church historians following Harnack and Lietzmann have considered that the Church gradually evolved its organization, until by A.D. 90 its ministry and some parts of its liturgy corresponded in their outward forms to those of the Hellenistic synagogue.[12]

Both ideas embody elements of truth, though not altogether for the reasons stated by their authors. Apart from A. A. T. Ehrhardt,[13] few critics have taken into account the vital differences between the needs of the ministry in Jerusalem and in the Dispersion, the one Aramaic-speaking, thinking in terms of Jerusalem and Jewish nationalist aspirations in Palestine, the other working in the Greco-Roman world and the intellectual environment of synagogue and Septuagint. In addition, our documents do not tell a consistent or even a coherent story. No amount of ingenuity can fully reconcile the differing accounts of the ministry to be found in *I Clement*, the *Letters* of Ignatius and the *Didache* respectively. Ignatius writes as though the norm of Church government was the bishop, priest and deacon, with absolute power in the hands of the bishop. The *Didache* treats the bishop on a lower level than the prophet and teacher,[14] while *I Clement* though asserting the preeminence of bishops gives no clue whether there was to be one bishop or a college of presbyter-bishops in each See.

The question indeed, whether Jesus sought to found an *ecclesia* is not properly stated. Israel was already an *ecclesia*, a "congregation of the faithful" and "people of God," among whom, however, were individuals set apart to carry out particular functions, such as Levites and rabbis. The decisive step taken by Jesus was to identify his own followers as the true Israel, perhaps in this case taking into account the long tradition of the holy remnant and the vine symbolism of Maccabean nationalism (John 15:1). Jesus' thoughts had their roots in the Palestinian past. Thus, from Pentecost onward each Christian felt himself in a particular way the witness of the truth of Jesus' message and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His baptism, that is, reception of the Spirit, had made him "in Christ," just as circumcision had been the guarantee of membership of the old Israel. The Holy Spirit was his leader marking him off from unrepentant Jews and Gentiles alike. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." (Acts 15:28) was the way in which the Christian ex-

pressed his membership of his community in the first century A.D., regardless of any office he might hold.

Against this background, one sees how a different form of ministry could evolve in Jerusalem and in the Dispersion respectively. The New Israel was pledged to the fulfillment rather than the destruction of the law, and its organization must therefore be recognizably that of the Israel of the law wherever it was planted. So, whether we accept the Peter tradition of leadership of Matthew or the James tradition of Thomas,[15] we find early on at Jerusalem a Christian Sanhedrin presided over by James, assisted by the twelve disciples representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Possibly also, there was an inner council of three, consisting of James, Peter and John the son of Zebedee. And James, as we saw in the last chapter, had monarchical powers. Here, surely, is one of the starting points of the tradition both of monarchical episcopacy and also of the apostolic succession. James was the high priest and head of the Church as his Jewish counterpart was the interpreter of Yahweh to the Jews. In Jerusalem pre-70 the latter was also prophet and priest, the all-powerful guardian of the covenant which he handed unblemished to his successor. It is interesting that the first Christian who seriously concerned himself about episcopal succession lists was the Palestinian Hegesippus circa 170. In the Clementine *Homilies* also (probably of third-century Palestinian Christian origin), the success of the mission would be crowned by the acceptance of a monarchical bishop in the new-formed community.

Meantime, in the Dispersion a much looser organization was emerging. In 45 we find that at Antioch, along with the Apostles, there were "prophets" and "teachers." These are the oldest distinctive offices in the Church and as the *Didache* (chaps. 11–13) shows, they remained the primary offices of the Church in some places until the turn of the second century. When one looks at the well-known Pauline texts (1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11), "And God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, second prophets, thirdly teachers . . ." to various types of assistant, the Apostle was speaking of the internal organization of a community with which his readers would be familiar. These offices could all be paralleled in the Judaism of the time.

