

Part II The Great Separation

Chapter 4 The Great Separation

135-381

The Second Jewish War (the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–135 CE) brought the first age of the Church to an end. The revolt resulted in the Roman Emperor Hadrian decreeing that the city and territory of Colonia Aelia Capitolina, that is, Jerusalem, was off-limits to all Jews.

Eusebius wrote: “From that time on, the entire race [of Jews] has been forbidden to set foot anywhere in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, under the terms and ordinances of a law of Hadrian which ensured that not even from a distance might Jews have a view of their ancestral soil” (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 4.6.3; (Williamson, 1965, p. 108). This prevented Jews from resettling and building synagogues there. Michael Avi-Yonah reconstructed the decree as: “It is forbidden for all circumcised persons to enter or stay within the territory of Aelia Capitolina; any person contravening this prohibition shall be put to death” (Avi-Yonah 1976:50–51).

Chronological Highlights

ca. 120	Ignatius of Antioch observed that “Some, indeed, have a wicked and deceitful habit of flaunting the Name about, while acting in a way unworthy of God” (Ignatius <i>Ephesians</i> 7.1; Richardson <i>Early Christian Fathers</i> 1970:89)..
132–135	The Second Jewish War (the Bar Kokhba Revolt)
303	Diocletianic Persecution (or Great Persecution) of Christians. Beginning in 303 CE, the Emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius and Constantius issued a series of edicts rescinding the legal rights of Christians and demanding that they comply with traditional Roman religious practices.
325	First Council of Nicaea
363–364	Council of Laodicea
380	Theodosius I, baptized
381	First Council of Constantinople (May–July 9) with 150 Orthodox bishops present, although there were no western representatives (Papadakis “Constantinople I” in <i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> 1991:512).
381	On July 30 Theodosius I issued an edict proclaiming his belief in Christ and the Trinity, stating that all of his subjects were to share the same views, holding that any people with differing views were “extravagant madmen” and heretical (<i>Codex Theodosianus</i> XVI.1.2; Gibbon <i>Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</i> , Vol. 3, 1993:86).
381	Emperor Theodosius I (Theodosius the Great) ordered the immediate surrender of all churches to the Orthodox bishops “who confess that the father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of one majesty and power, of the same honor and dominion.”

The Judeo-Christians (or Nazarenes) were by then not considered Jews but *minim*.⁸⁷ Moreover, unlike the traditional Jews, the Christians were pacifists.

While the sanctity of human life was a historic component in Jewish teaching the Judeo-Christian Church of God went further, throughout the Apostolic Age, by rejecting any resort to violence against human beings. This required the rejection of the use of war and violence by its members. They took no part in war (see Bagatti 1971a:7; (González, 1984, p. 53) which led to difficulty in the CE 66-70 and CE 132-135 Jewish attempts to free themselves from Roman rule.

By refusing to take part in the revolt Judeo-Christians appeared as traitors to traditional Jews but as loyalists by the Romans. The latter apparently rewarded Judeo-Christians with continuing access to Aelia Capitolina following the Bar Kochba Revolt but denied Jews access to the city under the pain of death. “This is explained by the fact that with the war a distinction was made between the Jews and the Judaeo-Christians,” argues Franciscan historian and archaeologist Bellarmino Bagatti, “and that the decree of expulsion, promulgated by Hadrian, concerned only the Jews” (Bagatti 1971a:10).

While the defeat of Bar Kochba resulted in further suppression of the Jews in the Holy Land and their exclusion from Jerusalem it facilitated the presence of Gentile Christians throughout Roman Syria Palestine, especially in Alia Capitolina, both in regard to residence and pilgrimage. Bagatti held that this precipitated Gentile Christian contact with indigenous Judeo-Christians, leading to conflict and the motive to begin a religious war.

According to Bagatti: “In fact some gentile Christians could not bear that their coreligionists should perpetuate, more than a century after the death of Christ, those Jewish rites which they, on reading St. Paul, believed had been juridically abolished. The Christians of Jewish stock, on the contrary, thought that it was wrong to abandon those rites,…” (Bagatti *The Church from the Circumcision* 1971:78).

