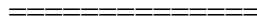


In the beginning was the Word,
but in the beginning also was the Roman Empire.¹



The Strongest Poison ever known
Came from Caesar's Laurel Crown.²

¹ R. Allen Brown, *The Origins of Modern Europe*, 15.

² William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, 8.

The Iron Kingdom Series
Book Four

The Synthesis

The Blending of Apostate Rome
with the Apostate Body of Christ

John David Clark, Sr.

Foreword

I believe the Bible. I trust it to be historically and prophetically true. I believe that Jesus is Lord of all, that he was born of the virgin Mary, that he suffered and died for our sins, that on the third day he was raised from the dead by the power of God, that he ascended into heaven to offer himself to God for our sins, that he will return at the appointed time to reign on earth a thousand years, and that in the Final Judgment, he will be the Judge of both the living and the dead. I believe that there is no hope of salvation except by faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son. Jesus has filled me with his Spirit and taught me. I am his servant.

I also believe that the religious system known as Christianity is an abomination to both God and Jesus. I believe that, to date, Christianity is Satan's crowning achievement, that by it, he has divided and confused the body of Christ, and that he reigns over the flock of God through Christian ministers, though they do not realize it. And I believe that in order for God's people to attain to the unity and purity that Jesus prayed they would enjoy, they must come out of Christianity.

I am, by the wonderful grace of God, a follower of Jesus. I am also, by that same grace, not a Christian and not a part of what you know as Church religion.

The Iron Kingdom Series, of which this book is the fourth part, is an explanation and defense of my faith.

God Had a Son before Mary Did
The Significance of God's Revelation of His Son
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ISBN-13:

First Printing, 2020

Cover design by Donna Nelson

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Acknowledgment: M. Crockett and S. Kaviraj (Oxford University, UK), R. O'Connell (University of Virginia), B. Whitmore (STScI) and the WFC3 Scientific Oversight Committee

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Author's Notes

- In English, the singular and plural forms of “you” are identical. In both Hebrew and Greek, however, the differences are obvious. Therefore, to more perfectly convey the biblical writers’ messages in verses where the English word “you” appears, I have italicized the “y” of all plural forms of “you” (you, your, yours, yourselves).
- Translations of Old and New Testament scriptures in this book are my own. Following standard practice, whenever a word is added to the translation for clarification, that word is italicized. Also following standard practice, in some Old Testament quotes, “LORD” in small caps is sometimes used where “Jehovah” is in the Hebrew.
- Conflicting rules exist concerning English punctuation, none of them adequate for every situation. My Readers will find that I subscribe to a freer punctuation style. Of special note, I do not include within quotation marks punctuation that is not a part of what is quoted. To do otherwise, in my opinion, leaves too much room for misrepresentation of the original author’s intent.
- The word “Pagan” originally referred to a villager, a country fellow, as opposed to a sophisticated city-dweller. In the fourth century, Christians began using the term condescendingly for those still clinging to worship of multiple gods, suggesting that they were ignorant. In this work, “Pagan” and “Paganism” are used only as a matter of convenience, to refer to polytheists and polytheism, without any pejorative intent.

Anachronisms are Replaced

To use the word *Christianity* in reference to the religion of believers prior to the blending of Rome and Christians in AD 325 is anachronistic and misleading.³ Therefore, where the authors who are quoted in this book use *Christianity* anachronistically, I have replaced it with a more appropriate and italicized word, adding a superscript ^a to indicate that the author’s word was *Christianity*. For example, speaking of the religion of believers before 325, Robert Payne (1911–1983) wrote,

³ William Tabbernee held to a somewhat similar standard in his book, *Prophets and Gravestones*. “In this book, the use of words such as catholic and orthodox should not be taken as references to the institution of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches that became more institutionally defined and developed after 325.” (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 3.

Christianity remained obstinately remote from the state cult.⁴

But since Christianity did not exist until 325, Payne's anachronistic use of *Christianity* is replaced with a more accurate term in italics with a superscript ^a:

The Faith of believers^a remained obstinately remote from the state cult.

The phrase "the Faith of believers" does not misrepresent Payne's basic point. I will never intentionally misrepresent an author's meaning. On the contrary, I believe that "the Faith of believers" is what Payne meant by *Christianity*. Payne, along with virtually all other historians assume that Christianity began with Jesus and the apostles, but that error burdens their writings with confusion. By replacing their anachronistic terms with words more in line with what they actually meant, I hope only to relieve their Readers of that burden.

The word *Church*, being a synonym for Christianity, is also anachronistic and misleading when used in the wrong context. Therefore, it is replaced as well, but with a superscript ^b to indicate that the author's original word was *Church*. Likewise, when *Christian* is anachronistically used, it is replaced with an italicized substitute along with a superscript ^c:

^a Christianity

^b Church

^c Christian, Christians

⁴ Robert Payne, *Ancient Rome*, 61.

Books of the Bible

Abbreviations

1Ap. = First Apology of Justin
 2Ap. = Second Apology of Justin
 1Macc. = 1Maccabees
 2Macc. = 2Maccabees
 AH5 = Against Heresies, Book 5 (Irenaeus)
 Dial. = Dialogue with Trypho (Justin)
 Ep. of Barn. = Epistle of Barnabas
 Hero = Epistle to Hero, a deacon in Antioch (Ignatius)
 Mart. of Poly. = Martyrdom of Polycarp
 Math. = Mathetes
 Phila. = Epistle to the Philadelphians (Ignatius)
 Poly. sv. = Epistle to Polycarp, Syriac version (Ignatius)
 Smyr. = Epistle to the Smyrnaeans (Ignatius)
 Trall. = Epistle to the Trallians (Ignatius)

Etc,

Introduction

During the 1980s, it occasionally happened that while I was praying in the Spirit, the Spirit would begin to speak through me in my own language, fervently saying over and over –and I knew it was being said to me– “Come on! Come on! Come on!” At the beginning, that exhortation did not trouble me, but when it continued, at seemingly random times of prayer, I felt that Jesus must be trying to tell me something that I was not understanding. By the early 1990s, I had begun replying to the Lord when he spoke to me like that, asking him what he meant. No answer came, and not knowing what to think, I was increasingly troubled by the strange exhortation. I distinctly remember one occasion in about 1992 when my frustration became especially acute. Kneeling in prayer beside my bed, I was praying in the Spirit when the Spirit began again to call to me earnestly in my own language, “Come on! Come on!” With a sense of desperation, I looked up to heaven and pleaded, “But I am here! I have already come! What do you mean by ‘Come on’? What are you telling me?” Once again, I received no answer; however, the answer –the unthinkable answer– was not very long in coming.

When, in early spring of 1993, the astonishing answer came, it changed my life completely. All those times, through all those years, Jesus had been calling me to “come on” *to him* –out of Christianity! I had striven to be the best Christian I could be; I would have given my life for Christianity, “thinking to do God service”, but now, Jesus was showing me that he had been calling me out of Church religion itself, the religion known as Christianity! I had thought that serving Jesus and serving Christianity were the same thing, but now I saw a difference. And what a difference there is!

At the time, I thought I was the only person on the planet to have heard such a call from God, and I was a little afraid. What was I to do? My mind was consumed with thoughts about it. It was as if I had been living my whole life in a dark cave, and suddenly, Jesus had brought me out into the sunlight to behold the real world and its beauty. I could not take it all in at once, and it was overwhelming. I remember entering my office the day after Jesus helped me understand his call to “come on” and saying, “Jesus, I am afraid –but don’t stop!” I knew that what he had revealed to me was true: Christianity is not of God, and He wants His children to come out of it. At the same time, I felt the weight of such knowledge. Jesus had revealed truth to me that I scarcely had the faith to believe, and I felt a great need for faith to believe what I now knew to be true.

In the years that followed, I was blessed to meet other believers who had heard the call to come out. An elderly sister told me that one day when she was a young woman at home alone vacuuming, she heard an audible voice say, “Come out of her!” The voice was loud enough to be heard over the noise of the vacuum, and she turned it off and went to the (locked) front door to see if someone had somehow gotten in. But no one was there, and she did not know what to make of that experience. So, puzzled, she went on back to her housework. But she never forgot the experience. There are many such testimonies, and among the believers I have found who have heard God’s call to come out (or, in my case, to “come on”), none have understood what Jesus was saying when he spoke to them any more than I did before 1993.

What a relief it was to let go of the title, “Christian”! And what a relief it was to cease from trying to make Christianity pure again, as I previously thought should be done! Christianity, I now understood, had never been pure, and it never will be. It is a nesting place for opinions that lead to damnation (cf. 2Pet. 2:1), a perverse religion which apostate saints began devising during the days of the apostles (cf. Gal. 1:6), and it provides no cure for the sins of man.

A brother once offered this wisdom to my congregation: “Don’t get so close to a wrong spirit that if God casts it out, you feel obligated to leave with it.” That sage advice can be difficult to follow. The

renowned historian Ramsay MacMullen's (1928–2022) observation is undeniably true that “people do not like to be told their faith is utter nonsense,”⁵ and people will often leave with the nonsense rather than let the nonsense go away alone. The religious system of Christianity is the nonsense with which this book deals. Once an error has taken root in a heart, one may feel threatened when God sends someone to pluck it out, but this book is not intended as a threat; it is only an attempt to liberate God's children from the bondage of devotion to a religion that God hates.