The problem is, therefore, how the bishop, priest and deacon came into existence, and what their relation was to the more primitive offices of the Church. In answering these questions, we should not forget the Jewish environment in which Paul and his friends worked. We notice first how the Christians at Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas for

their first missionary journey. "They laid their hands on them and sent them away" (Acts 13:3). This followed the prescribed method of setting apart an individual who had been selected for the Levitical order. As in Numbers 8:10, "The Children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites." In the first congregations they established, the Apostles "laid hands" on those whom they appointed presbyters (Acts 14:23) and these, like the Jewish *zequenim*, acted as administrators, judges and rulers of the Christian synagogues. It was with reference to these functions that Paul was to write to the Corinthian presbyters in 53. In the later missionary journeys, however, we find bishops and deacons, and not presbyters, such as at Philippi and Colossae. Why the change? The deacon was a subordinate, whether he served the saints at table in Jerusalem, or helped the bishop at the cult meal, or, like Phoebe at Cenchraea, kept house for necessitous Christians in a busy port. At this stage he presents no serious difficulty. The problem of Church Order revolves round the office of the bishop.

There is no clear-cut solution.[16] Paul addresses the same people at Ephesus first as "presbyters" and then as "bishops," and whether the Church in Rome was governed by a bishop or a council of presbyters in circa A.D. 100, when Clement wrote to the Corinthians on behalf of the Church there, we may never know. One difficulty is that the term *episcopos* (bishop) had two different meanings. First, there was the literal meaning of "overseer" which included in synagogue parlance overseers of charity, or guardians of the scrolls, but secondly, the term could mean "priest" as it was used regarding Eleazar in Numbers 4:16. Both meanings survived in Christianity. In the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Rome, 100–30) we hear of "bishops" looking after hospitality on behalf of the community and therefore acceptable to the Lord (*Similitudes* 9:27), but there was also the more usual meaning, denoting the head of the community. Just as each synagogue had its ruler, or board of rulers, so each church had its bishop or perhaps board of presbyter-bishops, among whom there must always have been a president (in Rome, circa 160 Justin calls him *prohestos* and not *episcopos*). This development took place not only on administrative grounds but also for more important reasons arising out of the needs of the Eucharist. A bishop must be not only a virtuous man, husband of one wife, etc., but a person fitted to represent Jesus, himself both priest and victim, at the solemn moment of the Eucharist before the sacramental meal eaten by each community before dawn on the "Day of the Lord" (Sunday). Also, he must represent the people should the Lord return as expected on that day. These factors applied only to Christianity, and made for the singling out of one

individual resident in the Christian community as its leader, or bishop.

All this did not come about in a day, but looked at closely, our authorities, namely the Pastorals and Johannine letters in the New Testament, *I Clement*, the letters of Ignatius and the *Didache*, give some idea of how this was taking place in the churches of the Dispersion at the turn of the second century. The Pastorals and Johannine letters show that there were still men of high-priestly and apostolic authority responsible for churches within a defined region (such as Titus had been in Crete) and able to call to order resident officials such as Diotrephes "who loveth to have preeminence" must have been (3 John). There were also "prophets and teachers" as *Didache* shows, and in certain circumstances these could take precedence over the bishop in the administration of the Eucharist (*Didache* 10:7). But the regional leaders with apostolic authority were dying out and the power of the prophets was already on the wane. They had been itinerant officials whose message or prophecy would be directly connected with the Coming. It would generally be apocalyptic in content, intelligible only in the context of the Last Days when "the Spirit would be poured out." The future lay with the resident clergy, and by A.D. 100 in Antioch and among many of the communities in Asia Minor and on the Greek mainland the bishop with his priests and deacons was in control. Ignatius, traveling through the cities of western Asia Minor on his way to martyrdom, shows that Polycarp had already begun his long reign in Smyrna, and that bishops were in authority in the other towns which he visited. His own clamant emphasis on episcopacy could not have been wholly unrepresentative of the Christian scene.[17] With the recession of the Second Coming into the distant future (see 2 Peter 3:3–4) the way was open for the bishop, assisted by his presbyters and deacons, to become the norm of Christian government throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Two other documents of this period tell us something about the internal life of the primitive Church, namely the First Epistle of Clement (*I Clement*) and the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians. *I Clement* is at first reading a very dull work, but as one considers it further it becomes extremely significant. We do not know its exact date. The "calamities" or "critical circumstances" of which the writer speaks at the beginning of his letter need have no connection with persecution, but could refer simply to time-consuming difficulties which had prevented him from replying to the letter of the Church of Corinth before. Even so, a date about A.D. 100 seems indicated, and Clement himself was probably a presbyter at Rome charged with liaison with other Christian communities. The problem he faced was the irregular deposition of some presbyters at