⁸⁷ Heretics as used in early rabbinic Judaism.

Christendom—Irreconcilably Divided Christianity

Christendom emerged in the second century as the church of the circumcision (Judeo-Christianity in its Hebrew and Greek divisions) and the church of the Gentiles (Greco-Roman Orthodox Christianity in its Latin and Greek [Byzantine] counterparts), in a less than amicable manner.

In their early literature, until the time of Constantine, the Greco-Roman Orthodox only managed to tolerate Judeo-Christianity. The fact that Judeo-Christianity was not problematic for Greco-Roman Orthodox writers until the fourth century is a non-issue. Why? It was only at that point that the Orthodox anathematized them, trashed them in Orthodox writings, aggressively destroyed their literature and seized their meeting places, and appropriated their history to give credence to their Orthodox notions of apostolic succession.

As Christianity expanded it became increasingly fragmented, divided linguistically, culturally, and doctrinally. There were at least six distinct clusters by 135 CE, albeit there were hundreds of small independent groups as well, namely:

1. The Ebionites, an obscure Jewish Christian sect extant from apostolic times to the fifth century, an early heresy that broke with the Nazarenes in the first century following the 49 CE Acts 15 decisions regarding the Gentiles by the apostles. The Ebionites were messianic Jews primarily drawn from the Pharisees. They rejected the doctrine of the divine nature of Jesus and regarded him as an ordinary human being and the biological issue of Mary and Joseph. They clung to the Mosaic covenant and *halakhic* practices preferring to keep the community of Jesus' followers in Judaism. They were a heresy vehemently opposed to the Nazarenes with whom some ancient writers confuse them. They met in synagogues as did the early Church of God. In a fourth century discussion of the Ebionites, Epiphanius wrongly identifies them as the successors of the Nazarenes. He states that “they have elders and archisynagogues, and they call their church a synagogue and not a Church and honor Christ in name only ” [Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30:18, 2 as set forth in *Patristic Evidence for Jewish—Christian Sects* by A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink (Klijn and Reinink 1973:187)].

2. The Nazarenes, Mishnaic Hebrew speaking Judeo-Christians in the Levant. who accepted the divine nature of Jesus, rejected *halakah*, but embraced the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament as their guide. Their theology was in the orthodoxy of James and the mother church at Jerusalem. Leaders included Symeon, son of Clopas. In the Levant this branch of the Church of God seem to disappear at the end of the fourth century suggesting a remnant migrated out of the Roman empire.
3. The Hellenistic Judeo-Christians, including Greek-speaking converts from the Jews of the Hellenistic Diaspora scattered over the Roman empire, inclined to adapt culturally and to intermarry with ethnic Gentiles. Leaders included Linus, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch, Papias, and Polycrates. The remnant of this branch of the Church of God was strong in Asia Minor. In the late fourth century their people migrated eastward into Armenia. Those in the Latin west appear to migrate into the alpine regions. In both cases these migrations were out of the Roman empire into areas where they could have some religious freedom.
4. The Greek Christians in the East, often referred to as the Greek Church or Eastern Church (Greek-speaking Gentiles adhering to Greek idealism and culture influenced by Judeo-Christian thought who brought philosophy and philosophical reasoning into their Christianity). This movement was heretical. This included the Gentile Jerusalem bishop Marcus, Epiphanius of Salamis, and Eusebius.
5. The Latin Christians in the West, often referred to as the Latin Church or as the Western Church, with few ties to Judeo-Christianity (Latin speaking, predominately Gentile in character and thought, adhering to Latin culture and Roman notions of authority and governance). This movement was heretical and included Tertullian, Xystus or Sixtus, Irenaeus the Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul, then a part of the Roman Empire (now Lyons, France). This branch of Orthodox Greco-Roman Christianity eventually morphed into the Roman Catholic Church.

6. The Christians in Egypt predominantly influenced by Gnosticism. This movement was heretical and included Arius, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. The Didache, the Shepard of Hermes, and many other Gnostic documents originate in this group. This divergent form of Christianity was ultimately destroyed by Orthodox Greco-Roman Christianity.