⁵ MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, 99.

Remembers from the Introduction

- Jesus revealed truth to me that I scarcely had the faith to believe, and I felt a great need for faith to believe what I now knew to be true.
- “Don’t get so close to a wrong spirit that if God casts it out, you feel obligated to leave with it.”
- The religious system of Christianity is the nonsense with which this book deals.
- Once an error has taken root in a heart, one may feel threatened when God sends someone to pluck it out.

Chapter 1

Destruction by Redefinition

Redefining the New Birth

To be born again is to receive Jesus' baptism of the Spirit. The most consequential change believers made after first-century believers rejected Paul's gospel was to redefine the new birth from receiving Jesus' baptism with the Spirit to simply believing in Jesus. While believing in Jesus is essential to receiving the new birth, believing is not itself the new birth; it only qualifies one to receive it. This is what John had in mind when he wrote,

John 3

16. This is the way God loved the world: He gave His only Son so that every one who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The Spirit is life, Paul said (Rom. 8:10b), and understanding that simple truth helps us to see that John 3:16 was teaching that whoever believes in Jesus should afterward receive the life of the Spirit. Jesus taught this to those who believed on him:

John 7

37. On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!"

38. He who believes in me, as the scripture said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water!"

39. But he spoke this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were going to receive, for the holy Spirit was not yet *given* because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus called the Spirit the promise of God (Acts 1:4–5),⁶ and after reminding the Galatians of that truth, Paul reminded them that they received the promise through faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:14) and that the promise is only given to people *after* they believe in Jesus (Gal. 3:22). The author of Hebrews wrote, "He who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6b). Just so, he who comes to Christ Jesus must first believe that he is Lord and that he is a baptizer of those who diligently seek him. Demons believe (Jas. 2:19b), but believing does them no good, for Jesus will not baptize them with his Spirit. For us, however, believing may lead to the new birth if we diligently seek the will of God *after* we believe in Jesus.

We are "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10a), just as Paul said, but there are only three verses in the Bible which tell us how we get into Christ, and all three say it is by baptism: Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, and 1Corinthians 12:13. In 1Corinthians, Paul made it clear which baptism he was talking about: "By one Spirit were we all baptized into one body." That baptism, the baptism of Christ, is the baptism

⁶ In context, Jesus was referring to the baptism of the Spirit which the disciples were about to receive (Acts 2:1–4), but he was speaking of the Spirit because they received the Spirit when Jesus baptized them with it.

Peter was talking about when he said that baptism saves us (1Pet. 3:21a). This explains why Jesus told his followers that those who believe *and* are baptized (with his baptism) would be saved in the end: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned” (Mk. 16:16).

Jesus described the new birth to the Jewish elder Nicodemus, a description of the new birth which he said applies to all people at all times:

John 3

7. “Do not marvel that I told you, ‘You must be born again.’
8. The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it is coming from or where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

That is a perfect description of what the followers of Jesus experienced in Acts:

Acts 2

1. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all in one accord, in one place.
2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.
3. And there appeared to them divided tongues like fire, and it sat upon each one of them,
4. and they were all filled with holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit moved them to speak.

That is the new birth. Believing in Jesus always precedes receiving it.

The Christian redefinition of the new birth as simply believing in Jesus is by far the gravest error believers made after rejecting Paul’s gospel, for when the new birth is redefined, everything is redefined. Repentance is redefined because what one must do to receive Jesus’ baptism (believe the gospel and repent) is different from what one must do to believe. In fact, I know of nothing the Bible says that one must do in order to believe. Believing is where the journey with Jesus begins.

Many a soul today has stopped at the point of believing that Jesus is Lord, for Christian ministers have taught them that at that point, they have received the Spirit and are born of God. But they need someone to ask them, as Paul asked some men he met at Ephesus who believed in Jesus, “Did you receive the holy Spirit after you believed?” (Acts 19:2). With that, Paul was asking them, “Have you been born again since you believed?” He knew that it was possible to believe in Jesus and not yet have the Spirit. Every person on earth who believes in Jesus should be asked that question. It is an essential point because, as Paul said, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9b). Everyone who believes in Jesus should be told that believing is not the experience of new birth; it is the path we must take to receive it!

Paul was not born again on the road to Damascus, as many Christians think; he was convicted on the road to Damascus. Paul became a believer when Jesus revealed to him that he was the Messiah. Paul was born again three days later, after diligently seeking God and repenting (Acts 9:9). It was then that he was baptized with the Spirit and his sins were washed away (Acts 9:17; 22:16). Likewise, the disciples were born again on the day of Pentecost when Jesus baptized them with the Spirit. They had many miraculous experiences with Jesus while he was here among them, just as Paul had a miraculous experience on the road to Damascus, but they never had the experience of new birth until after Jesus ascended into heaven and offered himself to God as a sacrifice for their sins (Heb. 9:23–26). This is why Jesus told Peter during the last supper, “When you are converted [born again], strengthen your brothers” (Lk. 22:32). Yes, even at the Last Supper, the disciples were not yet born again!

All true knowledge begins with understanding the new birth. If the Reader embraces the truth that the baptism of the Spirit, not believing in Jesus, is the experience of being born again, then the message of this book will be much easier to understand.

Terms

David once asked, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3). The foundations of the Faith are, in effect, destroyed when they are redefined, and one of the craftiest ways the wicked have found to destroy the foundations of the Faith is to redefine them. And in that case, there is little that the righteous can do.

Truth redefined becomes a lie in disguise. Even if we speak the same language, if we have different definitions for the same word, we might as well be speaking different languages. Only when we have the same definitions for the same words – and those definitions match what God thinks – do we truly communicate in Christ. One of the greatest impediments to believers having fellowship in the light of God is how certain words have been defined for them by men who do not know God. Among the most important of such terms are “Christianity”, “Church”, and “Christian”. These three words, held as sacred by the vast majority of believers worldwide, must first be brought into line with God’s thoughts if this book’s message is to be effectively communicated.

Christian⁷

The word *Christian* is found but three times in the New Testament, the first being Acts 11:26, where the passive voice of the verb (“they *were called* Christians”) indicates that unbelievers in Antioch, not believers, invented the term *Christian*. The Roman historian Tacitus confirmed this when he said that believers were “called Christians by the populace.”⁸ The populace, being Pagan, did not hold believers in high esteem and would not have been using the word *Christian* as a term of respect.

My father stressed to his congregation the importance of a little-quoted verse from the prophet Isaiah: “They shall call them the holy people” (Isa. 62:12). He explained that holy people are not distinguished by calling themselves holy (cf. Isa. 65:2–5); rather, they live such godly lives that those around them call them holy, even if it is to mock them. For one example, sinners invented the term, “holy rollers” for saints who roll across the floor under the power of God; those saints did not call themselves that. And for another, when John Wesley was a student at Oxford University, fellow students nicknamed him and his friends “the Holy Club” because they were so sincere about their faith; they did not call themselves “the Holy Club”. Thus, just as Isaiah said, “they”, the sinners, called them holy.

That is how it is with the term, *Christian*. Early believers who were ridiculed as “Christians” had earned that mockery by being so much like Christ that unbelievers gave them that label. If the unbelieving Sanhedrin had been as clever as the sinners in Antioch, they might have come up with that sarcastic term themselves. As it was, the Jewish elders only “took note of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

The second instance of *Christian* in the New Testament is in Acts 26:28. There, King Agrippa said to Paul after hearing him speak, “Paul, you almost persuade me to be a Christian.” Paul did not quibble over the word. He simply replied, “I wish you were altogether such as I am, except for these chains.” Everyone who heard the king’s confession would have understood it like this: “Paul, you almost

⁷ For a good discussion on the origin and original meaning of “Christian”, see <https://www.gotquestions.org/meaning-of-Christian.html>. Accessed 2–28–2025.

⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* XV.xliv.

persuade me to be called a jackass.” Paul’s powerful testimony had almost made a king willing to believe in Jesus and be mocked for it.

Lastly, in 1Peter 4:16, Peter told believers that if they suffer abuse as “Christians”, they should not be ashamed, but that they should glorify God for it, just as Peter himself had once glorified God for deeming him worthy to be flogged for Christ (Acts 5:40–41). Peter was not calling believers Christians. He was simply exhorting believers to praise God if God ever found them worthy of ridicule for the sake of Christ.

It is remarkable how quickly the term *Christian* caught on with the general Pagan public. By the turn of the second century, unbelievers in many places were calling believers Christians. In about AD 110, in a letter to the emperor Trajan, Pliny the Younger, governor of a province far from Rome, referred to believers as Christians, condemning their Faith as “nothing but a degenerate cult taken to extravagant lengths.”⁹ Pliny’s friend, the Roman historian Tacitus, living in another part of the empire, felt the same way, calling the gospel “a pernicious superstition.”¹⁰ A few decades later, another Roman historian, Suetonius, in a list of the mad emperor Nero’s good deeds, remarked rather casually, “Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.”¹¹ And in the mid-second century, Fronto, the emperor Marcus Aurelius’ tutor, followed suit.¹² The contempt for believers which Pagans of the time felt makes it impossible to believe that they understood the term *Christian* to be one of respect.

