THE END OF THE BEGINNING:

HOW THE JESUS MOVEMENT BECAME THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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The Easter Wars

In the 190s AD, Christians were passionately divided over the question of whether Easter Sunday should fall on Sunday. However nitpicking the issue might sound, the controversy actually involved very substantial issues of identity, culture and faith, issues that shaped the West's religious tradition. Just how closely should the new Jesus movement hew to practices derived from Judaism? Should Christians commemorate Passover?

Easter commemorates the Resurrection that is the central fact of Christian faith. According to the lunar Jewish calendar, Jesus had perished on the 14th day of the month Nisan, a Friday, and the gospels reported that he had been resurrected on the Sunday. As that Friday fell in the season of the Passover, Christians commemorated it with the Greek term for that feast, *Pascha*. For many centuries, Christians have followed that Friday/Sunday pattern. The date may vary from year to year, but Good Friday always falls on a Friday, and Easter Sunday on a Sunday. How could things ever have been otherwise?

But matters were very different in early times. In the churches of Asia Minor – some of the oldest of all Christian communities, and the ones most closely tied to the apostles - Christian Pascha in the second century always fell on the fourteenth of Nisan, whatever the day of the week, and thus followed Jewish practice. The Alexandrian church, in contrast, favored Sunday observance, and so

did Rome. About 190, Rome's bishop Victor demanded that Asian bishops fell into line, and a series of councils and synods demanded that the Resurrection day should fall on Sunday. Those holdouts who favored the old apostolic practice of observing the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan suddenly found themselves labeled as heretics with the ugly technical label of Quartodecimans, literally "Fourteeners."

However technical the calendrical minutiae in this affair, it points to a powerful theme in Christian history, namely just how late in that story the churches decided matters that we might have thought were absolutely fundamental. We normally think of a rigid separation between Christian and Jewish practice sometime around 70 AD, and certainly no later than the end of the first century. That is the interpretation offered in the myriad of books, articles and sermons that appear each year. Yet a hundred years after that supposed separation, some of the most significant churches were still relying on a Jewish structure of months and days. How, we might ask, how could so fundamental an issue, so powerful a symbolic marker of religious identity, still be undecided?

Nostalgia for a Bygone Faith

In many other ways as well, Christians at this time were still believing and doing things that fit better with what we might think of as the earliest apostolic ages. Most accounts present the earliest church as a thoroughly radical and utopian sect, open to prophecy, charisma, and miracle, and living in daily expectation of Christ's imminent return. As this event was pushed ever further into the future, so the emerging church spiritualized its messages and promises. At the same time, it developed into a more formal institution, with its hierarchy and bishops. That transformation was acutely apparent in matters of authority. While the earliest church depended on living apostles and inspired prophets, its successors followed an institutional church, and obeyed the mandates of scripture. Surely, we think, such a change must have been accomplished not long after the closing of the New Testament, at the start of the second century.

Such a trajectory, though, fits poorly with the historical facts. Still at the end of the second century, major congregations were seriously debating the approval of the so-called New Prophecy of Montanism, a charismatic movement that claimed that its living prophets were proclaiming spiritual truths equal in authority to those of the scriptures. Still at this time, the range of scriptures in general Christian use was far larger than later Christian concepts of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. Still at the end of the second century, some respected Christian leaders insisted that the Bible's promises of a future miraculous age of peace and plenty had to be read in a material and terrestrial sense, and not postponed and spiritualized as a supernatural promise of Heaven. Still, major churches followed interpretations of Christ and his mission that by later standards were radically heretical, and far beyond the fold of acceptable belief. Large sections of the Christian community felt able to reject the whole Old Testament, and the Jewish God that it revealed.

On every one of these issues, and on many other questions of belief and practice, and we can see the critical era of transformation and decision at the turn of the third century - roughly between 185 and 215. Although changes had been accumulating gradually, the pace of change then accelerated rapidly to create a revolutionary transformation. This was the watershed moment at which the Christian movement made the decisive move from being a Jewish sect to a free-standing independent church, on the verge of becoming a world religion. If all the simmering issues were not resolved and the various factions suppressed – as they assuredly were not – then at least it was clear that future debates would be fought out within one mainstream community, the Great Church, a vast

transcontinental entity spanning the known world, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. The wave of councils summoned forth by the Paschal debates of the 190s was in fact the first clear evidence of that global reach.

That Great Church was fundamentally committed to the defense and promotion of the doctrinal mainstream, defined in ever more precise terms. Wholly new concepts of orthodoxy became commonplace, together with new vocabularies. It was around 200 that the brilliant African theologian Tertullian (c.160-220) first applied the Latin word *trinitas* to the Christian deity. As with the poor Quartodecimans, those who espoused yesterday's normality suddenly became today's heterodoxy.

In terms of modern social theory, this period of some thirty years in the late second/early third centuries was when the movement changed from being an upstart sect – spontaneous, passionate, inchoate – to a fully-formed institutionalized "church," a change symbolized by new structures and hierarchies, more formalized patterns of worship and liturgy, and the strict regulation of individual prophecy. Also transformed were notions of authority, with a shift from charismatic or prophetic credentials to an emphasis on tradition and (gradually) bureaucracy. Newer institutions also felt a powerful impetus to centralization and standardization. This was a classic transmutation of a kind that has befallen so many other new religious movements through human history.

I will discuss these transformations in more detail in the following pages, but a brief summary would include the following "firsts" – the innovations and breakthroughs – all from that short period around 200:

**Scale and Diversity: The church's vast geographical scale demanded a much greater recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity, beyond the original Greek and Aramaic. For the first time, Latin and Syriac became vehicles of major Christian writing and thought, with Coptic rising as a cultural force.*

**A World Church: Despite its growth, the church retained its sense of common identity, as manifested by the first great councils.*

**Planting Roots: Globalization coincided with localization. As the churches developed local roots, they no longer relied on itinerant leaders and immigrants. Victor, whom I have already mentioned as the Roman Pope of the 190s, was the first holder of that office to speak Latin.*

**As a dubious blessing of this trend, the church's very first anti-Jewish polemic in Latin appeared a year or two after 200.*

**Authority and Tradition: In the extensively preserved Christian discourse and debate of this era, arguments repeatedly relied on church tradition and long authority, exactly the characteristics of an institutionalized church rather than a sect.*

**Hierarchy: Although bishops and clergy are recognizable in earlier eras, their roles and functions now become much more standardized and formalized. They become the crucial transmitters and guarantors of tradition and authenticity. Victor may have been the first Roman Pope to act as a bishop, rather than the chair of the governing board of the local congregation.*

**Institutional Life: churches and bishoprics now became corporate property-owning institutions, vastly increasing the material concerns at issue in any theological debates.*

**Clergy and Laity. It was precisely around 200 that we find the first evidence of clergy as a distinct profession or caste, a textbook sign of the distinction between a sect and a "church." That concept in turn consigned the rest of believers to the category of "laity", literally just "the people."*

**Priesthood. The theory of Christian clergy as priests originates in this era, with all the Old Testament implications of that term, and all the theological implications of that insight.*

**Christian and Jewish Identity: The Easter controversy was the clearest example of a newly assertive Christian identity and ideology separate from Judaism. Meanwhile, it was also around 200 that Jewish thinkers took their own steps to a new distinct identity with the maturity of Rabbinic Judaism. And Jewish-Christian sects expressed their theology in bold new literary endeavors.*

**Creating Catholic Theology. Around 200, Tertullian creates the language of later Catholic theology in a wide range of matters, notably including the concept of clergy. His amazingly prolific writings gave Latin-speakers a firm theological foundation both in language and concepts.*

**Tertullian is the overwhelming source for many ideas and themes that are often credited to Augustine, two centuries afterwards. Without Tertullian, Augustine would have been inconceivable.*

**Just to take one example, although he did not actually invent the Western concept of Satan, Tertullian's writings around 200 offered the essential foundation for the idea, and supplied the key scriptural references.*

**Church Order: These years mark a new sophistication in Christian liturgy and devotional practice, and more formal rituals. Several surviving texts demonstrate the near-obsessive concern with "Church Order," with its assumptions about formality, hierarchy, and the specialized roles of the emerging clerical caste. Eucharistic ideas in particular became central to spiritual power and prestige, with shared communion the essential criterion for church membership.*

**Cultural Genesis: The volume and diversity of Christian cultural and literary contributions grow massively in these years, suggesting a whole new scale of intellectual engagement. Christian musical culture and hymnody also originate at this very time.*

**Engagement with Mainstream Culture: Only in this era could Christian thinkers, for the first time, engage in serious debate with the pagan cultural mainstream, through sophisticated apologetics, and the emergence of distinctively Christian philosophy. These efforts manifest a new social confidence, and new class pretensions.*

**Gender and Sexuality: a fast-growing hostility to sexuality was transforming attitudes to celibacy, and to gender. The movement drove such critical changes as the rise of clerical celibacy, and (soon afterwards) the emergence of monasticism. It was around 200 that Tertullian supplied some of the most troubling Patristic warrants for Christian misogyny. Attitudes to both gender and sexuality were in ferment in these years.*

**Engagement with Political Power: Tentatively at first, Christians first began to appear among ruling elites, and even included in their ranks the king of a state, the borderland of Osrhoene.*

**Theology, and the Great Leap Forward: The need to participate in mainstream intellectual life revolutionized Christian theological discourse, demanding a new rigor in theological categories, and in turn provoking the debates that so agonized the Great Church over the following three centuries. These divisions were especially evident in concepts of the Trinity, and of the person of Christ. Even the Greek term that we translate Person in this context comes from this era.*

**Exploring the Christian Scriptures: From earliest times, Christians had been deeply engaged in scriptural exegesis and commentary, but with reference to the Old Testament. From the end of the second century, the focus shifted to the newly-defined New Testament, with the first pioneering commentaries on books in that collection, and intense debates about the proper contents and limits of Christian scripture.*

So many critical components of later Christian thought, life, writing, culture and devotion – so many ideas, arguments, institutions, and genres - have their roots in this effervescent period.

So prolific are the changes of this era, and so far-reaching, that it demands to be recognized as one of the most significant turning points in the formation of Christianity. It was at least equal in importance to the far better-known era of the Council of Nicea in 325, when the range of possible historical outcomes was far narrower than in the earlier period. The period around 200 truly was a time of near-infinite possibilities, on matters far broader than something as specific as the date of Easter. Indeed, so much of what the Council of Nicea debated reflected issues that had arisen about 200.

Scholars have long recognized the pivotal importance of some of the thinkers of this era, especially Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, but new (and indeed very recent) discoveries and insights have vastly enhanced our knowledge of these years. The range of available sources has increased dramatically – about the Gnostics and Sethians, about the pagan world, and indeed about the mainstream church itself - and scholarship has boomed, yet most of the findings remains unknown to a general audience. The more we discover, the more vital these transition years appear.

For centuries, Protestant historians in particular have focused on the era covered by the New Testament, and assumed that the church had formed most of its basic ideas and structures during that era – say, before AD 110 or so. As I will argue, that view is simply wrong, and it is harmful in that it distracts attention from other later eras, and above all that decisive and indeed revolutionary moment around 200. That is the time that we should stress if we are to make any sense of later Christian history, including in such critical matters as relationships with Judaism.

In terms of that Christian story, it marked the end of the beginning.

I stress one critical point. It would be quite possible to write the history of this era in terms of people and movements, controversies and persecutions. My goal is different, and this will condition the book's whole structure. It is rather to frame the dramatic story in terms of that underlying process of maturity, that shift from sect to church, from Jewish fringe to (self-described) "Great Church". I can prove, easily, that it happened around 200. But how and why did that epochal change occur? And no less vital, what happened to the groups, ideas and individuals left behind by the change, who suddenly found themselves consigned to the irrelevant byways of history?

Blessing and Curse

By 200, Christians were enjoying the blessings of success, but were also forced to deal with some attendant curses. On the positive side, Christian numbers were growing sensationally, from probably less than ten thousand in 100 AD to over 100,000 by the 170s, and to 250,000 by 200. (The number likely exceeded a million by 240). None of these figures need be read with strict accuracy, but they give a good idea of the scale of expansion.

As congregations grew apace in numbers, so they developed a solid institutional life: they had planted deep roots. It was theoretically possible for a Christian believer to look back to five or six generations of that faith in his family. Around 196, Ephesus's bishop Polycrates recorded that "seven of my relatives were bishops, and I am the eighth." Christian life was now based on solid foundations, based on lengthy memories of local saints, martyrs, and holy founders. Tradition was becoming a very powerful factor in defining doctrine, scripture and Christian behavior. When churches fought bitterly over such emotive issues as the correct way of dating Easter, the decisive arguments were framed in terms of what our church and community has always done. We are following in the steps of our cherished ancestors and venerated martyrs. History mattered profoundly. That is not the behavior of a sect.

In geographical terms too, Christians were now acquiring a much larger footprint, far beyond their original centers in the cities of the Mediterranean Jewish Diaspora. By 200, Christian congregations were well established in many parts of Parthia to the east, and in Gaul in the West. Probably, it was around this year that even remote Britain acquired its first Christian martyr. Already by 200, we can discern the mighty "Triangle" that would supply the framework for later Christian development, from Alexandria (Egypt) to Antioch (Syria) to Seleucia-Ctesiphon (Iraq). But other critical centers were operating far beyond this – from Africa and Gaul to Syria and Asia Minor. Arguably, the most dynamic Christian intellectual center in 200 was neither Rome nor Alexandria, but Edessa in Syria. Around 200, the head of Alexandria's Catechetical School was one Pantaenus, who reported on the Christian congregations he had personally visited in India.

Christianity was a tri-continental presence.