Diverse factions, some Judeo-Christian and others wholly Gentile in composition and character, all claimed to be the purveyors of the true doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth. These were at times in radical conflict with the Judeo-Christian teachings of the Jerusalem Church of apostolic times. There were those, often labeled “false ministers” by their opponents, who adopted the name of Jesus of Nazareth simply to form their own groups. Some actively peddled differing gospels and their own version of Jesus to meet their own ends.

Estimated Christians in the World				
Year	Jewish Ethnicity	Gentile Ethnicity	Total Christians	% of Gentile Ethnicity
31	±3,500 ⁸⁸	0	3,500	0
40	4,494	172	4,666	3.7
50	5,770	449	6,219	7.2
70	9,513	1,538	11,051	13.9
100	20,138	6,037	26,175	23.0
130	42,630	19,327	61,957	31.2
150	70,283	39,879	110,162	36.2
200	245,286	191,354	436,640	43.8
250	856,049	1,095,284	1,951,333	56.1
300	2,987,608	5,212,621	8,212,627	63.5
350	>3,000,000	31,561,703	34,564,703	91.3

⁸⁸ In 31 CE the approximate population of Jerusalem was from 25,000 to 30,000. Luke considered nearly 5,000 of these, about 15% to 20% of the inhabitants of the city, to be believers. These believers not only included the baptized members of the Church of God, but many who only believed. In this projection the estimate of about 3,500 converted believers as opposed to those who just believed appears reasonable but it could be more or less.



Roman Emperor Constantine convened the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE in his effort to consolidate his power and influence by making Greco-Roman Christianity the Orthodox religion of the Roman empire and to eliminate the major controversies in the Greco-Roman Churches, both Latin and Greek branches, concerning the question over the deity of Christ and the celebration of Easter. The Council, which did not include Judeo-Christian bishops or other Jewish Christians, was anti-Semitic and took a harsh approach toward Jews, Judeo-Christians, and other religious groups. Whether the Judeo-Christian bishops did not join the Council as they preferred to maintain their own autonomy or they were otherwise excluded by the Gentile bishops, remains to be seen.

The Church of the Gentiles arose among Greco-Romans of pagan stock as a result of the influx of Gentiles into Judeo-Christianity in the Diaspora. Greco-Roman Christianity, declaring itself to be Orthodox (from Greek *orthodoxos* “having the right opinion”) and Judeo-Christianity heterodox (opinion based on incomplete education or faulty reasoning), swamped the original Judeo-Christianity of the first two centuries and distanced itself from the actual beliefs, customs, and teachings of the Apostles and the Jerusalem Church.

Traditionally, Church of God literature refers to the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and Emperor Constantine (Roman Emperor from 306 to 337, baptized on his deathbed in 337 well after the Council of Nicaea) as the marker for the end of the Smyrnam Era. As we acquire more data, it becomes clearer that Gentile Greco-Roman Christianity certainly became more unified under Constantine, although there were setbacks for it after his death, but the evidence suggests that the persecution of the Church of God simply continued and intensified.

Beginning with Constantine the social policy of the Roman government, at least when in the charge of Orthodox emperors, was the elimination of paganism and the bringing about of unity in Gentile Greco-Roman Christianity, based upon a common core of fundamental Orthodox beliefs, thereby furthering the stability of the Roman state. In Bagatti’s words:

In the 4th century, when Christianity had already won the victory over paganism, there was a reorganisation of the church for unitarian purposes. The Jewish usages and doctrines, unknown in great part to the Christian world, in some regions were looked upon as causes of division among the faithful and were therefore fiercely opposed. Bishops and savants united their efforts on this programme and they acted through the councils. (Bagatti 1971a:86.)