Calling Themselves Christians

Professor and cleric Graydon Snyder (1930–2016) posed an interesting question when he asked, “When and how did Christians begin to indicate [on grave markers, etc.] they were Christian?”¹³ But an even better question would be, “When did believers begin calling themselves Christians in the first place?” It was not in the book of Acts. So, what was the process by which believers changed the sarcastic term *Christian* from a term of abuse to one of self-congratulatory honor? We know it happened soon after the age of the apostles, for the earliest known post-apostolic writers were already calling themselves by that name. Those writers called themselves Christians because they wanted to portray themselves as spiritual descendants of the persecuted saints of the first-century. But they were not. They called themselves Christians because they were not holy enough to make unbelievers do it themselves, as Isaiah said would happen. Still, by claiming the title for themselves, those who called themselves Christians eventually succeeded in convincing the whole world that they were the representatives of Christ. A crucial part of that deception was to name their apostate religion *Christianity*.

In sum, in the Bible, to be called a Christian meant to be ridiculed for Christ-like holiness, but apostate believers redefined *Christian* to mean anyone who professes to believe in Jesus.

Christianity

⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, X.96.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.xliv.

¹¹ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, VI.xvi.2.

¹² Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, IX.6–7 (here, Fronto is called “Cirta”); XXXI.2.

¹³ Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante-Pacem Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine*, 267.

Confusion abounds concerning the beginning of Christianity because it is assumed that Christianity began with Jesus and his apostles. It did not. That assumption is the foundation for the definition of Christianity as “the religion founded by Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ But the “Jesus” that founded Christianity is a phantom of human imagination. There is no connection at all between the real Jesus and the religion that is called by his name.

The seeds of that false religion in the name of Christ were sown during the age of the apostles when the body of Christ as a whole was persuaded to reject Paul’s gospel, for the men who led them away from the truth called themselves apostles of Christ, as Paul and other true apostles did.¹⁵ The evil seeds they planted blossomed after the days of the apostles and increased in the following centuries until, with the aid of Rome, they produced the bitter fruit of the Roman Universal Church,¹⁶ which in all its forms, both Protestant and Catholic, make up the religion of Christianity. Each of those sects proclaims its own version of Jesus, with doctrines and practices they claim were inspired by the true Jesus and the true God. They are all lying; none of their Jesuses is the true Jesus. The apostle Paul said that among men, there were many lords and many gods (1Cor. 8:5–6), and he gave warning of ministers who taught “another Jesus” (2Cor, 11:4). But Christianity is glutted with Jesuses and gods foreign to the truth, each of them teaching their own version of the gospel, hoping to attract members to their sect.

The true Jesus suffered and died so that we might receive God’s Spirit and enjoy fellowship with Him; he did not die to start another religious institution with “new and improved” ceremonies. That truth explains why the word *Christianity* is not in the Bible. Indeed, during the first three centuries after Jesus died, instances of the word *Christianity* are extremely rare, and they are all suspect as being later additions to the original documents.¹⁷

Church

The Greek noun for *church*, *kuriakon*, is not found in the New Testament,¹⁸ and for good reason. *Kuriakon* refers to a temple or other building dedicated to a deity – any deity – and the earliest saints did not build buildings for worship. *Kuriakon* had been in use among Pagans for many centuries before the New Testament books were written. This means that the word *kuriakon* was well known to the apostles and was available for them to use, but none of them did. Therefore, no translation of the New Testament should have the word *church* in it.

The Greek word for the body of Christ which the New Testament writers used is *ekklesia*. It, too, was a word which Pagans had been using for many centuries, and it means “assembly”, or “congregation”. Every instance of *church* in translations of the New Testament should be *assembly* or *congregation* instead. We do not know who first mistranslated *ekklesia* as *church*, but it was done soon

¹⁴ Jose Orlandis, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, 9. Even so passionate an anti-Church zealot as Frank Viola confuses the two. He sees that the earliest gatherings of saints were “informal and free of ritual,” but he still calls the Faith of those saints Christianity. – Viola, *Pagan Christianity*, 70.

¹⁵ Cf. 2Corinthians 11:13–15, 1John 2:18–19.

¹⁶ The word “universal” (“Catholic”) communicated Rome’s intention to impose that religion upon the whole world. Lactantius expressed the Christian justification for doing so: “[The Roman Universal Church] is the fountain of truth; this is the abode of the faith; this is the temple of God into which if any one shall not enter, or from which if any shall go out, he is estranged from the hope of life and eternal salvation.” – *The Divine Institutes*, IV.xxviii.

¹⁷ E.g., *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 10; Ignatius: *To the Magnesians*, 10⁽³⁾; *To the Romans*, 3; *To the Philadelphians*, 6; Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV.33. Ignatius’ letters have certainly been tampered with.

¹⁸ The Greek adjective *kuriakon* is used twice in the New Testament, once in 1Corinthians 11:20 and once in Revelation 1:10. In these places, it means “belonging to the Lord” or simply, “the Lord’s”.

after the first apostles died, for it was already being misused by the second century. The earliest known reference to “going to Church” is from Clement of Alexandria (150?–215?).¹⁹ In the early fifteenth century, William Tyndall refused to mistranslate *ekklesia* as *church*, preferring the appropriate word, *congregation*. And for his effort to produce a faithful English translation, Churchmen hunted him down and burned him at the stake, after extending to him the Christian courtesy of strangling him.²⁰

Seven decades after Tyndall, King James I, knowing full well that the word *church* did not belong in the Bible, nevertheless commanded his translators to mistranslate *ekklesia* as *church*²¹ in order to secure the political support of powerful Churchmen. A copy of King James’ sixteen “Rules To Be Observed in Translation” is preserved in the University Library at Cambridge. In modernized English, the third of those rules reads, “The old ecclesiastical words [are] to be kept, such as the word ‘Church’. [It is] not to be translated ‘Congregation’ etc.” The king’s translators knew, as he did, that *ekklesia* does not mean *church*; however, they did as the king commanded, for they knew that if they left *church* out of their translation, people might begin to question the legitimacy of their institution, which examination they would hardly have survived.

In the fourth century, when Rome blended with believers, it continued with its ancient church-based religion, renaming it *Christianity*. Under that new name, church-based religion continued as an essential part of the public culture, and eventually became the public culture of the entire Western world; consequently, believers everywhere came to equate dedication to Christ with dedication to the Church. (I used to be among them, but Jesus rescued me.) And because of that historical development, much of what is essentially Roman Paganism seems natural to us Westerners. Seeing this, MacMullen wrote that “the religious views most easily recoverable from the non-Christian Roman world do not ..., in some respects, strike a modern reader as alien or outlandish.”²² But the doctrines found in Christian churches would have struck the apostles of Christ as outlandish, even blasphemous. Charles Newbold, Jr., a strong opponent of church-based religion, is blunt but accurate: “This Thing we call church ... is an idolatrous substitute for Jesus and quite often a hindrance to our walk with Him. ... [It] has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God.”²³

Not long ago, I pulled out my first-year Greek text from my seminary days, now fifty years ago, to show my students what the right definition of *ekklesia* is. To my surprise, I saw that our textbook defined *ekklesia* as “church”! How were we to know any different? We were trusting the experts to teach us right things. But by such means, the word *church* has been redefined and the truth obscured. Though a church is and always has been a building dedicated to a deity, almost the whole world now uses it as a synonym for the body of Christ. And all of that in spite of the fact that the institution known as “the Church” did not exist before believers blended with Rome in the fourth century, while the body of Christ was created by the power of God in the second chapter of Acts.

A final note: The word *church* does not require capitalization any more than the word *building* does, for that is what a church is. However, in this work, I capitalize it when referring to the religious institution known as Christianity.

¹⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, III.xi.

²⁰ Tyndall’s translation of the New Testament was completed in 1525. Christians executed him in 1536 before he could complete the Old Testament.

²¹ Adam Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*, 75.

²² Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 10.

²³ Charles Elliott Newbold, Jr., *The Harlot Church System*, 9.

Historical Evidence

Roman documents from the first centuries AD, unlike Christian documents from the same time, are plentiful and relatively trustworthy. For the study of Church history, those Roman documents are of limited value, however, because they rarely mention Christ or believers. And though Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger made mention of believers, they did enough only to pique our curiosity.

Documents from the post-apostolic era bear strong witness to Christians' willingness to alter documents, or completely forge them.²⁴ Typical is the case of the letters attributed to the early second-century writer, Ignatius:

John Milton argued that the letters of Ignatius were forgeries of later times, fabricated, in part, precisely in order to justify the later creation of the office [of Bishop]. Among all the participants in this debate, it was Ussher himself who cut through the Gordian knot by showing that of the thirteen widely circulated letters of Ignatius, six were forgeries and the rest had undergone illicit expansion by the author of the forgeries.²⁵

The Epistle of Barnabas and *The First Apology of Justin* are other examples of Christian corruption of original documents. They both contain such starkly contradictory teachings, the original parts in harmony with Paul's gospel and the later additions blatantly contrary to it, that they cannot have been penned by the same hand. For that reason, I have designated the original Barnabas as Barnabas #1, and the later editor(s) of Barnabas' letter as Barnabas #2. The same designations, #1 and #2, will be used for Justin and the later, Christian editor(s) of his works. Other early writings will be treated in the same manner, as the Reader will see.