Many Voices, Many Tongues

That expansion had vital implications for the languages in which the faith was transmitted and discussed. Although there is some controversial evidence of early Christian writing in Aramaic, virtually every surviving trace of the faith we have before the late second century is in Greek. Even Irenaeus, writing in Lyon, in Gaul, around 180, naturally wrote in Greek. Of course, Greek continued to be a primary medium of Christian writing long afterwards, but Hellenes suddenly found themselves in a polyglot world.

In the 190s, Tertullian become the first Christian writer in Latin, and indeed the founder of Christian thought in that language. Through direct quotation and influence, through oblique references and confused memories, Tertullian is the source of a huge amount of later Latin Patristic writing. He also indicates some knowledge of a Latin Bible translation, but one probably made not from much before his time. And while Tertullian broke new paths in Latin, his contemporary Hippolytus (170-235) was the last western theologian whose works we know in Greek. In 189, meanwhile, Victor became the first Latin-speaking Pope. There were many such firsts about this time, during a cultural and linguistic revolution.

Other languages also became priceless vehicles for Christian thought, and for centuries they considerably outweighed Latin in importance. In Coptic, the first translations in the two main dialects both appeared precisely at the cusp of the late second and early third century. But it was in Syriac that this period marks a singular breakthrough. Throughout the first millennium, Syriac Christians were immensely energetic and productive, but they often faced the dilemma of how to deal with the founding father of that tradition. This was Bardaisan (154-222), a wide-ranging genius and polymath who was enormously influential in many genres, including philosophy, astrology, theology, and history, and he was a pioneer what we might call comparative religion. He has a strong claim to rank as the founder of Christian hymnody, and of church music. In geographical terms, he worked in Syria and Mesopotamia, Babylonia and Armenia, and his account of Indian intellectual life was widely read. If Tertullian was the first Christian thinker that we know in Latin, then his near-exact contemporary Bardaisan was the first of any significance whatever to write in Syriac.

The problem with Bardaisan was that his views were characterized as Gnostic, although he undoubtedly saw himself just as firmly located in the Christian mainstream as did Tertullian, or any bishop of the time. Later generations, though, were not forgiving, and only a tiny fraction of his works survive intact, so that he largely dropped out of the mainstream historical record. By any reasonable reckoning, he must be counted among that stellar group of innovators around 200.

Into the Mainstream

Figures like Tertullian, Bardaisan, and Clement of Alexandria indicate the real maturity of Christian thought around this time, and their impact on the larger intellectual community. Besides those giants, we know of other prolific writers and thinkers who were celebrated at the time, but whose works have been lost. That comment would apply to the prolific historian Julius Africanus (c.160-240), and to most of the writings of Hippolytus. By 210, an educated Christian could possess a really sizable library of authors from his own faith, including all the main genres of civilized discourse, in a way that absolutely had not been the case even a generation earlier. And the volume of publication was accelerating, in multiple languages. Pagans had no option but to pay attention, however grudgingly at first.

Adding to this relevance to the wider world, this was the first era in which Christians could plausibly aspire to some kind of political power. Bardaisan was raised at the court of the Syrian kingdom of Osrhoene, and around 200, that land's king Abgar became the world's first ruler to accept Christianity. That court background indicates the respectable and even aristocratic background of some leading Christians by this time, and even in Rome elite Christian sympathizers mitigated official persecution. The court of emperor Alexander Severus (222-35) was notably friendly to Christians.

The faith had come an inconceivably long way from the world of a few house churches under the ministry of fishermen and itinerant tentmakers. And it was no longer a fringe sect of Judaism.

Inventing Christian Theology

By 200, that Christian presence was becoming ever harder to ignore. This was the time that pagan philosophers found it worth their while to denounce and parody Christianity, as Celsus did so comprehensively in the 170s. Around 220, a *Life* of the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana depicted him as a kind of pagan version of Christ, together with miracles and even hints at a resurrection

appearance. At every point, Apollonius is explicitly presented as a counter-balance to the depiction of Christ in the Gospels, a disturbing image that pagans felt the need to counter. At last for the non-Christian world, this was the point at which Christianity began to matter.

In turn, Christians like Clement and (later) Origen had to combat these assaults, and they did so by appropriating and adapting the advanced philosophical thought of the time. The more ferocious the assaults, the deeper Christians ventured into the intellectual arena. Christian thought came of age.

That new intellectual sophistication revolutionized theological debate. Ever since New Testament times, authors had borrowed Greek and particularly Platonic ideas and language, but by the 190s such adaptation was essential to make sense such emerging questions as the nature of God, the personality of Christ, and the role he had played in making the world. At every stage too, Christians had to decide how, or if, their distinctive positions fitted into older Jewish schemes. The range of ideas under discussion in this era was staggering. Depending on the thinker and the school of thought, we might hear that there were two Gods, and one created spirit and one matter; or that Christ was fully human in his body, but divine in his inner spirit; or perhaps that God occupied the body of the man Jesus at the moment of his baptism, and left it at the crucifixion.

Around 200, one major division concerned so-called Monarchian thought, the idea that Father and Son were essentially the same, or else were forms of modes of one being. In this sense, we might even imagine God the father being crucified and dying on the cross, which later generations would consider as a grotesque theological absurdity. These debates would continue for two centuries, but it was around 200 that Tertullian, above all, offered both the concepts that would become the building blocks of later theology, and the language. I have already mentioned his invention of the concept of "Trinity," of what he daringly termed "three persons, one substance." (*tres personae, una substantia*). Those terms – persons and substance – would have a very long afterlife.

Ever flexible, and ever quotable, Tertullian also offered a novel justification for his daring views, in this case on the Resurrection: *certum est, quia impossibile*: It is certain, because it is impossible.

Against the World

But Tertullian also demonstrates the grave dangers that a movement encountered as it matured, as it moved from a sect to a church. As has often been noted, such transitions commonly stir resistance, even to the point of inciting new schisms. Although the church of the 190s could celebrate its new-found numerical strength, the "normalization" of Christianity raised some dilemmas typical of expanding sects. As Tertullian himself noted, much was lost when Christianity plunged into Greek thought, or as he famously asked, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? … Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!" In orthodox eyes, the Gnostic schools of the day fell into error by too wholehearted an absorption of Greek philosophy, especially Platonism.

Quite apart from intellectual pursuits, practical and moral dilemmas abounded. Throughout his extensive writings, Tertullian grappled with the issues facing a fiery puritanical movement as it evolved into a mainstream organization seeking to live in balance with the world. Small, highly motivated sects can demand extremely strict and puritanical standards of members, at the cost of expulsion. A larger "church", though, is more likely to include a broad spectrum of members in terms of commitment and sanctity, and it absolutely needs mechanisms to reconcile penitent sinners.

The problem then arises of reincorporating sinners without scandalizing hard-core true believers. But when does institutional maturity shade into compromise, and into outright betrayal of original fervor?

And there were many battlefronts. When legal threats arose, should Christians flee or should they confront martyrdom, or even seek it out? What was the proper Christian response to sexuality? Were second marriages ever permitted? Should unmarried women conceal themselves behind the veil? Could Christians ever, in any circumstances, hold public office in civil government, never mind in the military? On all these issues, Tertullian held the most severe and draconian stance, and on martyrdom, he declared that "The seed of martyrs is the seed of the church." But he also recognized that on such issues, he was no longer in a majority. He eventually forsook the mainstream church, which he viewed as a hotbed of worldly compromise and moderation, and joined the millenarian sect of the Montanists.

Christianity was born at war with the World. Around 200, for better or worse, Christians were increasingly finding ways to live within that same World.

The Quest for Authenticity

For Christians, the question of what the church actually did and thought in this early era is a matter of major contemporary significance. To varying degrees, Christians of all shades and traditions have always claimed to be grounding themselves in the Bible and the early Church. A practice is justified as authentic if it can be validated by scriptural reference, or else by the historical precedent of the early Christian centuries, and the venerated Church Fathers. The guiding principle is that the era closest to the time of Christ and his apostles was most likely to have preserved their message most faithfully and accurately. Even Protestants who claim to be following the strict practice of the New Testament acknowledge that the early church did not immediately lose or betray the glories of the apostolic age, thus granting some authority to Patristic authors. Commonly, this "early church" designation extends to what occurred before the Council of Nicea of 325 AD, creating the concept of "Ante-Nicene."

Although this sense of following the early church is a Protestant emphasis, it has profoundly influenced modern Catholics, especially after the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s.. When the Catholic church of that era revised and modernized its Eucharistic prayers, one of the options newly made available to clergy was explicitly borrowed from the *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to Hippolytus, supposedly a record of the Christian liturgy as it was followed in Rome around 210 AD. In historical fact, the liturgical text (technically known as Eucharistic Prayer II) in question was neither Roman nor as early as was claimed, but the story illustrates the widespread obsession with reproducing Christian antiquity. As a source for authority and authenticity, earlier is always better.

Such a resort to the "early church" commonly features in debates over present-day ideas and practices. Roughly, if an idea or theme can be demonstrated to have been recognized in the early church – and the earlier the better - that of itself gives solid grounds for reviving or restoring it in the modern world. That approach explains the strong concern of modern-day liberals and feminists with early church history, in such crucial matters as the existence of ordained women clergy. Although such activists challenge the current state of the church and the traditions that it claims to follow, they do so by seeking the warrant of a tradition still more ancient and, in this view, more authentically truer to the spirit of Jesus and his first followers. The past is usable.

By these criteria, the state of the church as it existed around 200 AD – over a century before Nicea - is clearly a vital matter in contemporary debate. The problem though for advocates of many different shades that the church was in such a state of rapid transition at this time. The main surviving author, Tertullian, was a daring and creative thinker, who was exploring a very wide range of opinions,

In one area in particular, that of the existence and status of a distinct Christian clergy, his words give balm to later Catholics, as do his stern words about the virtues of celibacy….

Frontiers of Faith

In stressing the critical character of the era around 200, I have been mainly speaking of those individuals and congregations whom later historians placed within the Christian story, but as we have seen, it was never clear who exactly belonged in that category. That question is critically important for determining the numerical strength of Christianity, and if its geographical dimensions.

If church historians largely forgave Tertullian's schismatic break with the mainstream church, Bardaisan was read out of the faith and consigned to oblivion. But we need not follow such a constrained view of the Christian spectrum. At the time, the Christian label was freely claimed by countless groups whom others would regard as traitors to the faith, including Gnostics, Marcionites, Montanists, and others. Obviously, none of these groups viewed itself as a sect or an –ism. Most believed that there was and should be one true church, and that their particular faction should be in charge of it. Later historians like Eusebius (in the fourth century) presented a view of one unquestionable true church, one mighty trunk of a growing tree, with deviant branches doomed to fall away or be trimmed ruthlessly.

At the time, though, there were plenty of areas where the Great Church had plenty of sturdy rivals, each claiming its own traditions and hierarchies, its own access to true authority and apostolic roots. In the region of Edessa, we sometimes hear of an obscure sect called the Palutians, and it with some shock that we realize these were what we would normally call orthodox Christians, those who obeyed the bishop Palut. In that area, though, the orthodox so heavily were the orthodox outnumbered by the Gnostics, Marcionites, and followers of Bardaisan that this majority could afford to dismiss their rivals as an obscure faction. Numbers and influence determined who had the power to grant the approving label of a "true Christian."

Issues of spiritual border control were especially fraught in terms of the Christian relationship with Judaism. As we have seen from the Easter controversies, Christians in many areas still viewed themselves within a largely Jewish religious spectrum, and shared Jewish customs. Potent surviving sects of Jewish-Christians still defined themselves as a legitimate sect within the larger Jewish world, and even challenged the credentials of Gentile Christians. That stance became doubly difficult at the end of the second century, as Christians drew stricter lines against such Judaizers. Meanwhile, Jewish thought was itself becoming much more sharply defined, and it was precisely around 200 that sages and scholars began the composition of the Mishnah, the foundation of the written Talmud. Yet there were still plenty of believers – the number is quite unknowable – who had not the slightest doubt of their claim to be at once both Christians and Jews.

We should best view the various groupings and movements as competing denominations within a common Christian spectrum, much as we might expect in the modern, post-Reformation world. In that sense, we would apply a simple and minimal admission test for any group, namely whether it claimed a Christian identity and placed itself within an avowedly Christian tradition, however deviant its opinions might appear by the standards of later orthodoxy. When I speak of the Christian world, then, I am referring not just to the mainstream Great Church of Catholic and Orthodox, but also to groups who might variously be described as Gnostics, Sethians, Montanists, Marcionites, Jewish-Christians, Bardesanites, Monarchians, Encratites, and all the rest. If they considered themselves Christians, then for my purposes, they were.

Acknowledging that very "broad church" idea allows us to write a more accurate history of the Christian movement, and also to see even more clearly the very acute nature of the transformation around 200.

Reading the Gnostics

This was a time of intense activity by Gnostic groupings, and endemic conflicts between the Great Church and its rivals. The extent and violence of those battles contributed powerfully to reshaping the church, and solidifying those emerging concepts of orthodoxy and heresy. In its later sense, the term "heresy" was then a very recent coinage, popularized by the book *Against Heresies*, published in 180 by Irenaeus (130-202).

The era around 200 was a watershed in the story of Gnosticism, and in its relationship with self-described orthodox Christians. That chronology runs counter to some recent assumptions. Gnostic writings have attracted vast attention in recent years as the suppressed voices of a lost Christianity, and one very attractive to modern eyes. Many of these writings were discovered in late fourth century contexts, largely due to the major finding of the library of Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. Hence, we therefore think of them in the setting of the 380s, say, when the Empire was accepting Christianity as its official religion, and enforcing its hegemony. However, most of those writings were already old at the point at which they were deposited, and a good number actually date from the era I am discussing, in the late second/early third centuries. (See below for a tentative list of some of these writings).