The decisions made in the fourth century Orthodox Church Councils and the de facto invasion of Judea by the orthodox—seeking Holy Sites to build churches, establish monuments, find artifacts and relics, to be closer to the land where Jesus dwelt, and to bring about the unity of the faith—unavoidably led to cultural conflict between the Orthodox and Judeo-Christians. The First Council of Nicaea was the first such ecumenical council and the group made the Sunday observance of Easter universal for

Gentile Greco-Roman Christians through its imposition on all Orthodox Christians. Harsh discriminatory decrees followed such as Canon 29 of the Council of Laodicea which stated:

Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ. [Schaff. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II, Volume 14 Canon XXIX.*]

From the time of Constantine on the Orthodox used the power of the Roman state to strip Judeo-Christians of their churches and to criminalize their observance of the weekly Sabbath, annual Sabbaths, and the Nisan 14 Christian Passover.

Concluding the 381 CE Council of Constantinople Emperor Theodosius I (aka Theodosius the Great) ordered the immediate surrender of all church facilities to the Orthodox bishops "who confess that the father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of one majesty and power, of the same honor and dominion." Such harsh intolerance led many Jews, Judeo-Christians, and others to move out of the cities into the country and the mountains in an effort to preserve some form of religious freedom. The emerging Greco-Roman Church ostracized Judeo-Christians, as they grouped them together with Ebionites, considered them as followers of Arius. The continued persecution by the Greco-Roman Church and the Roman state resulted in the general migration of members of these groups, out of the effective reach of the Roman Empire, in the West primarily into the Pyrénées⁸⁹ and the Alps, and possibly the British Isles, and in the East into Armenia.

The Orthodox, culturally Greco-Romans, turned upon and crushed Judeo-Christianity in the fourth century, forcing many of the true people of God to flee from the Roman Empire to the Alpine regions (primarily Piedmont in northern Italy) and east into Armenia where we find the third era of the Church of God. The Orthodox used the power of the Roman state to strip Judeo-Christians of their meeting places and to eliminate their

⁸⁹ The Pyrénées, is a range of mountains in southwest Europe that forms a *natural border* between France and Spain.

observance of the Sabbath, annual Sabbaths, and the Nisan 14 Christian Passover. Roman Emperor Theodosius I followed a policy of “national unity” and was “the staunchest supporter of Orthodoxy” (Gregory and Kazhdan “Theodosios I” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1991:2050-2051). Theodosius I summoned the First Council of Constantinople (May–July 9, 381) with 150 Orthodox bishops present, although there were no western representatives (Papadakis “Constantinople I” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1991:512).

Following the Council, Theodosius I, baptized in 380 CE, issued an edict on July 30, 381, proclaiming his belief in Christ and the Trinity, stating that all of his subjects were to share the same views, holding that any people with differing views were “extravagant madmen” and heretical (*Codex Theodosianus* XVI.1.2; Gibbon *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 3, 1993:86). Theodosius I ordered the immediate surrender of all non-Orthodox “churches” to the Orthodox Greco-Roman bishops, thereby authorizing seizure of all Judeo-Christian synagogues and ending any accommodation with Judeo-Christianity.

By the fifth century, the Orthodox, peopled by millions of Greco-Romans, had evolved into a massive movement, described in Revelation 17 as a great harlot, or “fallen woman,” representing a false church that has not been faithful to Christ, seeking exclusive control of Christendom. In Revelation 2-3 Jesus Christ identified this emerging movement. He said, “I know the blasphemy of those who say they are [spiritual] Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 2:9) and “I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are [spiritual] Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Revelation 3:9). This Orthodox Christianity, claiming that it was apostolic and catholic, formed an aggressive and distinctive Gentile religion in its own right, determined to eliminate all dissenting belief and practice.

The Fracturing of Christendom

The whole period (135-381 CE) was a difficult one for the Church of God in the Roman world. Adversaries included rising rabbinic Judaism (the Jews), the pagan Romans and emperor worship, Gnostic sects, mystery

religions adopting Christian forms (particularly the charismatics), the rise of the Byzantines and their aberrant form of Greco-Roman Christianity, and the rising centralization in the Latin west of Gentile Greco-Roman Christianity around the Bishop of Rome. By 300 CE Gentiles predominated Christendom. The Church of God scattered throughout the Roman world had to segregate itself from these worldly influences. The surviving literature of the period provides us with some information about the Church of God as it existed in Asia Minor, but there is little preserved about the Church in other regions. The ruthless Greco-Roman Orthodox were quite thorough in cleansing all traces of its opposition in the areas it came to control. By the end of this era there were two distinct Christianities—the great false church called Orthodox and a fragile small scattered Church of God resisting and fleeing the onslaught and persecution of the Greco-Roman Orthodox.