Sometimes, the forgery is easy to detect, for many early Christian forgers were grossly incompetent. Among the many examples are *The Divine Liturgy of James the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord* and *The Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark*, *The Disciple of Peter*, which contain so many anachronisms that one must wonder how the authors could have thought that they would persuade anyone that James and Mark really concocted those ridiculously long, responsive rituals.

The mixed bag of authentic and inauthentic material left to us by Christians of those early centuries can sometimes make separating the wheat from the chaff difficult. Consequently, no modern history of the early Church can be founded upon enough concrete evidence to escape the employment of guesswork, and every history of the Church is unavoidably tainted with the author's biases. This is a reality which historian J.G. Davies (1919–1990) was honest enough to admit: “The evidence at the disposal of the historian is fragmentary and ambiguous; any and every account [of early Church history] therefore partakes of that uncertainty which is inseparable from conjecture.”²⁶ Robert Grant (1917–2014) warned students of Church history against placing too much weight on the surviving documents because they represent the views only of the more highly educated and well-connected Christians, when the vast majority of believers accounted for the rest, and their thoughts are largely unknown.²⁷

²⁴ In the second century, this was already a widespread practice. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, were both concerned that their writings might be altered (Eusebius, *Church History*, IV.23.12; V.20.2). See also Walter Bauer's discussion of this cultural phenomenon in *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 165ff.

²⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, 140. Milton's argument can be found in his treatise, “Of Prelatical Episcopacy”.

²⁶ J.G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, 46.

²⁷ Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, xiii.

Since no alternative exists to using the documents which survive, it is imperative that when using those documents, we keep in mind that early Christian leaders had self-serving motives for preserving those documents. We would do well to heed the warning of Edwin Hatch (1835–1889) of the two pitfalls waiting for students of Church history: “The one is the tendency to overrate the value of the evidence that has survived. The other is the tendency to underestimate the importance of the opinions that have disappeared from sight, or which we know only in the form and to the extent of their quotation by their opponents.”²⁸

Our only real hope of arriving at the truth concerning post-apostolic believers, the history which the surviving documents purport to tell, is to receive help from God. Though typically disregarded by scholars, God’s help in studying the history of His people is available to all who ask for it: “If anyone among you lacks wisdom,” wrote James, “let him ask of God, who gives generously to all and does not belittle, and it shall be given to him” (Jas. 1:5). It is because He has helped me that I am able to write this book.

The Tunnel

British theologian and academic J.N.D. Kelly (1909–1997) wrote, “The difference of atmosphere becomes immediately apparent as one crosses from the apostolic to the post-apostolic age.”²⁹ But as great a difference of atmosphere as it was, and it was very great, no distinct line delineating those two ages can be found; instead, in the historical record there is “a gap which is somewhat more than the long lifetime of a man,” and it is only “after this gap, from somewhat before the year 200, [that] we come to the beginning of a regular series ... of documentary evidence.”³⁰ It is as though after the days of the apostles, believers entered into a long, dark Tunnel, leaving us with unanswered and unanswerable questions regarding what happened to them during the late-first and the early-second century. What we can say with certainty is that inside that dark Tunnel, the priorities of believers were reversed, for they entered the Tunnel as a charismatic community with some ceremonial aspects, but they emerged from the Tunnel as a ceremonial community with some charismatic aspects. This made for the “difference of atmosphere” which Kelly acknowledged. Believers who came out of the Tunnel neither spoke nor acted with the unction of the Spirit possessed by pre-Tunnel believers.³¹

It is extraordinary that none of the leaders of second- and third-century believers seemed to think that the great first-century apostasy of the body of Christ was relevant to them.³² All of them must have known about that apostasy, for the New Testament Scriptures plainly declare that it happened. However, none of them even attempted to explain how or when or by whom that apostasy was corrected – and they couldn’t do that because it never was. Believers of the second century onward were the spiritual progeny of the first-century Apostates, and their religion was only a continuation of the first-century apostasy.

²⁸ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 10.

²⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 3.

³⁰ Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith*, 46–47.

³¹ Israel entered into a similar Tunnel at the end of the Old Testament. They stayed in that Tunnel several centuries, and no information from that time exists concerning development of the Jewish traditions found in the four gospels. Other than the heroic story of the Maccabees, in which the origin of the non-biblical Jewish festival of Hanukkah is revealed, we have little to nothing from the Jews during those centuries. The earliest extant rabbinic literature comes from about AD 200.

³² It is equally astonishing that modern Christians know little or nothing about it.

Along with the mystery of how the sarcastic term “Christian” became a title which apostate believers adopted for themselves, two principal mysteries from the Tunnel years are (1) why did they stop observing Moses’ law,³³ and (2) how did they justify replacing the law’s ceremonies with ceremonies of their own design? That they did so is remarkable because some second- and third-century Christian leaders were openly contemptuous of both the Jews and the law, while believers of Paul’s time loved the law and converted to the Jewish religion (cf. Acts 15:1; Gal. 3:1–3; 5:2–5). Pre-Tunnel believers would have cringed at the contempt for Moses’ law exhibited by post-Tunnel believers such as Ignatius, who disdainfully used the phrase, “Christ-killing Jews” (Mag. XI), telling believers that “if anyone expounds upon the way of the Jews to you, do not hear him!” (Mag. XI; cf. Hero. II; Phip. VI).³⁴

Post-Tunnel Believers’ Attitude toward the Jews

Anti-Semitism fills *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, supposedly written in the mid-second century, in which Jews are depicted as hating believers and inciting Roman rulers against them. They are also said to have advised the Roman governor to burn Polycarp so completely that there would be no flesh left for Christians to claim and venerate (*Mart. of Poly.*, XVII). It may be true that some second-century Jews incited the Romans against those who believed in Jesus; first-century Jews certainly did (cf. Acts 12:1–3; 22:22–24). If, however, they advised the Romans to burn Polycarp’s dead body so that nothing remained for believers to salvage and venerate, they did believers a favor, for the veneration of human remains, burned up or not, is perverse, superstitious nonsense.

Barnabas #2 condemned the Jews as “wretched” (Ep. of Barn., XVI), and Mathetes³⁵ ridiculed them for ever having sacrificed animals, accusing them of sacrificing animals because they believed that God is in need of the flesh and blood of dead beasts (Math. III, IV). He further claimed that the Jews observed the sacred months and days of the law because they were waiting on the stars and the moon to do something (Math. IV), condemning such observances as “a manifestation of folly” (Math. IV). That is a false accusation. The Jews did not observe the law’s appointed times because they were waiting for the stars to do anything; they observed those times because God told them to.

Justin #2 insisted that Jews were “utterly incompetent to know the hidden counsel of God” (Dial. CXXIII) and, like Mathetes, he taught that the animal sacrifices of Moses’ law had not even been necessary for them to perform (Dial. XXII). That is obviously false; God commanded Israel to make those sacrifices. Paul taught that “every man who is circumcised is obligated to keep the entire law” (Gal. 5:3), but Justin #2 denied that, teaching instead that Israel performed the law’s ceremonies because of their ignorance (1Ap. XIII). He condemned the Jews as “senseless” (1Ap. LXIII), and claimed that God gave them the law only because of their great wickedness (Dial. XX; XXI). But the Scriptures teach that God gave the law to Israel as a blessing because He loved them (cf. Rom. 3:1–2), and “the law” wrote Paul, “is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12).

Whereas the pre-Tunnel Apostates were Paul-despising believers who honored the Jewish law, after the Tunnel, the Apostates were Jew-despising believers who honored Paul. Second-century Apostates would have frowned upon the Apostates of Paul’s day. For them, as Hatch put it, “The old orthodoxy

³³ A few groups, the best known being the Ebonites, continued keeping the law into the mid-second century (cf. “*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*”, XLVII), but their influence was inconsequential.

³⁴ See the sections titled “Anti-Semitism” in my book, *The Apostate Fathers* at GoingtoJesus.com. But it is possible that these hateful anti-Jewish comments were inserted into Ignatius’ writings by later Christians.

³⁵ *Mathetes* is not a name; it is the title of a work by an unknown early Christian.

became a new heresy.”³⁶ This reversal of attitude toward the Jews is puzzling. Feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther (1936–2022) posited that the anti-Semitism which characterized some post-Tunnel believers “entered the picture only when [believers were] assimilated into the Gentile world and took over a preexisting, non-Christian ‘Pagan hate’ for the Jews.”³⁷ But that theory doesn’t hold water. While it is true that some Pagans dismissed the Jews’ religion as foolishness, few if any Pagans ever hated the Jews with the viciousness expressed by early Christian leaders. Their hatred was entirely their own.