These works must thus be considered in the cultural, religious and political context of that age, and of the furious ongoing debates of that era. Once we understand that context, many aspects of the Gnostic texts and gospels can be understood and elucidated in ways that would otherwise be impossible. Only then do we see how these texts are addressing very specific issues, debates and even individuals of that time.

Heresy and Hierarchy

Those battles spurred changes within the churches. According to common sociological theories, competition between churches and sects encourages vigor and growth, and that is exactly what we find with the explosive growth around 200. Competition and conflict also shaped the practice and belief of individual churches. Bishops and church hierarchies were needed to help enforce orthodoxy and resist predatory rivals. Churches also needed to formulate more elaborate and specific creedal statements, to ensure the orthodoxy of all members. New statements in turn drove ever more recalcitrant believers to be defined as schismatics or heretics, and in turn encouraged the

struggle for orthodoxy. As each new controversy arose, bishops gathered together in substantial regional councils and synods, to promulgate true doctrine and purge dissenters.

Doctrinal feuds contributed powerfully to institutional growth, to the rise of hierarchies, and to making the Great Church of the third and fourth centuries. The heresy wars around 200 supply an essential foundation for the emergence of the Catholic/Orthodox church.

Those same struggles also provide an essential context for shifting attitudes to sacred scripture, and for the creation of what we now know as the Christian Bible. The process began in the mid-second century, when the daring thinker Marcion argued for a radical separation of Christianity from Judaism, and a rejection of the Old Testament. Instead, Christians should follow only their own New Testament, purged of Jewish contaminations. In pursuit of that goal, Marcion composed his own tendentious version of what a pure New Testament should look like, which scandalized other believers. But that still left the question of what should and should not be scripture in an age when Christians had access to so many candidates for holy books. The new climate of ecclesiastical politics, with its stress on tradition and authority, supplies the essential context to the outpouring of Gnostic gospels in these years, with their appeal to the authority of multiple apostolic figures.

It was very difficult for ordinary believers to know exactly which text might win formal church approval. The first efforts to determine a canon of approved books date from the 170s, but it was at the end of that century that the movement gained force. Especially in the long-established churches of Asia Minor, debates over the canon now raged freely, with texts like the Gospel of John as major detonators. Opposition to this gospel was so ferocious as to spark a whole sect of anti-John adherents, the *Alogi*. The first full New Testament listing that we possess, the Muratori Canon, is difficult to date but probably emanated from Rome, in the 190s. Again, the need to debate and define the proper limits of scripture added to the power and influence of senior clergy, and of the councils and synods at which they debated such questions. The move to define scripture culminated with the critical scholarship of Origen (185-254).

A Moment in History

It is all too easy to write the history of any movement in terms of its written records, to concentrate on literate elites, and especially their controversies. If, though, we focus on the larger Christian world in the specific period around 200, and the experience of believers in general, we can also see many other major trends and developments that profoundly change our understandings of Christian origins. In fact, such a tight focus represents an innovative approach to a controversial and endlessly interesting period of history, and of religious creativity. Beyond specific movements and controversies, the book offers an accessible and attractive entrée into the history of early Christianity.

For centuries, scholars have focused on the early Christian centuries, partly because of the overwhelming influence of Christianity in shaping the subsequent history of the West. Also, religious believers and activists of all kinds remain fascinated by the "early Church" as a source and exemplar for later doctrine and belief, and a justification for modern-day reform and restructuring. Debates over women's role in those early eras are an obvious example of such concern. In consequence, the volume of research and publication on early Christianity is immense and growing steadily, and the interest shows no sign of diminishing. But that sheer volume of work itself poses a major problem,

in that it is all but impossible for non-specialists to master the whole field – or rather, the many sub-fields that it now contains.

Although there are plenty of general histories, these face major difficulties as they range over three or four densely packed centuries, which demands a highly selective and compressed approach. That problem has become significantly more acute in recent decades, with the upsurge of interest in early Christianity beyond the Mediterranean world, in the Middle East, Persia, and Ethiopia. The time is long gone when historians could devote their whole attention to Latin (and to some extent Greek) Fathers. But how can any accessible survey cover such an enormous territory, such a vast diversity of beliefs and practices, and such a long time-frame? How can an interested non-specialist make any sense of what scholars now know about "early Christianity"?

My approach resolves this by focusing on a single historical moment, a brief period of two decades or so. Such a snapshot of realities allows the reader to grasp the breadth of that world, and to understand how at one particular moment Christians were dealing with critical issues – of tradition and authority, legitimacy and memory, orthodoxy and heresy, of the relationship with the non-Christian world and with Judaism, of the Christian intellectual endeavor, and so much else. The modern reader would thus have a firm and comprehensible foundation on which to build later reading and thought.

Ambitious in the breadth of its coverage and the range of its sources, *The End of the Beginning* offers the first account of one of the most critical eras in the history of Christianity. Out of these years came the Christian church as we know it historically, with its vast geographical spread and broad social appeal; its complex hierarchies, institutions and traditions; and its ever-sharper definition of orthodoxies, doctrinal boundaries, and canonical texts. This was a development with vast implications for Judaism, for the Roman Empire, and ultimately for the making of the West.

SOURCES AND MATERIALS

I am anxious not to write an account based solely on literary evidence, which tends to privilege elite sources and "top-down" accounts. Rather, I will make full use of other materials, including archaeology and social history. Having said that, the sheer volume of possible written material on which I can draw is very substantial and very diverse, going far beyond technical theological or apologetic writings. And even sources of that kind have much to offer in terms of incidental references to everyday life and practice.

In terms of the available sources, the era around 200 is very attractive. For an earlier period, such as 100 or 150, the potential sources would be abundant in quantity and rich in significance, including as they would some major scriptural texts and New Testament books. The problem is that the exact dating of such works is the subject of fierce controversy, lacking any solid consensus. The same comment applies to texts that (probably) give us a sense of devotional or liturgical life in those earlier years. The dating of those treasures, though, is a minefield. Around 200, in contrast, we have an impressive series of major texts that can be dated confidently within a few years, including some

pivotal and long influential works on worship, prayer, baptism and – in short – ordinary Christian religious life. Taking account of some slightly more speculative dating allows us to include a still richer array of writings, including many highly relevant Jewish texts. Putting these various sources together gives us a vastly better sense of who Christians were and how they defined themselves than would have been possible from any earlier period.

Most obviously, the main sources from the period roughly 180-220 include the diverse and extensive writings of great Fathers like Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria. Tertullian was in effect the father of Christian writing in Latin, and Clement was a prolific author who tells us a great deal about the Gnostic and other alternative Christian movements of his day. His major surviving work is the Stromata, the Miscellanies or Patchwork, and that translation gives an apt idea of the very mixed nature of the contents. (I do not intend to use any but the earliest writings of Origen, most of which were produced some decades into the third century).

Quite apart from these two beacons, Tertullian and Clement, we find an abundance of other writings, and indeed of other genres. Some can be dated very precisely, others with less confidence. Some writings survive as free-standing works, others are preserved in more or less complete form in other writings, from which they must be reconstructed – in several instances, from the *Church History* of Eusebius..

Using categories that are admittedly subjective and flexible, these various sources include:

1. CHURCH LIFE

Liturgy and Church Order

Apostolic Church Order,	?early third century
Apostolic Tradition,	?early third century
Didascalia	?225

Tertullian, De Baptismo, De paenitentia, De oratione, and others

Didactic and theological literature

Kerygmata Petrou (Pseudo-Clementines)	c.200
Testimony of Truth.	?c.180s
Treatise on the Resurrection	?c.190
Epistle to Diognetus	?c.200

Christian life and conduct

Sentences of Sextus
Tertullian, De spectaculis, De cultu feminarum, De fuga in persecution, De idololatria, and others

Moral and sexual behavior

Tertullian, De Virginibus velandis; De monogamia; De pudicitia

Accounts of martyrdom and Christian suffering.

Martyrdom of Felicity and Perpetua	203

Other examples of martyrdom stories include the Acts of Apollonius (180s)

Tertullian, To the Martyrs	197

2. DEFENDING THE CHURCH

Apologetics

Tertullian, several major writings including *Ad Nationes* and *Apologeticus*

Minucius Felix, Octavius	early third century
Epistle of the Apostles	180 (other sources put this closer to 150)

Controversial writings and denunciations of heresy

Anonymous Anti-Montanist tract	190s
Apollonius, anti-Montanist writer	c.200
Caius	c.210
Maximus of Jerusalem	c.190
Polycrates of Ephesus on the dating of Easter	c.196
Serapion of Antioch (against Montanists and Docetists)	c.200
Hippolytus of Rome, Refutation of All Heresies	c.200-220
Rhodon	190s

Tertullian, Liber de praescriptione haereticorum; Scorpiace, and others

Theophilus of Antioch	169-184
Victor I	190s

3. SCRIPTURES OLD AND NEW

Writings and commentaries on scripture

Ammonius of Alexandria, first gospel synopsis	c.210
Dura-Europos Gospel Harmony	c.190
Muratorian Canon	c190s?

Acts and other pseudepigraphic writings concerning the apostles

Acts of Thomas	?c.210

Including The Hymn of the Pearl

Similar Acts and collections of apostolic stories abound, but are hard to date precisely. These include the very influential Acts of Peter, John, Andrew, and Paul. Most stem from the second half of the second century, though greater precision is not possible.

Devotional and allegorical writings

Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles	?c.190

Exegesis on the Soul.	?c.210
Inscription of Abercius	c.200

Visionary and apocalyptic writings

First Apocalypse of James.	?early third century
Coptic Apocalypse of Peter.	?c.220
Coptic Apocalypse of Paul	?early third century

Mystical and philosophical works

Zostrianos	early third century

Speculative tracts: gospels and visionary accounts of Jesus and his followers

Books of Jeu.	early third century
Gospel of Philip.	?c.200-220
Book of Thomas the Contender.	?early/mid third century
Paraphrase of Shem.	?early third century
Hypostasis of the Archons	?early/mid third century
Second Treatise of the Great Seth	early third century
The Three Steles of Seth	early third century
Tripartite Tractate	?early/mid third century

Pistis Sophia - the dating is very uncertain, even when set aside all the other questionable estimates for such works, but probably early-mid-third century

Jewish writings

Mishnah of Rabbi Judah	c.200-210

MAJOR THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

The End of the Beginning offers many insights and lessons that would interest and surprise a contemporary audience. Among other things:

*The main purpose is to identify and describe a critical historical period that has never received the attention it deserves, and which is largely unknown to modern readers. Comprehending this time of transformation fundamentally rewrites the history of earlier periods of the Christian movement.

*Even readers who knew something about the early church would be startled to find how many of the church's essential doctrines and practices originated in this specific era, including most obviously the idea of the Trinity, with all its technical language.

*The book encourages readers to understand the very long relationship between Judaism and early Christianity, which goes far beyond the time of Jesus and his immediate apostles. It shows that this Jewish context is essential to comprehending most aspects of the early church. Contrary to myth, the church in much of the world remained in dialogue with Jews and Jewish congregations, long after the supposed "parting of the ways" a century before.

*It is tempting and all too easy to write ancient history solely in terms of texts and abstract arguments. To the contrary, the present book has at its core a group of a dozen or so prominent Christian leaders, thinkers and activists, who emerge as very well-rounded individuals, and whose characters we can follow through the controversies of the era. We can observe several in some psychological depth, and see how their minds develop. It is possible to know Tertullian (for instance) in a way that is possible for few in pre-Modern times. The "cast of characters" benefits enormously from their very wide distribution of origins – ethnic, social and geographic – and yet they do interact in various ways. None of these figures is well known to non-specialists, in stark

contrast to the era of (say) the Council of Nicea. In summary, these figures offer the opportunity of a character-based narrative that will appeal to general readers.

*The time frame of the book is marked by a series of spectacular events, confrontations and controversies that provide natural foci for the narrative, and which again would appeal to the general reader. In multiple cases, we know not just what theologians said to each other, but the particular networks and schools to which they belonged, and how individuals combated each other. Quite apart from Tertullian's endless battles, we can trace the long and very influential struggles to control the bishopric of Rome, which focused on the turbulent career of Hippolytus. This provides the basis for an engaging and memorable story, which also serves as a platform to explore the theological and political debates at issue in these years.

*The narrative offers abundant material for gender issues. Arguably the most dramatic incident in early Christianity, outside the New Testament itself, is the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity, a story in which we often hear the voices of the women themselves. In other matters, issues of women's roles are common themes of debate and argument, especially by the very opinionated Tertullian himself. Tertullian denounced the Gnostic women who were "bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures— it may be even to baptize." Women's spiritual authority also forms the subject of much debate over the Montanist movement; and it is commonly the theme of Gnostic gospels and tracts. It was above all around 200 that these issues of gender conflict reached their apogee.

*In multiple ways, the book radically widens the standard history of the early church, which has long been written in terms of the standard Patristic figures. Few such accounts give full coverage to the church's explosive expansion to the east, largely because this mainly took forms that were deemed heretical. But the present book would take the most expansive view possible of Christian divisions, treating all as part of one spectrum.

*The book would offer a fundamental rethinking of the topic of Gnosticism, of its historical development and context. Contextualizing many of the celebrated Gnostic and Sethian texts as I have suggested would be both illuminating and informative, and would help situate a whole body of writings that have attracted vast public interest.