Corinth by the "young men" of the community. It was a matter of discipline. No question of belief was involved, and this alone makes Clement's assumptions about what a Christian held very interesting. Clement shows that the concept of God was Trinitarian, "Have we not one God, and one Christ and one Spirit of Grace poured out upon us?" he asks (chap. 46:6). God was creator and ruler of the universe "all-merciful and beneficent Father." There was no trace of the Gnostic dualism of the next century. The universe was an ordered and harmonious whole, controlled by God, in which each grade and individual had its part to play. Jesus was both His servant (*pais*) and Son, and as in Hebrews, represented as the "High Priest of our offerings and guardian of our souls." He preexisted before the Incarnation and was associated with the Father and Holy Spirit as both savior and redeemer. The Christian who became "in Christ" through baptism was a member of a fellowship which was both a new creation and a continuation of the old Israel.

Clement was steeped in the Septuagint and the moral and ethical law of Judaism. To him it was Scripture and he quotes it more than a hundred times. It is evident that he sees the Christian order as a natural progression from the Jewish order. "Of our father Jacob came the priests and Levites who serve the altar of God. From him comes Jesus Christ according to the flesh" (chap. 32:2), and so too, in the well-known passages in chapters 42 and 44 he regards the Christian priesthood as the lineal descendant of that of Israel. The organization of his community also was a matter of course and tradition, not something that had come into being recently or which would end soon, and his distress at the behavior of the Church of Corinth toward their presbyters is obvious. Yet it was not his duty to chide and rebuke. He contented himself with reminding the Corinthians of past examples of fortitude and humility, not least, those of Jesus himself and the Apostles. The Roman representatives despatched to Corinth were simple messengers. As in Paul's time, it is evident that in both secular and religious matters the two cities were linked by the closest ties.

Clement does not tell us much about his Church's use of the New Testament nor of the details of its organization. He assumes rather than expounds. Polycarp of Smyrna's letter to the Church of Philippi written circa 108 fills a gap.[18] Where Clement is still thinking in terms of Logia (it seems evident that his Gospel like that of Thomas contained no Passion Narrative), Polycarp shows that the four Gospels, 1 Peter, the Pastorals, Hebrews and some at any rate of the Pauline Epistles were being read in church. He also shows us a neat concentrated little community, with its separate divisions of presbyters, deacons, widows and

the mysterious "young men" as we find them in *I Clement*, each occupying its appointed function. It was a Christian synagogue, concerned with its own life and purity of doctrine, determined to be "blameless before the Gentiles"[19] but utterly unconcerned in their affairs.

It is difficult to think of this letter having been written in the reign of Trajan. At this time the Church was more interested in the Coming and in stamping out false Judaistic teaching than in the state of the world in whose material prosperity it was sharing. The Roman Empire was scarcely more interested in the Church. Only at rare intervals did their paths cross.

For Rome, Judaism both as a political force and as an erosive propaganda was still the main preoccupation. *Exuere patriam*[20]—to desert (the law of) the country and one's ancestors, and to spurn the accepted ethic and religion was the reproach against the convert to Judaism. As Juvenal shows in a satire written circa 125, the process of conversion was often subtle, lengthy, but in the end complete.[21] It was probably through Judaism that Domitian's "persecution" of the Christians arose.