The few Apostates who exited the Tunnel still keeping the law were considered old-fashioned by other Apostates and were labeled as Ebionites, or Nazaræans.³⁸ Those Apostates taught that

Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent from the Jewish God to the Jewish people in fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures. They also believed that to belong to the people of God, one needed to be Jewish. As a result, they insisted on observing the Sabbath, keeping kosher, and circumcising all males.... They retained the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) as the Scripture par excellence.³⁹

Like the Gentile believers of Paul’s time who refused his gospel and submitted to the law, the Ebionites

did not accept any of the writings of Paul. Indeed, for them, Paul was not just wrong about a few minor points; he was the archenemy, the heretic who had led so many astray by insisting that a person is made right with God apart from keeping the Law and who forbade circumcision, the “sign of the covenant,” for his followers.⁴⁰

Paul once asked some of his Galatian converts who had been persuaded to receive circumcision, “You embraced me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Have I now become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:14b, 16). The answer was yes, he had. And the Ebionites still felt that way.

Rome’s Attitude toward the Jews

The Roman senate granted the Jews special privileges because Romans honored ancient religions,⁴¹ and the religion of the Jews was very ancient. Augustus Caesar himself demonstrated reverence for Judaism. He forbade interference with Jews who wanted to send offerings to Jerusalem for the temple,⁴² and he himself sent gifts for the temple at Jerusalem, commanding that a daily sacrifice be made perpetually at the temple at his expense.⁴³ It was during his reign that a delegation of Jews arrived in

³⁶ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 132.

³⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 23.

³⁸ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 132.

³⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 100–101.

⁴⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 101.

⁴¹ Cicero approximated this Roman sentiment when he said, “It is certainly true that whatever is best should be considered the oldest and the nearest to God.” – Cicero, *The Laws*, II.xvi.40.

⁴² Allen Chester Johnson, Paul Robinson Coleman-Norton, Frank Card Bourne, *Ancient Roman Statutes: A Translation with Introduction, Commentary, Glossary and Index*, Document 139, “Letter to Octavian on Jewish Rights, 112, cf. p. 113, “Letter of Norbanus on Jewish Rights”.

⁴³ W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 140.

Rome and petitioned Augustus to remove from office the cruel Archelaus (cf. Mt. 2:22), and Archelaus was eventually removed.⁴⁴ Jews were granted exemption from military service and freedom to worship according to their customs;⁴⁵ they were not compelled to make sacrifices in the name of Rome's gods;⁴⁶ nor were they officially persecuted as being atheists, as believers later would be.⁴⁷

Such respect for the Jews' religion notwithstanding, Rome remained sternly protective of her domain and "demanded that the Judaism practiced by Roman citizens in Italy be shorn of national features."⁴⁸ No ground was given for seeds of insurrection, though much liberty was granted. When the emperor Titus and, later, the emperor Hadrian made war against the Jews, their wars had nothing whatsoever to do with religion, as far as the Romans were concerned. They were fighting only to quash Jewish rebellion against Rome's authority.

When Christians blended with the empire in the fourth century, their anti-Semitism began to change official Roman policy. Afterward, the erosion of Jews' special privileges was inevitable. Matters worsened greatly for the Jews in the Middle Ages, as the traditional Roman deference to ancient religions withered away and Christian anti-Semitism was unhindered. Medieval Christian rulers sought to legitimize their cruel abuse of Jews by passing laws which legalized it, but no law could justify such abuse. Such things as "the head tax, the prohibition against circumcising non-Jews, and the exclusion of Jews from Jerusalem ... were to find their reaffirmation in Christian anti-Judaic legislation."⁴⁹

Paul's Attitude toward the Jews

Paul taught that the law was not the product of human ignorance and superstition, but was a holy, good, and just blessing to Israel from God (Rom. 7:12) and that those in Israel who faithfully kept it obtained eternal life (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5). The renowned Christian bishop Irenaeus (130?–202?) seems to have agreed. In reference to Jesus quoting from the law during his Temptation, he asked, "If the law is due to ignorance and defect, how could the statements contained therein bring to nought the ignorance of the Devil, and conquer the 'strong man'?" (AH5, XXII.1). That would have been a good question for Mathetes and Christian forgers such as Barnabas #2 and Justin #2.

Paul loved his fellow Jews even if they did not believe in Christ, or in him. He wrote to the Assembly in Rome, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is for their salvation," and "There have been times I myself prayed to be accursed from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are the Israelites" (Rom. 14:1; Rom. 9:3–4a). Paul's fellow Jews, in the main, had rejected their Messiah, but he still loved them, and in doing so, he was following Jesus' lead. Approaching Jerusalem for the last time, and knowing that most of the Jews had rejected him, Jesus' heart broke "when he looked on the city. And he wept over it, saying, 'Oh, if you had known the things which would lead to your peace! But now, they are hidden from your eyes'" (Lk. 19:41–42).

In rejecting Jesus, the Jews were locked into a continued adherence to the law even after he fulfilled it because (1) no one but God could set them free from the law, and (2) they had rejected the One

⁴⁴ W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 140.

⁴⁵ W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 139.

⁴⁶ James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*, 167.

⁴⁷ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 428.

⁴⁸ Simeon L. Guterman, *Religious Toleration And Persecution In Ancient Rome*, 76.

⁴⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 29.

ordained by God to free them. And so, the law became a prison for the Jews. This punishment was what the Messiah, through David, prophetically prayed for: “That which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap” (Ps. 69:22).

Remembers from Chapter 1

Redefining the New Birth

- To be born again is to receive Jesus' baptism of the Spirit.
- The most consequential change believers made after first-century believers rejected Paul's gospel was to redefine the new birth from receiving Jesus' baptism with the Spirit to simply believing in Jesus.
- While believing in Jesus is essential to receiving the new birth, believing is not itself the new birth; it only qualifies one to receive it.
- He who comes to Christ Jesus must first believe that he is Lord and that he is a baptizer of those who diligently seek him.
- Demons believe (Jas. 2:19b), but believing does them no good, for Jesus will not baptize them with his Spirit.
- Believing may lead to the new birth if we diligently seek the will of God *after* we believe in Jesus.
- There are only three verses in the Bible which tell us how we get into Christ, and all three say it is by baptism: Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, and 1Corinthians 12:13.
- Jesus told his followers that those who believe *and* are baptized (with his baptism) would be saved in the end (Mk. 16:16).
- When the new birth is redefined, everything is redefined.
- Believing is where the journey with Jesus begins.
- It is possible to believe in Jesus and not yet have the Spirit.
- Everyone who believes in Jesus should be told that believing is not the experience of new birth; it is the path we must take to receive it!
- Paul was not born again on the road to Damascus; he was convicted on the road to Damascus.
- All true knowledge begins with understanding the new birth.

Terms

- One of the craftiest ways the wicked have found to destroy the foundations of the Faith is to redefine them.
- Truth redefined becomes a lie in disguise.
- Even if we speak the same language, if we have different definitions for the same word, we might as well be speaking different languages.
- Only when we have the same definitions for the same words – and those definitions match what God thinks—do we truly communicate in Christ.
- One of the greatest impediments to believers having fellowship in the light of God is how certain words have been defined for them by men who do not know God.

Christian

- The early believers who were ridiculed as “Christians” had earned that mockery by being so much like Christ that unbelievers gave them that label.
- The contempt for believers which Pagans of the time felt makes it impossible to believe that they understood the term *Christian* to be one of respect.

Calling Themselves Christians

- In the Bible, to be called a Christian meant to be ridiculed for Christ-like holiness, but apostate believers redefined *Christian* to mean anyone who professes to believe in Jesus.

Christianity

- Confusion abounds concerning the beginning of Christianity because it is assumed that Christianity began with Jesus and his apostles. It did not.
- There is no connection at all between the real Jesus and the religion that is called by his name.
- Christianity is glutted with Jesuses and gods foreign to the truth, each of them teaching their own version of the gospel, hoping to attract members to their sect.
- The true Jesus suffered and died so that we might receive God's Spirit and enjoy fellowship with Him; he did not die to start another religious institution with "new and improved" ceremonies.
- The word *Christianity* is not in the Bible.

Church

- The Greek noun for *church*, *kuriakon*, is not found in the New Testament; therefore, no translation of the New Testament should have the word *church* in it.
- The doctrines found in Christian churches would have struck the apostles of Christ as outlandish, even blasphemous.
- The institution known as "the Church" did not exist before believers blended with Rome in the fourth century.
- The body of Christ was created by the power of God in the second chapter of Acts.

Historical Evidence

- Documents from the post-apostolic era bear strong witness to Christians' willingness to alter documents, or completely forge them.
- Every history of the Church is unavoidably tainted with the author's biases.
- Our only real hope of arriving at the truth concerning post-apostolic believers is to receive help from God.

The Tunnel

- After the days of the apostles, believers entered into a long, dark Tunnel, leaving us with unanswered and unanswerable questions.
- Believers entered the Tunnel as a charismatic community with some ceremonial aspects, but they emerged from the Tunnel as a ceremonial community with some charismatic aspects.
- None of the leaders of second- and third-century believers seemed to think that the great first-century apostasy of the body of Christ was relevant to them.
- Believers of the second century onward were the spiritual progeny of the first-century Apostates, and their religion was only a continuation of the first-century apostasy.
- Pre-Tunnel believers would have cringed at the contempt for Moses' law exhibited by post-Tunnel believers

Post-Tunnel Believers' Attitude toward the Jews

- Few if any Pagans ever hated the Jews with the viciousness expressed by early Christian leaders.
- The few Apostates who exited the Tunnel still keeping the law were considered old-fashioned by other Apostates.