Above the ca. 400 CE mosaic in the Basilica of St. Pudenzia in Rome shows the Theodosian Memorial to the left. The Memorial is adjacent to the Holy Church of God on the right. The Eleona Church on the Mount of Olives, appears above and behind the latter.

While Gentiles may not have become the majority in Christendom until the third century, it appears more likely that the Gentile Christian population *overtook* Judeo-Christians early in the second century, *overshadowed* them in the third century, and then

swamped them in the fourth. At the dawn of the fourth century, Christians made up about 10%, or 6 million, of the empire's population and Jews about 2% or 3 million.

While there are various theories as to why and how Christianity (meaning Orthodox Gentile Greco-Roman Christianity) became the dominant religion the phenomenon has been articulated thoroughly from a sociological perspective by sociologist Rodney Stark in his provocative *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). We do

not agree with all of Stark's ideas but he does present some historical material that helps us understand the draw of Christianity for hopeless pagans in a violent Roman world, better life for women, and the impact of nursing and caring for the sick as key factors.

Stark suggests that the phenomenal rise of Christianity was due ultimately to its:

1. Offering its converts a coherent culture entirely stripped of ethnicity;
2. Providing Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora opportunity to be free from an ethnic identity with which they had become uncomfortable;
3. Prompting liberating social relations between the sexes and within the family;
4. Great modulation of class differences;
5. Bringing a new conception of humanity to a world saturated with capricious cruelty and the vicarious love of death; and
6. Giving its converts nothing less than their humanity.

In any case, when the Orthodox Greco-Roman Christianity became the dominant form of Christianity, its mission included the eradication of all other forms of Christianity, as it sought to become the exclusive religion. The Orthodox distanced themselves from the Judeo-Christian Churches of God and all Jewish Christian sects.

Revelation 2:8-9 describes in prophetic type the state of the congregation at Smyrna late in the first century as well as in prophetic antitype the Smyrnam Era (135-381 CE) of the Church of God. In biblical prophecy type is a pattern or symbol of something future while antitype is the fulfillment, e.g., an event in the Scriptures foreshadowing another event. Type prefigures antitype. A type is not merely an analogy or a metaphor, but a true model of a greater fulfillment to come. One substitutes the antitype into the symbolism of the type to arrive at the full meaning. The passage in Revelation 2 reads:

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of

those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2.8-11).

Historically the Church of God has understood the "ten days" to be 10 years, 303-313 CE, in reference to the Diocletianic Persecution (or Great Persecution) of Christians. Beginning in 303 CE, the Emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius and Constantius issued a series of edicts rescinding the legal rights of Christians and demanding that they comply with traditional Roman religious practices. Later edicts targeted the clergy and demanded universal sacrifice, ordering all inhabitants to sacrifice to the gods.

The persecution varied in intensity across the empire—weakest in Gaul and Britain, where only the first edict was applied, and strongest in the Eastern provinces (particularly in Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine where the Church of God was deeply rooted). Persecutory laws were nullified by different emperors at different times, but Constantine and Licinius's Edict of Milan (313) marked the end of the Diocletianic Persecution.

Orthodox Tyranny

These Greco-Roman Christians, known as Byzantines, considered themselves Orthodox (purveyors of right teaching) and those who did not adhere to their peculiar belief system as heterodox (purveyors of wrong teaching). The Orthodox held the precepts and doctrines of Judeo-Christianity in contempt. Such rhetoric notwithstanding, it was the Nicene resolution of the Quartodeciman controversy and collateral issues, e.g., Sabbath observance and the like, that severed the two communities. The Nicenes viewed Judeo-Christians as heterodox and anathematized them because they refused to adopt the Nicene decrees. They excluded Judeo-Christians, whether of Jewish or Gentile descent, from membership in their Great Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Judeo-Christians argued that the Orthodox bishops and their synods lacked the authority from God to change the customs and traditions of the New Testament as set forth by the apostles. In their view, these customs and traditions were unchangeable. Outlawing observance of the Christian Passover on Nisan 14 and compelling a Lord's-day Pascal celebration were

considered by Judeo-Christians as non-scriptural *ultra vires* acts. Judeo-Christians held that the Scriptures were the standards in such matters. The Orthodox bishops believed that, in councilor decisions, they had the authority to change doctrine.