At least this is a possible explanation for the events in Rome in 95, at the end of Domitian's reign. Then, we hear from Dio Cassius that the Emperor had his cousin and heir presumptive Flavius Clemens and his wife Flavia Domitilla arrested, together with the consul for the year 95, Acilius Glabrio.[22] Clemens and Domitilla were charged with "atheism" in that they had "slipped into Jewish customs," and they were condemned, Clemens and Glabrio to death, Domitilla to exile on the island of Pantellaria. There is the usual difficulty over the evidence. Dio does not say that any of these nobles were Christians, but, though he was writing in 225 in Bithynia, one of the most Christianized provinces of the Empire, he never mentions Christianity! Even so, when Domitian was assassinated in September 96, and his successor Nerva recalled the exiles, the coin which commemorated these events spoke of "abuses of the Jewish tax" being abolished.[23] Moreover, while the catacomb of Domitilla was Christian by the mid-second century or a little later, it was not so originally, when Domitilla granted the land for the benefit of her freedmen. All one can say is that perhaps Christianity had something to do with the "Jewish customs" into which Clemens and Domitilla fell. Even so, a lawyer named Pliny had been in Rome at the time, and could write to Trajan seventeen years later that "he had never been at a trial of Christians."[24]

In Asia, however, where Christianity was strongest, various developments were increasing the chances of outright persecution. Here, from the middle of the second century (Melito of Sardis), Domitian was re-

garded as the second persecutor of the Church, and perhaps with good reason.[25] For the policy which in Britain had led to deliberate efforts at romanization by building towns and markets, led in Asia to an alliance between the Roman authorities and the local priesthoods and between the cult of Caesar and the national cults of Asia and Phrygia. Moreover, Domitian, unlike his predecessors Vespasian and Titus, was interested in propagating his own cult. His great statue at Pergamum and his temple at Laodicea warned Christians that the Lord Caesar expected to be worshiped as well as obeyed. At the same time, the Christians shared to the full the tensions and expectations of their Jewish rivals. For those like Polycarp[26] who agreed with the writer of 1 Peter "Fear God. Honour the King" (1 Pet. 2:17), there were many more who shared the hopes of Revelation, of the Four Horsemen, of fire and brimstone, and vengeance on the persecutors of the saints, and of the thousand years rule of the just. In the 90s, there were famines in Asia Minor such as Revelation describes, and it is more than idle speculation to associate the martyrdom of Antipas and the harrying of those who refused to wear the mark of the beast (an imperial stamp on purchases) to these years. Revelation is probably the reality behind Domitian's reputation as a persecutor.

The provinces of Asia Minor also provide the only other evidence of interest by the authorities in the affairs of the Christians. The province of Pontus–Bithynia on the Black Sea coast had been the scene of shameful mismanagement. The cities had been corruptly governed, vast sums of public money had been squandered, incompetent administrators had tried to erect public buildings on swamp-ground where they collapsed. Faction and discontent were rife. Early in 112 Trajan (98–117) sent his friend and experienced lawyer Pliny as his special representative to the province to attempt to put matters right, and Pliny's tenth book of letters shows how he attempted to deal with the situation. Of this collection, two letters in volume ten deal with the Christians. It seems that Pliny only came on them late in his mission, probably at the end of 112 when he had reached the town of Amastris in the eastern part of the province. He appears to have been told that the local temples were in a bad way, and that a sect called Christians were to blame. Some Christians were brought before him. They made a bad impression. Pliny asked them in the customary way three times whether they accepted the accusation, and when they refused to deny it sent them off for execution, for he adds in his report "whatever they were guilty of, their very obstinacy deserves to be punished."[27]

Then complications began to arise. Individuals recanted, and someone produced a list with a large number of names on it, many of whom were

innocent, and others though they had once been Christians had ceased to be so three, five or even twenty years previously. For this group Pliny applied a sacrifice test to which he added the demand of "cursing Christ," i.e., abjuring a demonic name. Thoroughly interested, he investigated further, tried to get more information from two deaconesses, and came to the conclusion that he was dealing with simply an extravagant superstition. Meantime, his remedial measures had had their effect. Animals were being brought for sacrifice and the temples were being frequented again. Pliny could send a satisfactory report to his master.[28]

Trajan's reply was as short as Pliny's report had been prolix. To quote it:

> You have adopted the proper course, my dear Secundus, in your examination of the cases of those who were accused to you as Christians, for indeed nothing can be laid down as a general ruling involving something like a set form of procedure. They are not to be sought out; but if they are accused and convicted, they must be punished—yet on this condition, that whoso denies himself to be a Christian, and makes the fact plain by his action, that is, by worshiping our gods, shall obtain pardon on his repentance, however suspicious his past conduct may be. Papers, however, which are presented unsigned ought not to be admitted in any charge, for they are a very bad example and unworthy of our time (tr., J. Stevenson).