*The book is unusual in its discussion of the Jewish-Christian baptist sects and their Gnostic heirs, such as the Sethians. However obscure they may sound from that brief description, they occupy a crucial place in this history of religions, and specifically the Jewish-Christian tradition, because of their likely inheritance from the famous Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls. In turn, these groups spawn the later Manichean movement, which becomes a world religion in their own right. In this saga, the years around 200 mark the key transition. This story would have been impossible to write a generation ago, but in recent times it has become the focus of cutting edge scholarship.

*Both in the context of the Gnostic and Sethian movements, the book would draw extensively on their original words and ideas, contextualized as nearly as possible in terms of place and date.

*Apart from the Gnostic literature, the book is highly distinctive in the extensive use of the very substantial Pseudo-Clementine literature, which offers a radical perspective on Jewish-Christian

interactions and hybrid movements, but which is relatively unknown to non-specialists. (See further discussion below).

*The book challenges of the myth of the early church as a single, comprehensive body, and instead presents a more modern, more plausible, and more comprehensible vision of multiple competing denominations.

*Throughout, the book draws on contemporary theories about the nature of historical thinking and debate. In the era under discussion, repeated historical debates are the essential foundation for fundamental questions of memory, authority, tradition and authenticity. In turn, those debates largely determine the preservation of records and memories, and determined the Christian memory and interpretation of the past.

*The book shows that Christianity's global, transcontinental nature can be traced to the very earliest era of the faith, within a generation or two of the completion of the New Testament. This is a study of Africans, Asians and Europeans. Examples of wide travel and inter-cultural contacts are very numerous.

*The book rejects the retroactive interpretations of the church that emphasize European and Latin themes and interests, at the cost of the very vibrant story of eastern Christianity, of what was taking place in Syria and Mesopotamia. This argument builds on my earlier book *The Lost History of Christianity*. In the present book, that interest focuses on the life and works of Bardaisan, about whom a great deal can be known, and who should properly be known as one of the greatest thinkers and scholars of Christian antiquity. Given that cultural emphasis, my book in no sense defines its subject matter as "the Age of Tertullian."

*Unlike many "church histories," the book would take full account of the very lively scholarship on the non-Christian world of the time and specifically the Roman Empire, which was then passing through its Severan Age. Severan politics and culture are the subject of flourishing scholarship (which incidentally has plenty to say about gender issues in the era). Also of lively concern is the vital matter of Roman relations with eastern neighbors, a matter of immense interest to Christian congregations. I would fully integrate scholarship on Christian and secular/pagan worlds.

* The book's "single moment" approach is highly distinctive. It is by no means unknown in historical writing, and "the Year One" (the time of Jesus's birth) has been a popular topic. No writer, though, has ever used this cross-sectional approach in anything like the context I am suggesting, and certainly not to "the Christian World" at a given point in history.

*The book offers important lessons for the many modern Christians who claim to view the early or primitive church as an authoritative source of inspiration and teaching, as well as the Bible itself. The era around 200 is indisputably part of that early or primitive church, and it offers some surprises for modern day believers. For Roman Catholics, for instance, it is alarming to find the Papacy and the papal institution so weak, and so difficult to trace.

*Protestants, likewise, might be disturbed at the very "Catholic" nature of church life in that era, with its focus on Mary, its interest in saints and relics, and the emerging clerical hierarchy.

*Also surprising in terms of Protestant assumptions is the very early stage at which the institutional church developed and enforced really sophisticated liturgies.

*In terms of lessons or examples for modern debate, the book would show the wide latitude available to local churches in matters of doctrine and conduct, although within firm limits in some areas. The "Great Church" – the orthodox mainstream – was already a recognized reality across much of the world, and member congregations were vigilant about the other churches with which they remained in communion.

*The book speaks knowledgeably and comprehensively about the lively issue of the definition of the Christian canon, and the church's acceptance or exclusion of particular gospels and other texts. Popular books on the history of the Bible and New Testament suggest that early Christians enjoyed near-total freedom in matters of the scriptures and gospels they might use, including many so-called Gnostic gospels, and that situation remained highly fluid until the Council of Nicea in 325. Such claims are in fact very misleading. Although early churches used a variety of texts over and above the present canon, a core of texts remained indisputable, and this included the four gospels that we know today. Churches in that era were sensitive about heretical scriptures creeping in to corrupt the flock. Prelates and church leaders were alert to the dangers of new scriptures, which they viewed in terms of forgery and falsehood. The Great Church was quite conservative about the scriptures it would and would not permit – and it acted thus long before there was the slightest prospect of any alliance with a secular government anxious to curb radical or apocalyptic excesses.

Similar and Competing Works

No work currently available offers any close competition to the book proposed here.

Surveys of the early Christian period are commonplace, and they cover a broad span of approaches and methodologies. Most cover a standard range of issues and individuals, and the less academic books tend to underplay the broad diversity of early belief. In terms of more academic volumes, the standard author on the period under discussion is Ramsay MacMullen, author among many other works of *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400* (Yale, 1984) and *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200-400* (Brill, 2009). Other major recent works include Charles Freeman's *A New History of Early Christianity* (Yale 2009); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (Penguin 2009); and Géza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth To Nicaea* (Yale University Press, 2013). Covering a somewhat later period, see Peter Brown's *The Rise of Western Christendom* (2003). All these books are excellent, thoughtful and thoroughly reliable, and I have praised these and other recent contributions in reviews and blurbs.

Now, moreover, we have the *Cambridge History of Ancient Christianity* edited by Longenecker and Wilhite, (imminently forthcoming, 2023), a dazzling collection of essays that address the themes raised here at considerable length.

As remarked earlier, though, one issue is the sheer scale of what they are trying to cover. Freeman's book spans the period from Jesus's time through about 600 AD, a timespan equivalent to that which separates us from the invention of printing, and all in under 400 pages. He is surveying very long term trends and does it extremely well. It is difficult, though, for the non-specialist historian to keep the chronology constantly in mind, and to form a clear impression of the Christian world at any given moment – to find, for instance, how people prayed and worshiped at a given time, and what

texts they regarded as canonical. Brown's book covers a still longer span, from AD 200 through 1000.

Another older book that is still much used is W. H. C. Frend's *The Rise of Christianity* (Fortress Press, 1984), which similarly covers the period up to 600, and in a massive thousand-plus pages. Frend's book is immensely erudite, with an enormous range of valuable material, and the book is a goldmine of information. The problems for a general reader, though, are substantial, and I base my comments on attempts to use it in teaching. It is really not intended for a non-academic audience: it assumes a solid knowledge of the Classical world, and of the general outlines of early Christian history, and the level of writing can be intimidating. The reader, for instance, is assumed to know who Tertullian is, and to comprehend terms such as "neo-Pythagorean." The book is not an easy read even for undergraduates with a declared interest in religion or church history. Frend's work has also aged, inevitably as it was published over thirty years ago, and scholarship in the intervening years has been lively. McMullen's classic *Christianizing the Roman Empire* belongs to the same vintage, and concentrates on the post-300 period. His work *The Second Church* is much more specialized in nature, and comes from the narrower outlet of Brill.

The book's chronological structure is a drawback, and a lesson to later writers. Although divided into periods, those divisions are often very flexible, making it difficult for the reader to understand exactly what is happening at any given moment. For instance, three substantial chapters cover the era from 135 through 190 AD in over a hundred pages, while the period from 190 through 235 received less than a third of that space. The reason for this is that many events and trends from the later era are here incorporated into the earlier discussion, presumably because that is where Frend's academic interests lay. The reader can sort out an excellent account of the era around 200, but it requires some active mining of the text, not to mention some previous knowledge.

Some of the same comments apply to Freeman's excellent *New History of Early Christianity*, which offers some ninety pages on the whole second and third centuries. The period between 180 and 220 is covered quite thinly, and mainly consists of discussions of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.

Conversely, books that specifically do address the second and third centuries tend to be highly focused and specialized in their concerns. If we take the era around 200 as an example, then there are four main topics that feature regularly in accounts in Christian history. These include two critically significant individuals (Tertullian and Clement) and two episodes or controversies – namely, the Montanist heresy, and the martyrdom of Felicity and Perpetua, in Carthage in 203. This latter event is described in a strictly contemporary account that is immensely moving, conceivably written in part by Tertullian himself. The central role of women characters has made the work irresistible to modern-day scholars. Each of these has over the centuries generated a vast literature, and continues to do so.

Books on these four topics abound, but most are very academic, to the point of being arcane. The literature on Tertullian in particular is overwhelming. No less significant, these topics all give information about very limited geographical areas, namely Alexandria (Clement), Carthage (both Tertullian and the martyrdom) and western Asia Minor (Montanism). By this stage, Christianity was present in a great many other regions, which receive relatively slight attention.

Besides these "Big Four," other very detailed aspects of Christian history in this period are the subject of much research and publication. These include, for instance, martyrdom, the development

of liturgy, the major theological controversies, relationships with Judaism, and so on. All, though, are addressed in specialized volumes, rather than accessible or wide ranging surveys.

Most of the Gnostic gospels that have received such enthusiastic notice in recent decades were almost certainly written in the century or so after 150. General surveys of those texts and the world that produced them include Elaine Pagels's famous *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979). That does not though seek to cover anything like the same territory as my proposed book. No single volume tries to integrate the stories of all the diverse sects of the larger Christian world, to give proper attention to all the so-called heresies and schisms.

The Book

The End of the Beginning would comprise about 90,000 words.

The Author

I have published widely on topics of history and specifically the history of Christianity, but four substantial books in particular demonstrate my interest and expertise in this area. These include *Hidden Gospels* (2000); *The Lost History of Christianity* (2008); *Jesus Wars* (2010); and *The Many Faces of Christ* (2015). Each in its various way addresses the history of early Christianity and the emerging church. *Hidden Gospels* and *The Many Faces of Christ* both explored the changing attitude of early Christian churches to canonical scripture, and specifically to various gospels. Each of the four books in different ways discussed shifting concepts of orthodoxy and heresy. *Jesus Wars* described the Christological conflicts of the fifth century. *The Lost History of Christianity* explored the worlds of Middle Eastern and Asia Christianity in the church's first millennium or so, with a focus on those communities that the Roman Catholic church deemed heretical. I specifically discussed Syriac and Coptic church communities.

I am thus very conversant with the literatures and scholarship relevant to the proposed project. Because the proposed book covers a time period very different from those predecessors, there is virtually no overlap with those earlier books.

LIST OF CHAPTERS

Power, structures and hierarchy within the church, and the growth of institutions. The routinization of charisma. Issues of memory and tradition as the foundations of authority and authenticity. History wars among Christians. Gender and power.

Introduction: Hippolytus and Callistus
1.The Great Church: Councils, Contacts and Networks
2.The Rise of Bishops
3.Church Power, Property and Wealth
4.Bishops at War
5.Church Memory and Church Tradition
6.Rival Traditions
7.Bishops, Martyrdom and Charisma
8.Choosing Bishops
9. Clergy as a Class and a Profession
10.Inventing Christian Priesthood
11.Celibacy and the Clergy

CHAPTER FOUR
Abercius: Praying, Worshipping and Baptizing
The church's evolving ritual life; the growth of memory and distinctive language and custom. How liturgy and ritual supplied the basis for authority, hierarchy, and stability.

Introduction: Abercius and his Inscription
1.Why Liturgy Matters
2.Eucharist, Liturgy and Power
3.Baptism
4.Liturgy, Creed and Orthodoxy
5.Making Churches: Buildings and the Liturgy
6. Inventing Mortal Sin: Liturgy, Baptism and Sin
7.Private Prayer and Devotion
8.Transmitting Knowledge and Making Books

CHAPTER FIVE
Philumene: Women, Men, and Marriage

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1.A Women's Church
2.Appealing to Women?
3.Chastity and Family
4.Women's Cultures
5.Tertullian and the Devil's Gateway
6.Women as Clergy
7.Sects and Prophets
8.Ordaining Widows
9.Sexual Unorthodoxy: Libertines
10.Abstinence Only: The Evils of Sexuality

CHAPTER SIX

Judah the Prince: Christians and Jews
How the emerging church separated itself from Judaism. How controversies over that relationship drove schisms and controversies: the Jewish-Christians; Marcion.

Introduction: Confrontation in Carthage
1.The Common Treasury
2.Christian Attitudes to Jews
3.Founding Rabbinic Judaism
4.Jewish Attitudes to Christians
5.Continuing Debates: Tertullian and Hippolytus
6.The Jewish-Christians.
7.The Clementine Mystery
8.Marcion and a Bible without Jews
9.Legacy: Elchesaites and Babylonian Baptists
9. Legacy: Sethians and Manicheans
10.Sects and Heresies

CHAPTER SEVEN
Bardaisan: Heresies and Orthodoxies
The extreme diversity of sects and alternative interpretations of Christianity, many of which represent responses to Gentile philosophy and cosmology. How struggles with those alternative movements promote the structural and institutional growth of the Great Church.

Introduction: Palut and the Palutians
1.The Logic of Heresy
2.Adoptionism
3.Encratism
4.Flawed Creations: Gnostics
5.Bardaisan
6.Heresy Wars
7.Hippolytus and Heresy
8.Clement and his Foes
9.Tertullian's Wars
10.Orthodox and Heretics
11.Conclusion: Christian Divisions

CHAPTER EIGHT
Tertullian: Christian Theology Comes of Age
Disputes about the nature of God, the person of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit divide the Great Church, and reshape the balance of power between regions and churches. These controversies demonstrate the church's growing intellectual sophistication, and popular attempts to reassert primitive values. How a church separated from its Jewish roots struggles to find firm moorings in the Gentile world.