Rome's Attitude toward the Jews

- The Roman senate granted the Jews special privileges because Romans honored ancient religions, and the religion of the Jews was very ancient.
- When Romans made war against the Jews, their wars had nothing whatsoever to do with religion; they were fighting only to quash Jewish rebellion against Rome's authority.
- When Christians blended with the empire in the fourth century, their anti-Semitism began to change official Roman policy.

Paul's Attitude toward the Jews

- Paul loved his fellow Jews even if they did not believe in Christ, or in him, and in doing so, he was following Jesus' lead.
- The law became a prison for the Jews.

Chapter 2

The Synthesis

Daniel's Iron Kingdom

In two stunning visions about 2,500 years ago, God revealed to Daniel that there would be four great kingdoms which would shape the history of mankind, which would conclude with a fifth, eternal one. First was the kingdom of Babylon, followed by Medo-Persia, Greece, and lastly, the most powerful of the four, Rome. At the time of Daniel's visions, Babylon was in power, and Daniel lived long enough to see the Medes and Persians conquer Babylon (Dan. 5). Daniel also foresaw the destruction of the Medo-Persian Empire by the king of Greece (Dan. 8:21). So, before Daniel died, he knew the names of three of the four empires that would dominate world history. The name of the fourth empire, the Roman Empire, which conquered Greece was not revealed to Daniel, nor was the name of the fifth, the eternal kingdom of Christ Jesus.

Daniel's first vision (Dan. 2) came after God had given Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar a dream in which he saw an imposing image in human form. Its head was of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its midsection and thighs of bronze, and its legs and feet were iron, with toes made of iron mingled with clay. The meaning of the king's remarkable dream "was revealed to Daniel in a night vision" (Dan. 2:19): the golden head was Babylon, the silver chest and arms were the Medes and Persians, the bronze thighs was Greece, and the iron legs, with feet part iron and part clay, was Rome, the fourth and final kingdom of man. When Daniel brought the dream's interpretation to the king, Daniel told him that the fourth kingdom would "be strong like iron because, just as iron breaks to pieces and shatters everything, and like iron that brings ruin, it will break to pieces and bring ruin" (Dan. 2:40). Then the entire image was obliterated by the unnamed Ruler of the everlasting kingdom.

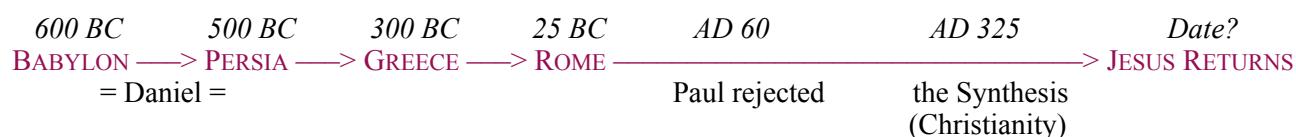
In Daniel's second vision (Dan. 7), he saw the first three kingdoms as unusual animal forms: a lion with eagles' wings (Babylon), a bear with three ribs in its teeth (Medo-Persia), and a leopard with four heads and four wings (Greece). Remarkably, when the fourth beast appeared, Daniel could only say it was "dreadful, and terrifying, and exceptionally strong" (Dan. 7:7). Apparently, unlike the other kingdoms, there was no animal known to Daniel that would help him describe it, which is consistent with what the angel told Daniel, to wit, the fourth kingdom would be "different from all kingdoms" (Dan. 7:23). In describing it, Daniel said only that this beast had massive iron teeth and bronze claws and that it devoured the whole earth and smashed and trampled whatever was left (Dan. 7:19, 23). Then, Daniel told the king, God "will forever take away his power" and give it to another, whose "kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom" (Dan. 7:26–27).

What was it about the fourth beast, the kingdom made of iron, which made it so different from all other kingdoms that Daniel could not describe it as he had described the previous three? Only the epochal event which I call "the Synthesis" answers that question.

Where Is the Iron Kingdom?

In both his visions, Daniel saw that the fourth kingdom would still be in power when Jesus returns to set up his everlasting kingdom on earth. However, even though Jesus has not yet returned, students on every educational level, in both public and private institutions, whether secular or religious, are taught that the Roman Empire fell a long time ago and is gone. But God told Daniel—twice—that the fourth kingdom would continue in power until Jesus returns. So, where is the Iron Kingdom, the beast so unlike any other that Daniel knew of nothing with which he could compare it? Nowhere in the hundreds of books and articles I have read in researching this subject did I find anyone asking that question, much less answering it.

The Five Kingdoms of Daniel's Visions (Dates approximate)



The Council of Nicea

A synthesis is a blending of parts to make a whole. The blending with which we are concerned is the blending of apostate believers with the Roman Empire in AD 325, when the emperor Constantine convened a council of Christian bishops. Remarkably, the scholarly world has not yet adopted a generally accepted title for that unique and monumental event, and so, individual historians have been forced to coin their own terms for it. MacMullen called it the “Grand Event”;⁵⁰ others use such terms as “amalgamation”,⁵¹ “assimilation”,⁵² “transmutation”,⁵³ or “fusion”.⁵⁴ I call it “the Synthesis”. Professor Judith Herrin (1942–) used the word “synthesis”, but only when describing the empire’s educational system as it stood two centuries after the Synthesis took place. That system, she said, was a “complex synthesis of Pagan and Christian elements.”⁵⁵ But that was true of the entire culture of the Roman Empire. Regardless of what the Synthesis is called, however, every student of Roman or Church history acknowledges that the event took place.

The Roman emperor Constantine convened the council of Christian bishops in Nicea, a city in the northwest corner of modern-day Turkey. King David once rejoiced that “righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10). At that Council, however, the unrighteousness of apostate believers and the martial spirit of Rome did more than just kiss, and the product of their intercourse was a Christian Empire whose soul was expressed in the Roman Universal Church, or “Christianity”. The Synthesis which took place at the Council of Nicea transformed the Roman Empire into the mysterious kingdom which the prophet Daniel saw, and it is still here, as Daniel said it would be, wielding great influence over billions of souls around the globe.

⁵⁰ MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism*, 152.

⁵¹ Hyatt, *Years of Charismatic Christianity*, 33.

⁵² Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 27.

⁵³ Warmington, *Carthage: A History*, 153.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Origins of Modern Europe*, 3.

⁵⁵ Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, 79.

Opinions

It is beyond question that early believers perverted the Faith and, as historian Norman Cantor (1929–2004) put it, “accommodated themselves” to the institutions of the Roman Empire.⁵⁶ But how are we to judge that accommodation? As with all other major historical events, opinions of the Synthesis vary greatly. Some scholars characterize the Synthesis as a Romanization of Christians, while others see it as a Christianization of Rome. Cantor summed up both sides: “From one point of view, *the body of Christ*^b thus developed away from [the] pure, apostolic *Faith*^a. On the other hand, it may be claimed that only thus could *the body of Christ*^b progress, adapting itself to a changing world, to new people and new ideas.”⁵⁷

Ambrose, a fourth-century Roman bishop who figured significantly in the Synthesis, excitedly spoke of the Synthesis as the denouement of Roman history, the crown of Rome’s divinely-ordained march toward world domination, from which it would be sin to back away.⁵⁸ Some modern historians likewise extol the Synthesis. Irish professor Peter Brown (1935–) calls it “one of the greatest achievements of the late Roman period,” characterizing it not as a mere Christianization of Rome, but a combination of Pagan and Christian elements in which everyone could participate.⁵⁹ Anglican priest and professor W.R. Inge (1860–1954) concurred, saying that the production of the Church “was the last great creative achievement of classical culture.”⁶⁰ Others, while agreeing in principle, choose a less enthusiastic route. American historian and philosopher Will Durant (1885–1981) tamely characterized the Synthesis as merely “a mutual adjustment of the spirit and the flesh.”⁶¹ And Robert Grant yawned, “A certain measure of adjustment or even compromise was inevitable.”⁶²

At the other end of the scholarly spectrum, the devout nineteenth-century English cleric William Gilly (1789–1855) roundly condemned the Synthesis, and many have agreed with Gilly, that believers went “grievously wrong.... by a succession of corruptions, and by a gradual departure from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁶³ What is missed in that assessment, however, is that believers’ “gradual departure from the Gospel” began much earlier than Gilly realized, in the first century, and continued until the Synthesis was realized, and it has continued ever since as Christianity, in Catholic and Protestant churches alike.

Historians who say that the Synthesis was a natural development are correct, for every religion devised by man develops over time, and after first-century believers forsook the truth, they began the process of devising gospels of their own, which did develop, or evolve. B.H. Warmington (1924–2013), a British classicist, rightly viewed the Synthesis as “a logical, organic process, ... a development, an

⁵⁶ Norman Cantor, *The Civilizations of the Middle Ages*, 37.

⁵⁷ Norman Cantor, *The Civilizations of the Middle Ages*, 37. See Author’s Notes in the Introduction for the explanation for the superscripted alteration of the original quote, both here and in other places.