Pliny had in fact done very well and the Emperor could afford a word of praise to a conscientious civil servant.

Once again, we have to try to avoid the legal tangle which generations of historians and lawyers have built up around this incident. To take the facts as they are revealed by the exchange of letters, Christianity for some reason was an offense and Polycarp seems to confirm that the Christians were liable to persecution,[29] and yet Christians are rare enough for Pliny to refer the whole affair to his master. They had evidently not been the subject of a *lex* proscribing them. Indeed, Pliny had tried and punished them by virtue of his magisterial powers, acting on information received from accusers. He was struck by the defiance of the first batch of the accused, and concluded that this was precisely the sort of behavior he had been sent to Bithynia to quell. Trajan's answer allowed him discretion within the limits of the general instructions issued to Proconsuls, namely to set the province free from evil men whom they should seek out; but Christians were not to be sought out, and if they recanted, and worshiped the Roman gods, they were to be freed.

As neither "treason" (*maiestas*) nor atheism are specifically mentioned the alternative remains that as in Rome in 64, the Bithynian Christians were regarded as members of some form of illegal Judaistic association,

which was perverting the worship of the gods in the province. It is clear that Pliny was pleased when he found that Christians ate ordinary food and even more pleased that they had given up their *agape*, the common meal, the hallmark of a society. The latter, whether public or secret, were the curse of the province, and only a short time before Trajan had forbidden the 150 firemen in the city of Nicomedia to form one.[30] He was not now going to legalize that of the Christians. The wind, however, was to be tempered for the shorn lamb, and repentant Christians were to be dealt with according to the "liberality" and "humanity" of the times.

Finally, the *collegium* (association) theory fits what is known of the views of provincials in the Greek east about the Christians later in the century. In 165 the satirist Lucian of Samosata on the Euphrates describes a dissolute Cynic, Peregrinus, during a brief but intense flirtation with Syrian Christianity as a Christian *thiasarches* (i.e., leader of an association)[31] and a decade or so later the anti-Christian apologist, Celsus, opens his *True Doctrine* with the sentence "There are some public societies that are legal, but secret societies are not"[32]—and the Christians belonged among the latter. Perhaps Ignatius of Antioch had been arrested a few years before as leader of the Christian *collegium* there, and as a Roman citizen sent to Rome to be tried and punished.

Trajan had good cause to avoid exacerbating religious dissensions especially where Judaism or its offshoots were concerned. In 115 when away on his great campaign against Parthia, the Jews of the Dispersion rose.[33] In Cyrenaica they proclaimed a certain Lukuas or Andreas as king, and wreaked havoc in the province. Nothing of the hated Gentiles must remain. The temple of Zeus at Cyrene was undermined and its huge columns allowed to come crashing to the ground. There they stayed, until raised by British Army engineers after the Second World War. The provincial highways were hacked up in an excess of fanaticism against the works of idolatry. Thousands of Greeks were killed. In Alexandria and Cyprus there were also terrible risings. The Jewish revolt perhaps saved Parthia. It spelled doom for the Dispersion Jews as both a political and religious threat. Reprisals were grim and calculated, and in some areas such as Cyprus, Jews were treated as open enemies and banned entry. The Christians had stood aside, and they now benefited.