Introduction: Clement of Alexandria and the Christian Gnostic
1.Montanists
2.Conflicts Over The Spirit
3.The Earthly Millennium
4.The Nature of God and the person of Christ

5.Christ the King: Monarchians
6.The Modes of God
7.Sabellius
8.Tertullian and the Trinity
9.Founding the Catholic Tradition

CHAPTER NINE
Clement of Alexandria: One Church, One Book
Different churches and sects struggle over the acceptable limits of scripture and seek to place an end to the outpouring of new works. The acceptable limits of memory and tradition. Authority, authenticity, and the quest for canon.

Introduction: Serapion and the Gospel of Peter
1.The Quest for Authority
2.Saturated in Scripture
3.Which Old Testament?
4.Four Gospels
5.Alternative Gospels
6.Gospel Wars
7.New Testament Battle Fronts
8.Forging Canons
9.Clement and Origen
10.The New Era

CHAPTER TEN
Perpetua: Dying and Living in the World
How distinct from the world can and should a church be? How far should a church seek to be perfect, and how can it deal with its fallible human members? Perfectionists break with a too-worldly church. The culture of martyrdom.

Introduction: The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity
1. Pressure Points: Living in the world.
2. Language, Custom and Separatism
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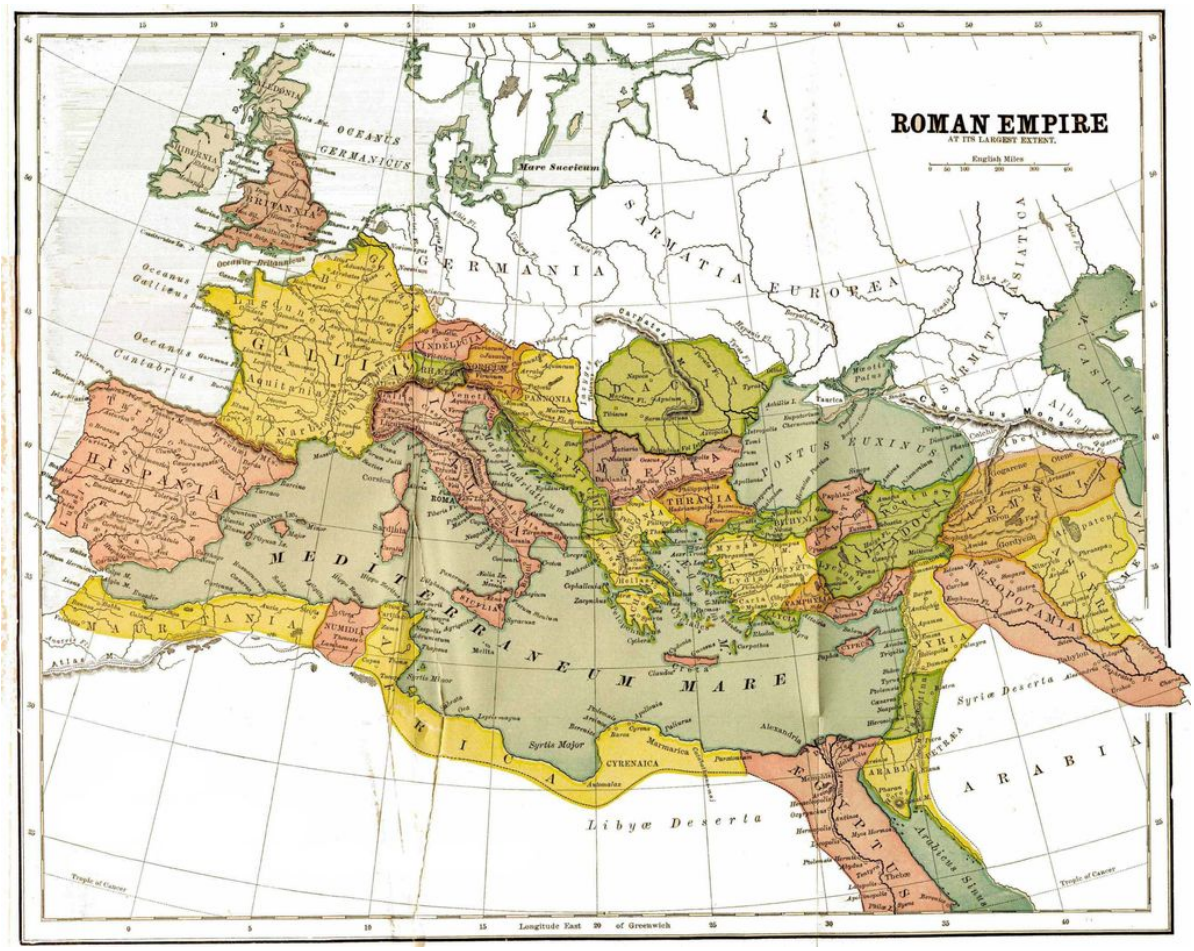
5. Martyrdom and Persecution: Dying in the world
6.Confessors
7.The Culture of Martyrdom
8.Unbreakable

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Conclusion
How the new issues and currents emerging around 200 shaped the subsequent history of the church, and of the larger West.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE
Septimius Severus:
The Empire and the World



Between 193 and 211, the Roman Emperor was the able and aggressive Septimius Severus, who was born in the province of Africa, in the land that we would today call Libya. After a period of political chaos in 193, Septimius presided over an era of wealth and stability. His second wife, Julia Domna, came from the Syrian city of Emesa, modern Homs. Septimius campaigned widely throughout the empire, expanding the frontier in both North Africa and Syria and defeating the Parthians, until he eventually died in Britain, in the city of York. His family, the Severan dynasty, held power in Rome until 235. That brief sketch gives a good sense of the extremely wide spread of Roman power in these years, and the multinational character of the ruling elites. (Septimius's son Caracalla was born in Lyon, in modern France, and was assassinated on the border between what we would call Turkey and Syria.) But this account also suggests the geographical dimensions of the Christian world. Much of what we know about the faith at that time comes from Septimius's home province of Africa, while other key Christian centers included Edessa, which he annexed to the empire. Lyon was the

base for the influential Christian thinker Irenaeus. If the Roman Empire did not exactly mark the limits of the Christian world, it provided an essential context to religious developments.

This ambitious chapter serves a function far larger than merely scene setting. Rather, it describes the structures and realities of the mainstream, non–Christian world, in order to allow readers to trace the similarities and differences of the Christian church, its beliefs and practices. I am careful not to speak of the "secular" world because it was in no sense secular, even if such a concept was thinkable at the time. Rather, it was a world profoundly conscious of spiritual concepts, or as the phrase has it, "a world full of gods." In some ways, the Christians were radically different and counter-cultural in the worlds in which they lived, but we can also see surprising similarities with, and borrowings from those worlds. Although in some ways Christian ideologies and approaches marked them as starkly deviant, the larger society was in many ways surprisingly open to diversity and accommodation.

The chapter would begin with the dominant reality of the two great empires of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, namely Rome and Parthia. In terms of popular culture, the years around 200 are quite celebrated in that this is the context of the film *Gladiator*. This points to the role of the Roman Empire, and the year 200 would have been known at the time as Year of the Consulship of Severus and Victorinus. However, the Severan dynasty proved to be an interlude between periods of anarchy and chaos. I would sketch the military institutions of the empire and its changing borders. That is particularly relevant to my larger story because Roman possessions in the east were then at their height, so that Roman power formally extended over many critical centers of early Christianity.

I would sketch the demographic realities of the world at the time, with a global population of some 250-300 million, 1/30 of the present day figure. The Roman Empire itself probably had a total population of at least 65 million. This fluctuated considerable, and numbers were hit hard by cataclysms such as the Antonine Plague of 165-180 and the horrific Plague of Cyprian (c.250-270). In this sense also, the Severan age was a boom period between these two troughs.

In this section, as throughout this chapter, my main concern would be to help the reader understand how exactly Christians fitted into this larger social and economic picture. That applies for instance to understanding the communities in which churches grew, the means of contact between them, and the plagues that so summoned forth their efforts at relief and social support.

The world's people were heavily concentrated within the great empires, which enjoyed a close symbiotic relationship in terms of trade, communication and cultural exchange. I would sketch the role of coins and currency, both as economic devices but also vehicles of propaganda. Trading links supporting networks of cities that were the basis of imperial power, and I would sketch the urban hierarchies of the time. Below the goliath center of Rome, there were several major cities, and then subordinate communities and regional capitals. Urban life was strongly concentrated in the east of the empire, with Africa as a rising force. Each community had its own local elites. Cities had a rich institutional and civic life, manifested in public buildings and rituals. Theaters, shows, and baths were all fundamental to social life. An account of cities would also describe ethnic divisions and neighborhoods in cities, the powerful role of migration, and linguistic diversity. What were the languages of power, the languages of trade?

As part of this discussion, I would also describe the means of commerce, trade and travel across the empire, in terms of roads and sea routes. As in most such accounts, I would use as my basis the celebrated Peutlinger Map, a kind of route map of the entire empire, marking roads, key cities and communication centers.

Although Parthian conditions are less relevant to my story, this chapter would also sketch comparable conditions and realities within that realm, with a concentration on urban life in the western territories where Jews and Christians most abounded. This discussion would take account of the culturally vital buffer states separating the two great Powers.

A section on power and ideology would stress concepts of empire to which all subjects were required to be loyal, and how local elites supported the imperial cult. Among many other ways, the Severan era was so critical in the history of Roman concepts of power and unity because this was the historic time that citizenship was extended to all free subjects of the empire. In 212, Caracalla implemented this policy in the *Constitutio Antoniniana.*

This chapter would sketch the social hierarchies prevailing in various parts of the empire, stressing the distinctions of freedom and slavery, compulsion and forced labor, and the status of slaves and freedmen. In terms of everyday life, I would sketch the social structures available at different stages of that social pyramid. These were founded on various forms of association, clubs and guilds, usually cementing their social bonds in eating and drinking. Such forms of grass roots social organization normally involved some degree of official licensing, and formal religious or ritual acts and ceremonies.

Any worthwhile history of a society has to take full account of gender distinctions, but in this context, discussing the role of women at all social levels is quite essential, because of the vital role of women in early Christian communities. In the Severan era especially, women were key political figures, and played a vital role in court affairs.

As so much of the book concerns texts and written evidence, a critical section of this chapter would introduce the common varieties of writing. Severan culture was distinguished in terms of major

authors, active in the main genres of Roman thought, philosophy and history, science and cosmology. But what can we say about levels of literacy in various parts of the empire? Who wrote, how did they learn to write, how were books made, published, regulated, and circulated? Who read books and why? Schools, academies and education; the scribal profession. Apart from books, what other means of written communication served to circulate and discuss ideas? At what social levels? Again, the key question is: just how different were Christians in what they wrote and read, and how they circulated and preserved these texts? How did their concepts of history and biography differ form those of the pagan mainstream?

The other major theme of this chapter concerns religion and spirituality very broadly defined, and how practice differed from what we might commonly assume from a later Christian (or Muslim) society. What were the central ideas and institutions? I would stress the pervasive and central role of sacrifices across social actions and interactions. The role of temples, shrines and srimage place; religion in the home, in commerce and in everyday life; household deities and their functions. How Christian mockery of such local deities sounds exactly like later Protestant denunciations of Catholic cults of the saints, and often in the same geographical areas. The religious foundations of empire: religion, cults, mystery cults, temples, priests, texts and scriptures.

How did the Romans view religious outsiders and minorities? Tolerance, inclusion and regulation. Views of other races and religious communities; Jews.

CHAPTER TWO
Polycrates:
Mapping the Christian World in 200

I have already described the controversy in the 190s over the dating of Easter. As that debate developed, its geographical scope was deeply impressive. Obviously, communications in this era were nothing like as fast as in Modern times, and messages could take months to travel across the empire. Even so, Christian leaders were acting on an enormous scale. The main protagonists were based in Rome, Ephesus and … Participants in the debate… Major councils were held in ?, ?, and ?. Syrian bishops gathered in Edessa. And the participants in these meetings were only from congregations in communion with the Great Church, rather than from the many rival Christian groups that rejected its authority or legitimacy.

This chapter would offer a survey of the Christian world as it existed around 200, examining numbers and demographics. It will show what we can reliably say about how numerous Christians of all shades were, and where they were to be found. Throughout this discussion, I will be drawing material as heavily as possible from the years immediately around 200, rather than more generically in the era of "the early church."

Estimating Christian numbers at any point in history (even today) is a difficult task, not least because of the definition of what we are trying to count. For the early church, the classic figures are those of Rodney Stark's 1996 book *The Rise of Christianity*. His study was and remains controversial, but it made an excellent attempt at providing some kind of general parameters. Drawing analogies with modern new religious movements, Stark showed that Christians could have achieved their remarkable growth in the first few centuries by quite familiar forms of growth and conversion, without any kind of claims to miracle or uniqueness. He estimates a global Christian population of 40,000 in AD 150, rising to 218,000 in 200, and 1.17 million by 250. According to his calculation, it was around 180 that global Christian numbers first surpassed the symbolically weighty figure of 100,000. Stark would be the first to admit that those figures are anything but precise, but they provide plausible limits. If someone suggested a Christian population in 200 as ten thousand, or as ten million, then they would assuredly be wrong. But a range anywhere from (say) 150,000 to 350,000 would be quite plausible.

There are two reasons to place the figure for AD 200 somewhat higher than Stark proposed. One specific issue concerns the total population with which Stark is working, which is that of the Roman empire. His estimate for the overall Roman population is rather lower than more recent estimates, and Christian numbers must be adjusted accordingly. Also, he treats the limits of the Christian world as identical with that of the Roman Empire. As I will show, though, already by 200 there certainly were Christians outside that political realm, especially in eastern lands.