⁵⁸ cf. Ambrose, Epistle XVIII.23–29.

⁵⁹ Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, 12.

⁶⁰ R.W. Livingstone, ed., *The Legacy of Greece: Essay by W.R. Inge*, 30.

⁶¹ Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 657. **Is this form right (several places for this? This book, *Caesar and Christ*, is the title of Part 3 of the Series, “The Story of Civilization”. Should it be: Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization 3: Caesar and Christ*, 657? or just Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 657?**

⁶² Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, 247.

⁶³ William Gilly, *Vigilantius and His Times*, 5.

evolution.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Irish historian Peter Heather (1960–) taught that “the best way of understanding historical development in the late and post-Roman periods is to consider it in terms of organic evolution.”⁶⁵ But what scholars of this sort are suggesting is that Christianity is the grown-up version of the original Faith of Christ and that if one believes in Christianity, then he is believing in that Faith. But that is not the case; the original Faith of Christ and Christianity are far too different to be the same religion. The Faith of Christ is the only religion that has not and never will evolve, and it does not evolve because it had no earthly origin, but was revealed from heaven.

Classicist Michael Grant (1914–2004) said, somewhat nonchalantly, “It is a commonplace that Rome created Christianity.”⁶⁶ That observation moves us in the right direction, but it would have been more perfectly stated thus: “Rome blended with apostate believers, and that blending produced Christianity.” Nevertheless, the point Grant was trying to make is true, to wit, from its beginning, Christianity was of men (Rome), not of God. Therefore, it has evolved over the centuries, and it is still evolving.

The essential point here is that regardless of whether the Synthesis is viewed favorably, unfavorably, or neutrally, the Synthesis is acknowledged by every historian of every ilk as a landmark event in human history. That it happened is never disputed; what it was that happened is the issue. And to understand what happened, one must first understand the gospel of the apostle Paul, which pre-dated the Synthesis by almost three centuries.

Paul’s Gospel

The body of Christ was created by and is sustained by the power of the Spirit of God; it is to no extent an organization of man’s will or design, and other than the earthly bodies of the saints, nothing of earth has a place in it. On the other hand, Christianity, being of earthly origin, requires earthly materials for worship: candles, incense, fire, water, special clothing, bread and wine, etc. Jesus and his first disciples partook of such earthly elements in worship because they were all Jews living under the law which required those elements (cf. Acts 3:26; 13:46), but the gospel which Jesus later revealed to Paul (cf. Gal. 2:7–8) excluded earthly elements.

The revelation given to Paul was that believers are baptized, clothed, fed, sanctified, and sustained by the Spirit alone, just as they will be raised from the dead by the Spirit alone (cf. Rom. 8:11). In this covenant, earthly elements have nothing to do with the worship of God, or with anything else in His kingdom. Paul was heartbroken when his Gentile converts began polluting their worship with the use of earthly elements: “Who has bewitched you,” he cried, “that you should not obey the truth? ... Having begun in the Spirit, are you now perfected by the flesh? How is it that you want to return again to live – again! – as slaves to weak and worthless elements?” (Gal. 3:1, 3; 4:9). Those Gentile believers had been persuaded by Jewish teachers to return to worship in ceremonial form – not the Pagan rituals they once knew, but to the rituals of Moses’ law, the rituals which the Bible calls “dead works”:

Hebrews 9

13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctifies for the purification of the flesh,
14. how much more does the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve a living God!

⁶⁴ B.H. Warmington, *Carthage: A History*, 153.

⁶⁵ Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 439.

⁶⁶ Michael Grant, *Art in the Roman Empire*, 82.

Elements of the earth are elements of the earth, no matter what religion they are part of, including the elements of the once-holy law that God revealed to Moses. After Jesus' sacrifice of himself, God crowned Jesus with so much glory that there was no glory left for the once-glorious law of Moses: "That which was once made glorious has been made not glorious," wrote Paul, "on account of the surpassing glory [of Christ]" (2Cor. 3:10). Therefore, Israel's religion and the religions of the Gentiles, which all employ earthly elements, are now equally useless for salvation, for God sent His beloved Son to make "a new and living way" of life and worship for us (Heb. 10:20; cf. Rom. 6:4). After Paul angrily rebuked Peter and his Jewish companions for pressuring Gentile believers in Antioch to submit to the law, he admonished them with this reminder:

Galatians 2

15. We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,
16. knowing that a man is not justified by works of a law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, we also have trusted in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Therefore, by works of law will no flesh be justified!⁶⁷

Misguided Euphoria

When first-century Gentile believers forsook Paul, they did not know that by doing so, they were also forsaking Jesus. Paul was only the messenger, explaining what Jesus had accomplished, and it was Jesus speaking to them by him. Nor did they know that in adding earthly materials to the kind of worship Christ purchased with his blood, they had made themselves adversaries of the God they claimed to be serving. Paul told the Philippians,

Philippians 3

18. Many (of whom I have told you often, and say again now with tears) live as enemies of the cross of Christ,
19. whose end is damnation, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.

Those fallen saints did not see themselves as fallen; quite the contrary, their Jewish teachers had persuaded them that in embracing Moses' law, they had risen to a higher spiritual state. But Paul saw it rightly. It was apostasy from Christ to turn from worship "in spirit and in truth" to worship with dead earthly materials.

Paul warned the Galatians of the hidden motives of the Jewish teachers they had come to admire: "They make much of you, but not for good; they want to exclude you [as not pleasing to God] so that you will make much of them [and so, become Jews as they are]" (Gal. 4:17). But his warning fell on deaf ears, and Paul's converts began to trust again in earthly things and to admire men who claimed to be apostles of Christ but were not. Their former confidence in rituals and their former desire for men's approval was rekindled and grew apace. And when the fourth-century Synthesis took place, as Robert Grant accurately said, "The [world's] acceptance for which Christians had long been seeking was achieved."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ I have added "the" to what Paul wrote here, since he was speaking specifically of Moses' law. But the Galatians would also have understood Paul's larger message, to wit, ceremonial works required by any law are worthless for salvation.

⁶⁸ Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, 248.

The simplicity of that statement belies its depth. In turning to elements of the world, believers had to “mind earthly things” in order to please the men who led them to do it. When Jesus and his disciples kept the law, they were not seeking acceptance from men as Paul’s Gentile converts were when they turned to it. Jesus kept the law in order to fulfill it and bring it to its intended end (cf. Rom. 7:14), but Paul’s Gentile converts turned to the law in order to please the men who told them they must. Paul even said that men would stop persecuting him if he added ceremonies to his message (cf. Gal. 5:7), and that those who were preaching circumcision were doing so to avoid persecution (Gal. 6:12).

By the time of the Synthesis, the believers who “minded earthly things” were fully given to ceremonial worship, but they were so dull of heart that, far from being ashamed of it, they rejoiced in it as the fulfillment of God’s ancient promises of earthly glory for His people. In an oration honoring Constantine’s thirty years on the throne, the sycophantic Church historian Eusebius (263–339/340) quoted the prophet Daniel to show that the reign of Constantine and his sons fulfilled the ancient prophecy which said, “The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom” (Dan. 7:18).⁶⁹ But that was a misapplied scripture. Daniel was prophesying of the Second Coming of Christ. Yet, according to Eusebius, Daniel was prophesying about Constantine. In Eusebius’ eyes, Constantine was “perfect in discretion, in goodness, in justice, in courage, in piety, in devotion to God,”⁷⁰ for he had conquered not only his “impious and savage foes, but equally barbarous adversaries, the evil spirits themselves.”⁷¹ Said Eusebius, heaven itself was celebrating the emperor’s reign as he and his fellows were: “Heavenly choirs, attracted by a natural sympathy, unite their joy with the joy of those on earth.”⁷² But the euphoria of Apostates such as Eusebius was but an indication of the depth of their spiritual blindness, which blindness was their just reward from God for rejecting Paul’s gospel.

Rome Was Defeated?

Many Christians still glory in the Synthesis as the victory of their humble and harmless faith over the mighty Roman Empire, but that is an imaginary conquest. Of that myth, Durant derisively wrote,

There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned or oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fierce tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won.⁷³

That popular version of events has no basis in fact, as Durant knew.

Robert Payne taught that “the cult of antiquity never died out,”⁷⁴ and the reason it never died out is because the Synthesis reshaped Rome’s ancient cult into a more acceptable form, a form that both Christians and Pagans could accept. That change was crucial to the Synthesis’ success. As one historian pointed out, “The accommodation between *the faith of Christians*^a and the habits, customs, and social expectations of many in the empire was a vital factor in securing widespread acceptance of the new

⁶⁹ Eusebius, *Oration*, VI.21.

⁷⁰ Eusebius, *Oration*, V.4.

⁷¹ Eusebius, *Oration*, VI.21.

⁷² Eusebius, *Oration*, VI.2.

⁷³ Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 652. **Form correct?**

⁷⁴ Robert Payne, *Ancient Rome*, 271.

imperial religion.”⁷⁵ The Synthesis adjusted Rome’s Paganism and sealed it as “Christianity” in the psyche of Rome’s multi-cultural empire. It adorned Pagan thought with Christian dogma and immersed Pagan cult in the waters of Christian baptism.