Trajan died in August 117, and it seems that his successor, Hadrian, may have aimed at drawing a distinction between Jews and Christians in favor of the latter. We find that in a letter to the Proconsul of Asia, Minucius Fundanus in 124–5, replying to a question by his predecessor, Hadrian ordered that a Christian must be accused of definite crimes

under due process of law before he could be condemned, and if the charge failed he had the right of cross-charging his accuser under the *calumnia* procedure.[34] To modern ears this was no great concession. The courts were still open to hear charges against Christians, and Christianity was not legalized. But few would risk the penalties of *calumnia* for the sake of bringing a charge, and there were still fewer Roman officials empowered to decide capital charges. It would need a grave situation in the community or a bitter enemy to denounce a Christian. No wonder then, that Justin Martyr included a copy of the text of the rescript at the end of his *I Apology* written in 155.

The Jews were not so lucky: Hadrian was in Palestine in 129 on his way to Egypt, and seems then to have given the Jewish leaders a half-promise that they would be allowed to return to Jerusalem. For some reason which we can only guess at (perhaps in an obscure way connected with the drowning of his favorite Antinous in the Nile in 130) Hadrian took a bitter dislike to the Jews. He equated circumcision with castration, i.e., made it a criminal offence, and instead of fulfilling the hopes of Palestinian Jews, ordered the restoration of Jerusalem, but as an wholly pagan city *Aelia Capitolina*. For two years discontent simmered, to flare up in 132 in a series of guerrilla actions directed against the Roman garrisons and traders. Once again, the initial successes went to the Jews. Their leader, Bar Kochba, declared his independence of Rome by minting his own coins and instituting his own era. Akiba and his friends rallied to his cause. They accepted him as son of the star and as messiah. They were soon undeceived. Rome gradually gained the upper hand. Recently, discoveries in the caves overlooking the Dead Sea have revealed evidence for the last desperate stands of the Jewish nationalists.[35] By 135, 985 villages had been devastated, and Hadrian had himself proclaimed Imperator for the second time.[36] Akiba suffered martyrdom. The hopes of apocalyptic Judaism died with him.

The Christians had not supported Bar Kochba. Indeed, they had been persecuted by him. But in some ways they were affected by his defeat. The blighting of Jewish apocalyptic hopes entailed a blighting of their own. As the writer of 2 Peter shows, doubts were already being raised as to the reality of the Coming. These doubts were not to be stilled.[37] From now on, in the settled Christian communities apocalyptic was on the wane, its place being taken by speculation about the nature of Jesus' promise, his ministry and his revelation of the world beyond. With the emergence of Gnosticism in the person of Basilides at Alexandria circa 132 the history of Christian doctrinal controversy begins.

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5

The Gnostics. Marcion 130–80

With the second capture of Jerusalem we reach the end of the Judeo-Christian period of the Church's history. As we have seen, up to now much of its outward form and many of its aspirations had been Jewish, Jewish in the dominance of apocalyptic, Jewish in its defensive arrogance toward the pagan world, Jewish in its tight set little communities with their strict internal discipline, their hierarchical structure, and also their social conscience. In 130 a traveler through the cities of Asia Minor might be excused if he failed to differentiate adequately between the old and the new Israel, for amid all their mutual execrations, was it not merely a question of one group fasting on Mondays and Thursdays and the other on Wednesdays and Fridays?[1] If the Christians were harmless it was only because there were not many of them. Had not the Jewish-Christian prophet Elchesai foretold a colossal apocalyptic war on the Romano-Parthian frontier; and had not this been fulfilled in 115? Yet, of those who had been attracted by the confident prophecies of the end of the world many had fallen away.

But some pagans had inquired further, and by 130 there were men, such as Justin of Neapolis (Nablus in Samaria), who having tried every philosophy from Stoicism, through the Peripatetics to Platonism, finally turned to Christianity. Christian teaching and Christian bravery in face of death had converted him, and he was not alone. The influx of Greeks into the Church, however, was bringing its own problems. A century later, Origen had a pertinent remark to make on the effect of the Christian message on thinking Greeks of Alexandria.

> So then, since Christianity appeared to men as something worthy of serious attention, not only to people of the lower classes as Celsus thinks, but also to many scholars among the Greeks, sects inevitably came to exist, not at all on account of factions and love of strife, but because several learned men made a serious attempt to understand the doctrines of Christianity.