Without any confidence in the precise nature of an estimate, then, I would rather suggest a global Christian population of perhaps 250,000. That represents a stunning expansion from the small groups we glimpse in apostolic times, but the number is tiny when we think of the vast geographical extent of the large world, from Mesopotamia to Britain. It is also a tiny fraction of that world – perhaps 0.36 percent of whole population of the Severan Empire.

I would then map Christian communities, examining the role of cities and urban hierarchies; ports and trade routes; frontiers and rivers. Comparing the Christian world map with the Jewish Diaspora.

How these early centers provided launch points for later expansion. Also, the potential directions that either failed or were blunted by later developments. Among the regions and centers I would explore would be the so-called Great Triangle, of Alexandria, Antioch, Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The three other major components of the Christian world would be, first, the Christians in the Greek *Oikou Mene*, with a particular emphasis on Egypt and Palestine. We would then examine the very substantial eastern territories, and the Syriac world of the east: Syria, the border states, and Parthia. Congregations already flourished in Arabia, the Indian Ocean, and India itself. Finally, we note Christians of the Latin West, of Italy, Africa, Gaul and even Britain.

As I have noted, the consequence of this geographical spread was a vastly greater linguistic and cultural diversity within the church, and the emergence of at least four major language zones, each with its own customs and traditions.

Pushing Christian boundaries even further were and budding mission ventures. I would descri9be the means by which the faith spread, apart from deliberate missionary evangelism. These alternative means included, for instance, the effects of war, captivity and enslavement.

This chapter would sketch the appeal of Christianity within the various regions, focusing on such issues as social class, and gender balance. The social and educational level of church leaders and bishops was in rapid transition, with an obvious growth of educated men of considerable learning, fully able to participate in the intellectual conflicts of the time.

How far does our available evidence distort the actual strength and distribution of the faith at this time? Communities of various sizes, from great cities to regional centers: the emergence of rural Christian congregations.

The spectrum of Christian belief and activism. Based on modern observations of new and marginal religious movements, there is always likely to be a range of degrees of enthusiasm and commitment, and recruits often come and go. This section would therefore consider degrees of membership within churches, but also the presence of half-hearted or limited believers, and defectors or apostates. The role of intermarriage, and the presence of mixed families.

Reasons for conversion. How did Christians seek to spread their views, and what we can learn or infer form more modern sociological literature on rising sects and marginal religions. The role of social networks and family networks. How do Christians advertise and recruit? What is their appeal? Did Christians live a distinct lifestyle? The role of Christian charity in social welfare, disaster relief and plague.

How different were Christians in terms of sexual ethos and family structure? In terms of how outsiders viewed the faith's appeal, we might turn to the observations of the pagan medical writer Galen around 200. Among other factors drawing people to that faith, he mentioned the appeal of parables, signs and miracles, and claims to supernatural power; but also the Christian contempt of death – demonstrated above all by the martyrs. Also, he noted Christian sexual morality, their restraint in cohabitation, which proved attractive. Although he did not claim to have based those observations on any vast scientific survey, those different elements were likewise remarked by other outsiders around that time.

As the church grew, as it became more diverse and polyphonic, that put pressure on congregations to form wide relationships with other churches, to avoid the danger of Christianity breaking down into multiple groupings unable and unwilling to communicate with each other.

CHAPTER THREE
Hippolytus:
The Great Church

By 200, individual churches were acting in concert on a regional and imperial scale. Some of the travels and interactions from this period are striking, showing frequent contacts across a Christian world that existed as a kind of shadow version of the Roman empire. And as in that empire, the city of Rome mattered greatly, even if we do not yet see anything vaguely approaching the power oif the later papacy.

At least by the early second century, the Christian church had an institutional structure focused on bishops, with subsidiary ranks including presbyters and deacons. By 200, this structure was well recognized and increasingly formalized, even if it fell short of anything we might expect from Late Antiquity or the medieval world. Bishops mattered immensely.

It should be said that the exact nature of those bishops varied greatly, and even such historic congregations as Rome and Corinth might have been late adapters of the practice. By the ate second century, though, standardization and uniformity were developing apace. Also by the late second century, there is substantial, if controversial, evidence, of churches acting as corporate bodies that held property., owning cemeteries and catacombs.

Although individual congregations enjoyed large autonomy, they existed within a larger doctrinal and administrative framework, which severely limited their capacity to deviate from commonly held views. Communities recognized each other by sharing eucharistic communion, which was withheld from any group felt to be deviant, in a process much like later excommunication. That larger communion constituted a higher notion of the church, and what has come to be called the Great Church. Concepts of heresy, schism and orthodoxy were already highly developed.

This chapter would identify the major centers of church power around 200, and how they were situated in the emerging structures of the church. Bishops of major cities enjoyed widespread prestige across large sections of the Christian world. Some at least were approaching the kind of status and recognition that characterize the great patriarchates of the fourth and fifth centuries. That power largely reflected the status of the cities in which they were based, such as Rome and Alexandria, but it was reinforced by the accumulating volume of church tradition associated with particular congregations – the seat of previous martyrs, apologists and scholars. Some great churches were beginning to command power over whole regional networks.

Disputes often arose between factions and between individual centers, especially when Christianity was spread over such a vast territory. As the example of the Easter controversies suggests, there was already an expectation that conflicts would be resolved through synods and councils. Feuds and factions also developed within local communities, over both ideological and personal issues. Rome offers many examples of such disputes, some of which expanded into full schisms.

I will describe what we can know about the process by which bishops were chosen or elected, which at this stage was still very much a matter for popular acclamation, and of course lacked any kind of official sanction. One powerful theme that does emerge from any such study is the very wide and diverse range of structures prevailing in different areas, totally unlike later uniformity. In some critical cities for instance, congregations were administered not by a single monarchical bishop but by a more collective authority, a kind of ruling committee.

In early modern times, the nature of the early church was a matter for fevered debate between Protestants and Catholics, with each side seeking either to expand or diminish the power and hierarchy of that primitive community. That debate also extended to the nature of the clergy, with later Catholics seeking to make the early clergy as priest-like as possible. This chapter will begin with the status of the eucharist as it existed around 200, with the central role of the bishop. However we can discern those lower ranks of clergy, and the means by which they were chosen and set aside – it is slightly too early for the concept of ordination.

One innovative theme of this chapter is celibacy. By the late fourth century, there is abundant evidence that clergy in many areas were expected to practice celibacy. Partly, this reflected a growing sense of the power of the eucharist, and the expansion of celebrations to a daily basis. If a priest or bishop was expected to be celibate before celebrating that rite, and if it occurred in a daily or near daily basis, that de facto demanded strict, permanent, celibacy. I will describe the stages by which that situation developed, and where matters stood around 200.

Finally, I will describe some structures of Christian life that prevailed in early times, but which subsequently ceased to exist. At least up to the second century, churches acknowledged prophets or visionaries among their leaders, a situation that vanished in later centuries. Also, Christian philosophers ran schools and academies much like their pagan philosopher counterparts, although this kind of didactic status fits poorly into later concepts of clergy and institutional structures.

One unusual aspect of this chapter will be my use of alternative and Gnostic sources to illustrate the growth of church order and hierarchy, and the nature of church authority. Several gospels and tracts allude to these themes, commonly from a very critical perspective, and these reflect debates and controversies in progress around 200.

CHAPTER FOUR
Abercius:
Praying, Worshipping and Baptizing

Around 200, one Abercius erected a funerary monument for himself in Phrygia, in modern-day Turkey, and the inscription used some language that would have baffled most passers-by. Abercius was probably the bishop of Hierapolis, a city where Christianity dated back to Paul's time, in the mid-first century. Using multiple metaphors and cryptic symbols, the bishop described his core beliefs, and those of his church. The inscription told how Abercius served a "chaste shepherd":

> He sent me to Rome, to behold a kingdom
> And to see a queen with golden robe and golden shoes.
> There I saw a people bearing the splendid seal.
> And I saw the plain of Syria and all the cities, even Nisibis,

> Having crossed the Euphrates. And everywhere I had associates
> Having Paul as a companion, everywhere faith led the way
> And set before me food the fish from the spring
> Mighty and pure, whom a spotless Virgin caught,
> And gave this to friends to eat, always
> Having sweet wine and giving the mixed cup with bread.

For fellow believers, Abercius's words were at once inspiring and instructive, teaching as they did fundamental Christian doctrine and practices. They must also have given a sense of pride and joy in the ability to share a whole mystical world-view closed to outsiders, (literally) to the uninitiated. Already, at this early stage of Christian history, the church had evolved a corpus of images and symbols, mythology and narrative, that was quite comparable to those of the most recondite mystery cults.

This chapter has three pervasive themes, namely memory, tradition, and authority: how Christians remembered their story, how they transmitted it, and how they derived authority from those actions.

That act of memory was focused on the Eucharist, the central fact of Christian life, and the justification for all that followed. We can reconstruct with fair confidence what the Eucharistic service would have looked like about the year 200, and the specific prayers and liturgies. The other fact of ritual life was the baptism, a moment of initiation preceded by a lengthy spell of training and induction for catechumens. Both events customarily involved versions of the Creed, which became increasingly formalized.

I would also explore the other forms of prayer and private devotion that can be demonstrated in this era, including the first evidence of devotion to Mary and the saints. This includes the early evidence of saintly relics.

It was also around 200 that the Bardesanes composed the first known Christian hymns in Syriac) , and Christian music. So successful were these that they naturally inspired imitators. Because of Bardesan's reputation as a heretic (deserved or not), orthodox writers were especially keen to produce their own musical versions to challenge and replace his compositions.

Also early are the first manifestations of magical tokens and amulets bearing Christian symbols, a particular form of popular devotion.

Because of the church's illegal or irregular status, it is difficult to say much about the physical appearance of churches, although a good deal can be surmised. The rather later church at Dura Europos gives some evidence that can be extrapolated. The same is true of the catacomb material, which is very informative for Christian approaches to the visual arts, and to iconography. What such images tell us about the Christian symbolic and aesthetic universe, as already suggested by the inscription of Abercius.

Among other themes, this chapter would discuss how the Christian world – liturgical, devotional and architectural – grew out of Judaism and how far it differed from that powerful precedent. I would also discuss the relationship between that same Christian world and Roman/Greek/pagan precedent.

One aspect of popular devotion is the slow and gradual adoption of distinctive Christian names. Around 200, even prominent Christian leaders had such embarrassingly pagan names as Narcissus and Serapion. How did that pattern change?

CHAPTER FIVE
Philumene:
Women, Men, and Marriage

In recent decades, the role of women has occupied a central place in discussions of early Christianity. Issues of gender (and sexuality) will feature in every part of the present book, but this chapter will provide the principal discussion, and will introduce core themes for the rest of the argument.

One controversial issue in modern scholarship concerns the power and authority of women within the churches, and women's role in church offices. In modern times, the role and status of women has been a matter of enduring concern to most Christian churches. Commonly, that has focused on the issue of ordaining women as priests, pastors, or bishops, a cause that has largely been won in mainstream Protestant denominations, although it remains deeply contentious in the Roman Catholic church, and many evangelical congregations. As I suggested earlier, debates over contemporary Christian issues frequently take the form of historical quests for ancient precedents, and that has very much been the case with the question of women's leadership. Much recent

scholarship has stressed the prominence of Mary Magdalene in the earliest Christian community, and arguably as an apostle in her own right.

This chapter discusses the evidence for women as clergy, priests and office holders in various Christian movements and denominations in this particular era, and generally finds no evidence of women as priests or bishops. Women did however occupy key roles in church structures, both institutional (acknowledged widows, and deacons) and as charismatic figures of prophets. Whether or not as recognized leaders, women were key activists in many emerging sects. Two women were the esteemed prophets of the millenarian Montanist sect that exercised so powerful an appeal across the Christian world around the year 200. Women were spiritual leaders and prophets, they were martyrs, and well-placed female believers worked to mitigate persecution. Women were dynamic forces in the process of Christian evolution.

But gender issues are significant in other ways, including any attempt to explain the rapid growth of Christian numbers. Most contemporary accounts stress the prominent role of women as lay Christians across the social scale, as key converts and church members. Most also see distinctive Christian sexual morality as a powerful selling point for the new faith, quite as significant as the Christian role in assisting the poor with welfare and assistance. Women especially found the message of chastity and fidelity profoundly attractive.

Modern parallels help explain linkage between the church's messages about sexuality and family and the church's popularity with women. This touches on an argument often made for the appeal of Pentecostal and evangelical churches in the modern day Global South, where women are multiply attracted to congregations that strictly forbid drink and drugs, prohibit male sexual dalliances or second families, and encourage habits of hard work and thrift. Whatever the theological foundations of such attitudes, the practical consequence is to offer women much more secure and prosperous home lives, and in consequence, they are the most devoted supporters of the new churches. One scholar has described this larger shift in attitudes towards family and gender a "Reformation of Machismo."

This chapter would explore the rich theme of distinctive women's cultures within the early church, as expressed in apocryphal texts and traditions. These represented a whole other aspect of Christian tradition and memory.

One powerful trend in Christianity from the mid-second century onwards was a growing suspicion and even hatred of all sexuality, a prohibition that went far beyond mere calls for chastity within marriage. Although such opinions never acquired mainstream status within the Great Church, they were remarkably widespread among influential sects – Encratites, Marcionites, nascent Dualist sects, and others. Around 150, Justin Martyr reports an Alexandrian Christian who sought official permission to castrate himself. That idea lies behind the long-credited myth that the young Origen, around 210, attempted to castrate himself.