For the orthodox, the Nazarenes, that is the Judeo-Christians of Jerusalem in particular and of Palestine in general, were not Christians. The decisions made in the fourth century Orthodox Church Councils to quash the practice of Judeo-Christian customs and the *de facto* invasion of Judea by the Orthodox led to cultural conflict.

Aided and abetted by this influx of Orthodox religious supporters, Jerusalem's Orthodox bishops sought to dispossess the Judeo-Christians and become the only Christians of Jerusalem. The Judeo-Christian synagogue on Mt. Sion remained in their possession until authorities seized it under an imperial decree issued by Theodosius I on July 30, 381. The decree ended the First Council of Constantinople and formalized its decisions. Control of the Holy Church of God on Sion was given to the Orthodox Byzantines. Following its annexation, bishop Cyril of Jerusalem saw to its full absorption into Greco-Roman Christianity. The traditions associated with the Holy Church of God, which the Orthodox believed to be the mother of all churches, came with it. Their act of forcing out the Judeo-Christians and taking control of this ancient Judeo-Christian synagogue ended, more or less, the strife in Jerusalem.

While Judeo-Christians lost their religious freedom in Judea and possession of their Holy Church of the God, the Judeo-Christians of Galilee continued to resist the Orthodox for another century. By the end of the fifth century, however, Judeo-Christianity appears to have vanished without a trace. Some Judeo-Christians presumably escaped the stifling Antaeon embrace of the Orthodox by moving on to regions outside the Roman empire. Others remained in spite of the efforts of the Orthodox to strip them of their churches and to criminalize their observance of the Sabbath, annual Sabbaths, and the Christian Passover on Nisan 14. Eventually many, if not most, of these Christians of Jewish ethnicity became so much like their Gentile neighbors that they appear to have lost any distinctive identity. As the Orthodox assimilated Judeo-Christians, their numbers dwindled. Unable to recover and regroup from the relentless

Orthodox onslaught, they seem to have disbursed and blended into the Gentile populations of the empire. From time to time, however, later Orthodox writers acknowledge occasional eruptions of people observing the Sabbath, annual Sabbaths, and the Christian Passover on Nisan 14. This they condemned as Judaizing. This suggests that to some extent various Judeo-Christians simply hid themselves from Orthodox tyranny.

The Early Church Fathers

The Churches of God have generally regarded Polycarp, the bishop at Smyrna, as a principal leader, if not the most important one, in the second century. According to Tertullian, Polycarp of Smyrna was a disciple of the Apostle John (Tertullian, *Liber de praescriptione haereticorum*) and Irenaeus (Irenaeus, *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus*). Irenaeus of Lyons, whose credibility is suspect, reports that the apostles appointed Polycarp as the overseer of the Church in Smyrna (*Ibid*). With Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, some regard Polycarp as one of three chief apostolic fathers. Despite his influence, only one document written by Polycarp remains. The sole surviving work attributed to his authorship is his *Letter to the Philippians*, or *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*; it is first recorded by Irenaeus. Although based in Asia Minor, he was the first known Christian leader to go to Rome for the express purpose of denouncing various heretics/heresies and to turn people back to the true Christian church (*Ibid* and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haeres*, Bk. III). Polycarp, according to Irenaeus, denounced the heretics Marcion and Valentinus as well as pointing out errors of the Bishop of Rome (*Ibid*). Problematic is Eusebius' account of Anicetus showing his respect for Polycarp by having him administer the eucharist, that is the mass, in the Roman church (Eusebius 5.24.16-17).