These anti-sexual critiques also had their impact on Tertullian, whom we have already encountered as such a powerful force in the making of Latin Catholic theology. Tertullian even foreshadows the later linkage between original sin and human sexuality. He notoriously described women as "the Devil's Gateway," providing a Patristic charter and warrant for much later ecclesiastical misogyny. Without exaggeration, we can say that reading Tertullian today often recalls the words of strict modern-day Islamic thinkers, even on matters such as veiling women.

Although not new in 200, these radical ideas were at this time creating a ferment in religious thought and moral discussion, and in perceptions of gender. They also provided the essential foundation for ideas of clerical celibacy, which did so much to shape the institutional structures of the emerging church. Moreover, we see here the prehistory of monasticism, which emerged with such overwhelming force from the 240s onwards.

CHAPTER SIX
Judah the Prince:
Christians and Jews

Most accounts of early Christianity prominently describe the "parting of the ways" between Christians and Jews, a process by which both movements became independent religions, and the growth of hostility and vituperation that involved. Customarily, this critical change is associated with the Jewish War of the 60s, and a definitive break is suggested with the Bar-Kochba revolt of the 130s. As Christianity became more of a Gentile-dominated faith, so it distanced itself from its roots. In turn, Jews acquired their own new directions with the consolidation of Rabbinic Judaism

Although there is some truth in that picture, scholars in recent times have warned against seeing the breach as simple. Indeed, one important collection of essays uses the title *The Ways That Never Parted*. While fully admitting the hostility and controversy separating the two, we must also recognize the highly local nature of cooperation and conflict. In such a vast and complex territory of interaction, obviously communities did not all follow one script, or observe one timetable. Conditions varied enormously, from time to time and city to city. As late as the fourth century, we find Christians in some regions seeing themselves as part of a Jewish continuum and happily attending Jewish services. Such a tendency was much more marked around 200.

Through the centuries, scholars have often studied the so-called Jewish Christian sects, which are well documented in the third and fourth centuries. Bearing names such as the Ebionites and Nazareans, such groups declared their loyalty to Jesus and claimed their proper position in Christian communities, yet held views on circumcision and dietary laws that fitted better with Judaism as we know it historically. Still more intriguing, these groups had their own range of gospel texts. Although those do not survive in their entirety, the fragments that we do possess include some important and evocative remnants of early tradition. Just who these sects might have been remains much debated. Many see them as the authentic heirs of the earliest followers of Jesus, those who refused to accept the movement towards universalism and accommodation with the Gentiles, as represented by St. Paul. Determining the state of such "Jewish-Christian" movements around 200 is therefore a crucial contribution to understanding the larger story.

Critical evidence for the Jewish Christian movements comes from the large Pseudo-Clementine literature, which I will only sketch briefly in the present document. (I will be using these texts in the book passim). These documents tell of interactions among the early apostles, with a focus on Peter and James, brother of Jesus. They survive in fourth century copies, but their originals almost certainly date from the years around 200, in the span 180-220. They are so important because they reveal a whole otherwise unknown world of Jewish-Christian beliefs and movements, a whole and largely forgotten strand of sectarian Judaism that accepted Jesus but also insisted on the validity of the Law. Yet the kind of Judaism they advocate is not simple piety, but is rather based on complex speculations about the nature of Deity, and the process of divine revelation and the formation of scripture. These texts remain little unknown apart from among narrow specialists, and are unfamiliar even to many scholars of early Christianity and Judaism.

The years around 200 were critical for the development of Rabbinic Judaism. We now see the beginning of a process lasting several centuries out of which emerged the Talmud, initially from Palestine but later Babylonia. Although it is in no sense a dominant theme of that literature, many texts can be cited to illustrate controversy with Christians.

Quite apart from controversies that explicitly set Christians against Jews, that enduring Jewish dimension provides the essential foundation for understanding some of the issues that most sharply divided Christians in this era. Although Church and Synagogue were separate, the relationship between the two remained tense and divisive.

However technical the calendrical minutiae in the so-called Paschal debates described earlier – the controversy over the dating of Easter - one key question was how far Christians should rely on a Jewish structure of months and days. Also divisive was the survival of highly material and this-world oriented kinds of millenarianism, which we would normally assign to Jewish traditions. Those ideas still attracted prominent Christian thinkers well towards the end of the second century.

The question of how far the old Law should be retained or respected also drove another very lively controversy of this era. What was the relationship between Christ's mission and the Law of the Old Testament, of the Jewish tradition. Jewish-Christians preached direct continuity, demanding that the new community should practice all aspects of Jewish law, including circumcision and dietary laws. At the opposite extreme were thinkers like Marcion, who taught a total disconnect between Old and New Testaments and the deities taught by each. Christians, in that sense, truly were a wholly new creation. Marcion further demanded that Christians should only follow the New Testament, and indeed a heavily edited version of that text, while disregarding the Old. Although Marcionism was condemned, his views held widespread support in large regions of the Christian world, and also attracted many followers for centuries afterwards.

Even if indeed "the ways had parted", the after effects of the breach endured for centuries afterwards. Those continuing contacts shaped the historical development of Christianity far more substantially than we might expect.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Bardaisan:
Heresies and Orthodoxies

In however mixed and muddied a form, Christianity broke with its Jewish parent stem, but that still left the question of just how far it should travel away from that origin in the direction of the Gentile philosophical traditions of the time. As Christian communities established themselves in many great cities, with their flourishing intellectual life, so Christian thinkers were compelled to interact with pagan thinkers and to debate them. That was all the more essential when pagans were directly attacking Christianity. Apologetics became an urgent necessity.

This chapter will describe the two sides of the debate as they existed around 200. That task is made much easier by the abundant writings of Clement and Tertullian, both of whom operated in major cities.

Quite apart from apologetics, the new status and visibility of Christian communities meant that writers had to consider questions that might once have seemed far beyond their higher aspirations. Could Christians actually participate in the sophisticated debates of the philosophical salons in great cities? How far could they accept and absorb the very different assumptions of science and cosmology? Could they learn the thought worlds of Platonism, a movement that in the early third century was on the eve of a renewed efflorescence? As so often in this book, we see an enormous range of local responses, varying according to place and time. Some individuals, some communities, were far more advanced and ambitious in these tasks than were others, and some of the most adventurous would later be dismissed as grossly heretical.

Around 200, as never before, Christians had to confront the challenge of dialogue with the pagan intellectual world.

The fourth century bishop Eusebius of Caesarea offered an enormously influential model for understanding the history of Christianity. In his *Church History*, he described the emergence of the faith as he conceived it, tracing the struggles of the authentic true-believing mainstream to resist and crush deviant ideas and practices. In the 170s, the Gaulish bishop Irenaeus had popularized the terms orthodoxy and heresy for the competing forces. Not only did Eusebius create the narrative that prevailed until modern times, but his selection of documents for recording and preservation decided the sources and materials that subsequent historians would be able to access. The customary lack of alternative sources makes it all but impossible to decide whether Eusebius was correct in his judgments about individuals he mentions, particularly those who lived a century or more before his time.

The rediscovery of long-lost sources from the nineteenth century onwards has changed this situation enormously, and created new opportunities to reassess that basic narrative. In 1934, German scholar Walter Bauer proposed a radical re-evaluation of the whole idea of orthodoxy and heresy. To over-simplify, he suggested that the Christian world of the second or third centuries would have been radically diverse, to the point that large territories were dominated by views that the later church would regard as grossly heretical. What we would later term "orthodoxy" prevailed only in limited sections of the Christian community, and only retroactively from the fourth century was history rewritten to present it as a historic norm. Few modern scholars would accept Bauer's thesis in anything like its pure form, but he provided a crucial function in framing questions that needed to be asked.

Surveying Christianity around 200, "orthodox" Christianity, or something very like it, would indeed have prevailed over most of the known world. However, there assuredly were areas dominated by very different views that for convenience, I will here term heresies. Rather than merely list the groups - and the names proliferate very confusingly – I will classify them according to their degree of difference from the orthodox vision recorded by Eusebius, and largely maintained by his church successors. For present purposes, I will treat all as components of the larger Christian reality: if they described themselves as Christians, then they must be treated as such.

My chapter would thus identify the major groups, strands and thinkers within that broad diversity of Christian thought, as it existed at that moment around 200; and also the recurrent debates and battles between them and the self-described orthodox. Fortunately for present purposes, these alternative currents are very well surveyed at just this time by Hippolytus himself, in his *Refutation of All Heresies*.. As noted earlier, the present availability of alternative scriptures and gospels means that we are very richly informed about the views of many of these Other movements as they existed at that time, and in their own words. The work of sophisticated authors like Clement of Alexandria also gives us wonderful resources for the range of opinions at this time.

The chapter would thus suggest the wide diversity of Christian opinion, but also the institutional structures that each of these various movements possessed. In some cases, rival opinions fought for control of a particular church, while in others, competing bodies existed within a city or region, and each claimed to be the true mainstream voice of authentic Christianity. As remarked earlier, this pattern suggests something very much like modern concepts of denominations.

I would focus here on the crucial figure of Bardaisan and his intellectual world, indicating the core issues that divided Christians in this era.

The most fundamental question concerned the literal, physical reality of Jesus and his earthly mission. According to a common Gnostic interpretation, the account in the gospels was a symbolic, metaphorical account that needed to be read inwardly, and psychologically. Christ, in this vision, was a divine force, a symbolic figure, and events like his Resurrection had to be read accordingly. A somewhat less radical reading accepted the general outlines of his mission, but denied Christ's material reality. Far from being wholly human, he was a divine figure, who only "seemed" to take that form. From the Greek word for "seem", this approach was Docetic. The divine Christ was not necessarily identical with the earthly Jesus, or if he was, it was only on a temporary basis.

Marcion's attack on the Old Testament had also raised vital questions about the relationship between the material and spiritual worlds Gnostics held that the material creation was utterly flawed and evil, the work of an inferior creator god or angel, while Christ brought news of a higher spiritual realm.

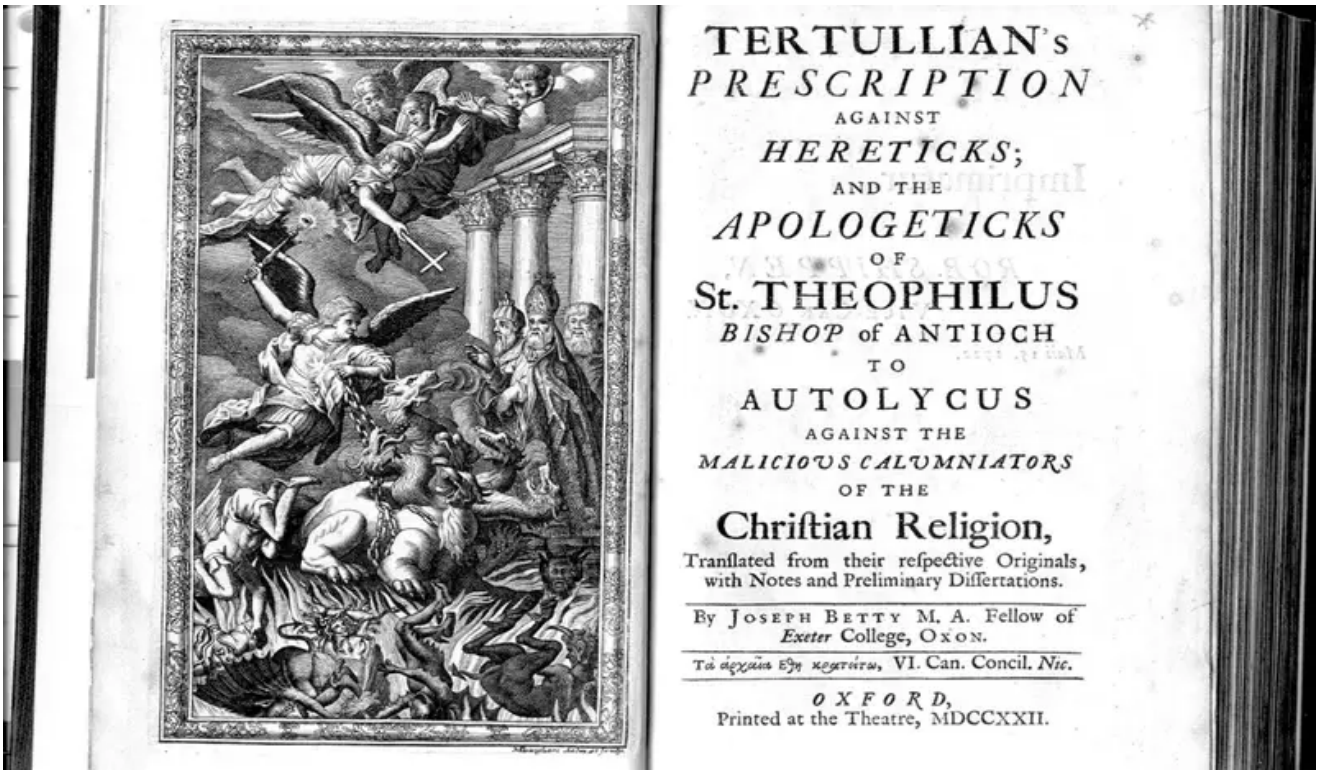
By later standards – and I emphasize that distinction – such views were so grossly heretical as to deny their advocates a place within the Christian spectrum. Some had roots in the first century, and were forthrightly denounced in the New Testament itself: Docetism was a frequent target.

One other strand of belief demands special attention, and it might also be another remnant of truly primitive ideas. In the early Christian era, there were various Jewish-Christian baptismal sects that held broadly Dualist views, and one particularly important manifestation of this became known as the Elchasaites. Although their origins are uncertain, they might have represented some kind of heritage from Qumran and the sect that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in the third century AD, they evolved into the new Manichean religion, founded by the prophet Mani. Particularly significant in terms of their written remains were the Sethians, who can be mapped together with the baptismal sects and the esoteric Jewish current, quite as much as with the Gnostic tradition.

Around 200, these baptismal groups were an important, if poorly understood, presence in the eastern portions of the empire, and they require special treatment here.

In describing the confrontations between shifting versions of orthodoxy and heresy, I would emphasize how such battles actively encouraged the growing sophistication and institutional structures within the Great Church.

CHAPTER EIGHT
Tertullian:
Christian Theology Comes of Age



TERTULLIAN's
PRESCRIPTION
AGAINST
HERETICKS;
AND THE
APOLOGETICKS
OF
St. THEOPHILUS
BISHOP of ANTIOCH
TO
AUTOLYCUS
AGAINST THE
MALICIOUS CALUMNIATORS
OF THE
Chriſtian Religion,
Tranſlated from their reſpective Originals, with Notes and Preliminary Diſſertations.
By JOSEPH BETTY M. A. Fellow of *Exeter* College, OXON.
Τὰ ἀρχαῖα ἐξῆ κρατεῖν, VI. Can. Concil. *Nic.*
OXFORD,
Printed at the Theatre, MDCCXXII.

The range of heresies and –isms in the early church was enormous, and all but impossible for any non-expert to track accurately. But they did matter greatly, in terms of the effects of the resulting controversies on shaping what became the mainstream church. Also, it was in dialogue with those alternative ideas that mainstream Christian theology formed its own ideas. That emerges especially from the case of Tertullian. It was precisely in his controversy with various heretics that he laid the foundation for Christian ideas that would be standard orthodoxy for the next 1800 years.

I have warned against drawing too stark a division between orthodoxy and heresy, and the range of "heresies" broadened substantially as a direct consequence of the growing sophistication of church doctrine. For instance, Eusebius would have viewed with horror an idea like Adoptionism, the theory that the divine essence, or Sonship, descended upon the man Jesus at a specific moment, generally at his baptism in the Jordan. In his day, orthodox believers accepted that the Jesus conceived of Mary and born in Galilee already united the divine and human. Earlier generations, though, had been less certain about that idea of divinity from birth. Neither the canonical New Testament gospel of Mark, nor that of John, has any reference to Jesus's birth, and it is quite possible to read both texts as suggesting that divinity descended on Jesus at his baptism. Quite possibly, those were the theological ideas of the primitive first century communities that originated and appreciated those venerated gospels, and only decades later were these approaches viewed as heretical, still less labeled with a damning "-ism."

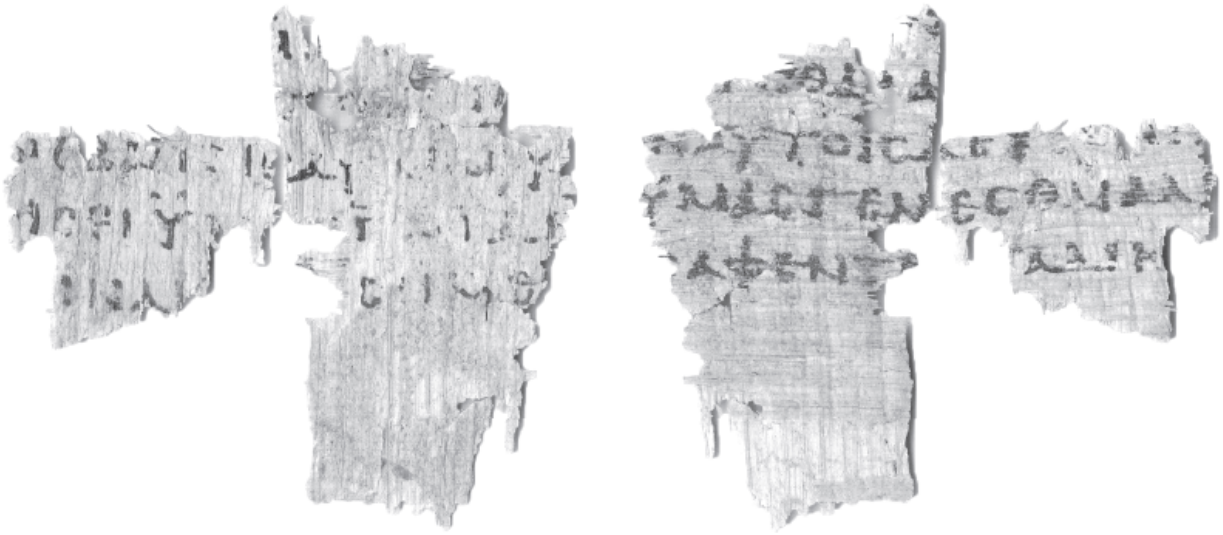
As the church evolved its ideas and theological approaches, so those who failed to keep up with the new realities found themselves labeled as heresies, even if the views they had once held had long seemed unexceptionable – even standard and orthodox. Around 200, that sad process was overtaking a variety of once-standard opinions, and those who held them. We have already seen how once-acceptable ideas about dating Easter were condemned. So also were older approaches to questions of the Incarnation or the Trinity, both ideas that were in flux at this time.

In other areas too, movements that were marked as heretical around 200 held ideas that might not have seemed so deviant in earlier periods. These included the Montanists, followers of the "New Prophecy" that erupted a generation earlier. Arguably, they were pursuing ideas and practices that might have seemed much more mainstream in apostolic times. Also, ideas of the apocalypse, the Millennium, and the end of the world were much debated, and some visions of the imminent End Times were now classified as heretical in a way they would not have been a century before.

Another example of this exclusion of once-common ideas was the Monarchian controversy of the late second century. This is a lengthy and complex story, but very briefly, second century writers accepted the idea that Christ was the Logos and as such divine, but did that imply the horrendous polytheistic conclusion that Father and Son two gods. In reaction, other thinkers stressed the unified role of God the Father, even to the point of imagining him dying on the cross. Were Father, Son, and Spirit no more than Modes of one single reality?

Various thinkers struggled against these ideas, and in so doing they had to find acceptable formulae to explain just what was the relationship between what they came to call the persons of the Trinity. Related to this was the no less fundamental question of who or what was Jesus Christ, and in what sense could he be fully human, and fully divine? Tertullian above all offered his solutions for these questions, and in so doing laid the foundation for Western Catholic theology.

CHAPTER NINE
Clement of Alexandria:
One Church, One Book



The great diversity of sects and schools affected attitudes to Scripture, and to scriptural authority. In various ways, all Christian groups paid at least some attention to scriptural sources, including the Old Testament and some or most of the New Testament, but it is hard to generalize across groups and denominations.

This chapter will describe the Bible as it was commonly known at the time – how it was defined, which texts were canonized, and what authority was granted to them. Briefly, what was counted scripture, and did this vary from place to place? Most Christian groups had high veneration for the Old Testament, virtually always read in Greek in the Septuagint version. That meant using a larger canon of books than would be found in a modern day Protestant church. Beyond that canon, various apocryphal texts or pseudepigrapha were also still read, especially the Enochic writings. That Christian taste for exotic Biblical writings aggravated the many grievances separating Christians and Jews.

If the Old Testament was under debate, that was all the more true of the New. The idea of four key gospels was already well established by the mid-second century, but debate continued. Significantly, in light of present-day approaches, there is more evidence of people actually wanting to cut the four down, perhaps by removing John, than of agitation to expand the canon. Harmonies or compilations of the four gospels proved highly popular.

Throughout these years around 200, issues of canon remained much discussed, both in terms of the gospels, and of other texts. Beyond the gospels, canon remained in flux. And while opinions differed about the texts that should be incorporated into the canon, there was also significant variation over the specific readings found in those books.

Although the exact date is uncertain, the Syriac translation of the Scriptures (Peshitta) was probably available by 200, both Old and New Testaments.

Around 200, the Gospel of John was the subject of fierce controversy, which would provide an excellent centerpiece for this discussion, and an illustration of the conflicts of the time.

Even when books were viewed as canonical, there remained much discussion about how they should be interpreted and valued. The Pauline letters especially were subject to very different readings in this era. Also by 200, the first New Testament commentaries were emerging. The Gnostic Heracleon wrote the first ever, in the 170s, but orthodox writers soon took up the task. Again, Clement is very informative on attitudes to scripture and exegesis.

Beyond the matters of criticism, I would also describe the world of Christian literary enterprise: who wrote books and tracts, how they were copied, published and circulated; how some texts were preserved while others were lost and destroyed, deliberately or otherwise. How, if at all, did Christian practice and attitudes differ from pagan and Jewish precedent?

The century after 150 witnessed a vast outpouring of writings that roughly followed the form of gospels and other New Testament texts, although fro an enormous range of theological stances. Such texts were in fact a common means of framing debate and asserting religious claims within the Christian world. I will describe the main non-canonical works available around this time, and trace their fate. How did church authorities assess their claims and decide on an appropriate response? How did such attitudes vary from place to place? How far can we identify local fads and fashions? Already during the late second century, we see some impressive evidence of critical skills being applied to decide whether particular books were acceptable or not, suggesting definite attitudes to questions of authenticity, forgery, and fraudulence.

Also important is the question of what these texts show about the Christian community at this time in terms of its interests and obsessions. Clearly, there was a desperate hunger for any information about the apostles and especially the Virgin Mary, and this bespeaks a surging interest in saints and their powers. Apostolic Acts and alternative epistles proliferated, as did accounts of the Virgin that made her appear ever more like Christ himself. There was a huge market for popular fictions about Christian origins, and authors sought to satisfy it.

Beyond pseudo-Biblical works, there is also abundant evidence for theological tracts, for meditations, and for apologetic and controversial works. A solid range of such works is available for the period around 200, and they give an excellent idea of what readers were interested in.

We also know a good deal of the means by which Christians read their scriptures, and the reading strategies they employed – literal, metaphorical, spiritual. Although Origen would not write his critical works for another generation, we already see signs of these ideas emerging by 200.

As noted in earlier chapters, the outcome of these debates was the growing acceptance of a united canon, defined by the Great Church.

CHAPTER TEN
Perpetua:
Dying and Living in the World

In so many ways, the story of the legendary martyr Perpetua precisely fits the expectations that modern readers have of the early church, with its vision of Christians being thrown to wild animals in the arena. Such images, in fact, have become so stereotyped as to be fodder for cartoons and jokes. Incidents of this kin assuredly did occur, and they occupied a massive role in Christian rhetoric and mythology, but the question of just how typical or frequent they were divides modern scholars.

This chapter will address the role of Christians within a pagan state. In many ways, we find a close analogy to that ancient reality in modern-day China, where many Christian congregations operate under conditions that are technically illegal, yet with a considerable degree of de facto tolerance – always assuming that certain red lines are not crossed. At most times and places, it is feasible for Christians to live within the laws, and even to prosper. At any moment, though, believers know that persecution might arise in response to some local crisis or scandal, or the malice of some singularly hostile bureaucrat. At such moments – now as then – a whole culture of denunciation and scandal mongering easily arises to further stir and drive hostility. Then as now, the more successful Christians become, the more visible their success and the more overt their propaganda, the greater the likelihood of a backlash, and the strict enforcement of penal laws.

I will describe the legal environment of Christians within the Roman empire, and the issues potentially stirring persecution. Those chiefly included participation in the imperial cult, within the requisite oaths and sacrifices. At the same time, a harsh legal environment was counter balanced by

the personal good-will, or at least mild tolerance, of particular officials, and even members of the imperial court.

This chapter will describe the dynamics of the main instances of persecution under the Severans. Framing such events demands knowledge of the rich body of slander and hateful mythology applied to Christians in this era, and the array of charges concerning sexual deviance and even cannibalism. In turn, Christians built up stories of their sufferings through their own elaborate narratives. In a sense, we see a case of dueling mythologies.

Throughout these stories also, we see the importance of memory and tradition as cornerstones of Christian growth and development. Memories of martyrdom were powerful recruiting tools, and also gave unquestioned authority to particular cities, communities and families. Origen was himself the son of a martyr in Severan times.

But there was much more to the story than martyrdom and persecution. Around 190, the state of Osrhoene actually tolerated Christians, and reputedly its king converted.

At so many stages, Christians faced daily dilemmas of how to live within a pagan state, and the daily compromises that demanded. These issues pervade the writings of Tertullian, who is an inexhaustible resource on the Christian situation. As remarked earlier, issues of gender are pervasive.

This story perfectly illustrates the book's major theme of the transition from sect to church, and the response of resisters to accommodation. It culminates with Tertullian's protests against the excessively worldly and accommodationist views of the church to sin, and his own defection from the Great Church.

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Conclusion

How the new issues and currents emerging around 200 shaped the subsequent history of the church, and of the larger West.

The new world coming into view around 200 created the structures and patterns that would dominate Christian history over the next half-millennium. These themes include the surging interest in questions about the Trinity and the person of Christ, which would be so violently contentious at great councils like Nicea and Chalcedon, and rend the church for centuries. Those conflicts revolved around arguments and vocabulary that emerged precisely around 200, such as the *homoousios* theory espoused by Sabellius, and the Trinitarian thought of Tertullian. Another critical theme of the coming centuries was the emergence of monasticism, which was prefigured by the anti-sexual asceticism that came so prominently into view around 200. That same force drove the move to celibacy that so clearly marked the newly defined clergy from the Christian laity. Also in evidence in

200, and not before, was the polyphonic world in which all these mighty issues were debated, in Greek, Syriac, Latin and Coptic.

The Christian world in 200 looked back, often nostalgically, to the lost glories of an early Jesus movement. But it looked forward to the transcontinental splendors of Late Antiquity, and the Middle Ages to come.