In Church of God literature there has been a tendency to understand Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome as orthodox. That appears to have been the opinion of English historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) in his *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This does not seem to be the case. Careful reading of I Clement shows it does not, however, contradict Church of God doctrine. Moreover, the works of Ignatius have been highly redacted to reflect Orthodox opinions. Once we get through the "noise" of redaction, multiple conflicting copies and poor translation

from ancient Greek into English, we appear to encounter servants of the living God.

Jews and Gentiles continued to convert to Christianity well into the fourth century. There came to be, of course, Judeo-Christians in the Diaspora all over the Roman empire and to its east as well (Bagatti 1971a:26-29). However, in Syria Palestine Judeo-Christians increasingly isolated or separated themselves, sometimes referred to as the separation (Hebrew: *habdalah*), from the emerging Greco-Roman Orthodox whom they increasingly saw as apostate and heretical. Bellarmino Bagatti, rationalizing that these distinctions did not reach the true essentials of Christianity, in a somewhat conciliatory tone, described the irreconcilable differences differentiating the two groups. He writes:

Looking back at all the polemics which originated from the Mosaic Law we see that a line of division was cut from the very beginning between the Christians of the two stocks. Each inherited a past with a very different culture and a mentality which “Christianized” in a very different manner. Thus while the Christians of Jewish stock found the others too “pagan”, the Christians of gentile stock found the others too “Jewish”. But this divergence generally did not touch the substantial doctrines of Christianity, but it did have enough influence to bring about a great division of souls (Bagatti 1971a:930).

There were also Greek assemblies in the Latin West and, in Roman colonies, Latin assemblies in the Hellenistic East. It is naive and erroneous to believe that any group was limited or confined to a defined region. Roman cities, such as Antioch of Syria, were not integrated but rather divided into quarters or distinctive ethnic precincts (Stark 1996:15). Rome and Corinth were cosmopolitan hosting many religions. This ethnic diversity fostered the development of different Christianities along cultural lines in the same city. “In some bigger localities, where Christians were many,” as Bagatti put it, “it was possible to have various churches according to particular religious doctrines” (Bagatti 1971a:34).

The independent character of Christian fellowships in the second and third centuries permitted quite different forms of Christianity to coexist in the same cities, provinces, and regions with each fellowship having its own allegiances, character, and leadership.

According to Paul Johnson:

From the start, then, there were numerous varieties of Christianity which had little in common, though they centered round belief in the resurrection. They were marked by two things: individual oral traditions, which eventually found written expression as 'gospels'; and, linked to this, claims to an apostolic succession. Each church had its own 'Jesus story'; and each had been founded by one of the original band and who had handed over the torch to a designated successor and so on. The most important element in all these early Churches was the genealogical tree of truth. (Johnson 1976:44-45.)

The Gentilization of the Church of God in the Diaspora, the independence, or autonomy, of bishops, and the cultural divisions existing in Christendom led to the many theological controversies that followed. The gradual assimilation of various opposing Christian groups into Orthodox Christianity distorts its historical development and allows claims of apostolic succession through the appropriation of the history of the groups it absorbed.

Moreover, surviving literary works, often highly redacted by Orthodox scribes to align them with Greco-Roman orthodoxy, such as (but not limited to) those of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Eusebius, and Irenaeus, primarily reflect Gentile Greco-Roman orthodoxy and values not the Church of God. Bart D. Ehrman in his *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* summarized this reality.

These forebears came to be quoted as authoritative sources for deciding theological issues, and were presented as true heirs of the apostolic tradition, as reliable tradents who passed along the doctrines of the faith from apostolic to Nicene times. Chief among these were such figures as Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and even Clement of Alexandria and Origin—the writers whose works were preserved by the victorious party and who continue to influence students concerning “the” nature of Christianity after the New Testament period. (Ehrman 1993:12.).

The surviving literature of the time, hardly a representative sample, tends to distort the realities of early Christianity. The literature represents, almost exclusively, that of a Gentile movement viewing itself as Orthodox and all other forms of Christianity as heterodox. Nevertheless, some writings of leaders of the Church of God have survived, but we have to take care in understanding them due to the Orthodox scribal editing and sometimes misleading translation into English.