MacMullen’s view is in line with historical reality. He wrote that “the triumph of the church was not one of obliteration [of Paganism] but one of widening embrace and assimilation.”⁷⁶ That much is true, but he failed to acknowledge that the institution of the Church was produced by the Synthesis; before then, it did not exist, and could not have triumphed over Rome. He also fell short of the mark when he said that Paganism “in some sense never ended, at least not if the disappearance of Paganism is what’s in question.”⁷⁷ But why say that Paganism “*in some sense* never ended”? In what sense did it *ever* end? On the contrary, in the Synthesis, Paganism was “transformed by being linked to a new ceremonial of power”⁷⁸, the power of the Christianized empire. So, why not just state the obvious, that rather than defeating Roman Paganism, Christianity was, and is the preserver of the Paganism of Classical culture?

Christians Were Defeated?

Then there are those who hold the view that in the Synthesis, Rome conquered believers. German theologian and historian Adolph von Harnack (1851–1930) is in this camp. He taught that “Rome, a second time, step by step, conquered the world, but this time the Christian world.”⁷⁹ The strongly anti-Catholic Scottish minister, Alexander Hislop (1807–1865), also saw Rome as triumphant. Referring to Christians’ pre-Synthesis religion as “nominal Christianity”, he wrote, “To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter ... to get Paganism and *the Apostates’ faith*^a – now far sunk in idolatry – to shake hands.”⁸⁰ Hatch also taught that the Synthesis “was a victory in which the victors [Christians] were the vanquished. There was so large an absorption by the [Romans] of their [Christian] opponents as to destroy the main reason for a separate existence.”⁸¹

Frederick Farrar (1831–1903), Dean of Canterbury, rather timidly suggested that in the Synthesis, “the apparent triumph of Christianity was in some sense and for a time a real defeat, the corruption of its simplicity, the defacement of its purest and loftiest beauty.”⁸² Farrar’s suggestion is flawed because (1) Christianity did not exist before the Synthesis, and (2) when it came into existence in 325, it was neither simple nor pure. The original Faith of Christ was altogether simple and pure, but it had been abandoned by believers in the first century; it was their impure gospel which blended with Rome and became

⁷⁵ *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, Oleg Grabar, eds., 172.

⁷⁶ Ramsay McMullen, *Christianity & Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, 159.

⁷⁷ Ramsay McMullen, *Christianity & Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, 152.

⁷⁸ Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 49–50.

⁷⁹ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Neil Buchanan, trans., 127.

⁸⁰ Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 105. Within that statement are two remarkable observations. First, Hislop recognized that the pre-Synthesis religion of Christians was already “far sunk in idolatry”, and second, he acknowledged Rome’s “usual policy” of adopting the geniuses of others. In one sentence, Hislop thus zeroed in on two of the essentials for the Synthesis to take place: the apostasy of the body of Christ and Rome’s genius for absorbing the most useful elements of others, including its enemies. (More on the policy of Rome’s genius in a later chapter.)

⁸¹ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 133.

⁸² Quote taken from Walter Woodburn Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, 197, footnote 21.

Christianity. Moreover, the first-century “corruption and defacement” of the gospel was not merely “in some sense”, nor was it only “for a time”; it was corruption in every sense, and it has lasted to this day.

Mutual Adaptation

Christians absorbed Rome as much as Rome absorbed Christians. It was that mutual absorption which, as Hatch said, “destroyed the main reason for a separate existence.” One might even define the Synthesis as “mutual absorption”. So, the Synthesis was both a conquest and a victory. While both sides lost something of themselves in the Synthesis, both sides also won because the new entity forged by their blending produced a more effective version of them both: a Christian Roman Empire which claimed universal supremacy over all the earth, trusting in the empire’s military might and justified by doctrines of the Apostates. When Christians blended with Rome, they provided Rome with the theological terminology it needed to legitimize and perpetuate its best-loved Pagan traditions, while Rome provided Christians with the worldly power they needed to impose their version of the gospel on the world and to grind their theological rivals to powder.

The Synthesis was a mutually beneficial agreement between spiritual equals. That the dark spirit of Rome conquered Christians and became their master is an impossibility, for spiritual darkness had been believers’ master since the first century when they rejected Paul. And that the darkened spirit of Christians conquered Rome is a myth, for Rome had been in spiritual darkness from its foundation. That similarity, fellowship in spiritual darkness, is what made the Synthesis possible. Historian and philosopher Robert Markus (1924–2010) wrote, “From the later second century, Christians had been moving fast ... towards an assimilation of secular culture.”⁸³ That is true. In the late second century, after Montanus,⁸⁴ matters dramatically worsened for believers, spiritually speaking, as their status in society was improving. Still, it must be kept in mind that the spiritual degeneration of believers began in the first century.

Both Romans and Christians had shared a hatred of the true gospel for centuries before the Synthesis, and afterwards, the new empire, under Christian management, continued not only to despise the Faith, but also to despise any version of the gospel that differed from its own.

Secular and Christian scholars recognize the consubstantiality, so to speak, of the Apostates and Rome, for just as Christians expanded the borders of their gospel to accommodate Paganism, so Rome adjusted itself to embrace the Apostates’ gospel. Peter Heather wrote, “If the Christianization of Roman society is a massively important topic, an equally important, and somewhat less studied one, is the Romanization of *the Christian religion*^a. The adoption of the new religion was no one-way street, but a process of mutual adaptation that reinforced the ideological claims of emperor and state.”⁸⁵ The distinguished American historian Edward Peters (1936–2024) agreed that in the Synthesis, “The conversion of the Empire had transformed the *Christian religion*^b, and the absorption of the *Christian religion*^b had transformed the Empire.”⁸⁶ Even the Catholic writer Desmond O’Grady (1935–2014) admitted that while Christians shaped Rome, they themselves were shaped by Rome.⁸⁷ “There was much, on both sides,” said another scholar, “that was passed to posterity, although impure and

⁸³ Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 27.

⁸⁴ See my book, *Montanus: Prophet to an Apostate Body of Christ*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

⁸⁵ Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 126.

⁸⁶ Edward Peters, *Inquisition*, 32.

⁸⁷ Desmond O’Grady, *The Victory Of The Cross*, 28.

thoroughly alloyed.”⁸⁸ By “impure”, he meant “not in its original form”, which was true of both Rome and Christians. And by “alloyed”, he meant that elements of each had blended with the heart of the other.

The Synthesis was the *result* of apostasy, not the cause of it. It did not pervert “the Faith once delivered to the saints” because that Faith was perverted in the first century by the very people to whom it had been given. Consequently, as early as the mid-second century, “the essential premises for the development of Catholicism were already in existence.”⁸⁹ Before the Synthesis, believers had already “gone a long way in appropriating the culture and life-styles of their Pagan contemporaries.”⁹⁰ Likewise, as the next chapter will show, Rome had gone a long way in abandoning some of its long-held customs and beliefs and was steadily drifting toward a union with Christians.

Having left Paul’s gospel so far behind that it was forgotten, Christians “were prepared, should the occasion arise, to adopt, or imitate, or sanction the existing rites and customs of the populace, as well as the philosophy of the educated class.”⁹¹ But as they did so, their gospel became less and less spiritual and more and more ritualistic, or as Paul would say it, less and less “in the Spirit” and more and more “in the flesh”.

When early Christians began shaping their apostate gospel, their apostate gospel began shaping them, deepening their spiritual blindness. The billions of Christians who since then have followed in their footsteps have ended up in their ditch. None of those early Christians, caught up as they were in the contest to be crowned Orthodox, discerned what was really happening; they were too busy competing for recognition. And their oftentimes bitter quarrels over doctrines and rituals continued until Constantine ended the contest in 325 by declaring as Orthodox the version of the gospel which he preferred.

A Public Culture

The Synthesis was the crowning achievement of both Christians and Rome along the dark paths each had chosen, for it produced “a public culture that Christians and non-Christians alike could share.”⁹² That was key to securing the Iron Kingdom’s ability to endure to the end of this age, when Jesus returns. The essential elements of the Apostates’ faith not only survived, but thrived, and the ancient Roman lust for domination over men was bolstered.

Over the centuries, many Churchmen have acknowledged and even gloried in Rome’s continued existence through the Church. Notable among them is Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303), who sometimes donned imperial attire and famously declared, “I am Caesar! I am the Emperor!” He saw his power as universal, and in 1302, he issued his famous bull, titled “Unam Sanctam”, in which he claimed for the papacy sole authority over everyone and everything on earth:

The spiritual and the temporal [powers] are in the power of the Church. The former is to be used by the Church, the latter for the Church; the one by the hand of the priest, the other by the hand of kings and knights, but at the command and permission of the priest.

⁸⁸ *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, Oleg Grabar, eds., 90.

⁸⁹ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Neil Buchanan, trans., 216.

⁹⁰ Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 102.

⁹¹ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 238.

⁹² Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, 12.

Moreover, it is necessary for one sword to be under the other, and the temporal authority to be subjected to the spiritual.

That doctrine led to but one conclusion, of course, which Boniface declared: “We therefore declare, say, and affirm that submission on the part of every man to the bishop of Rome is altogether necessary for his salvation.” As British historian Stewart Perowne (1901–1989) noted,

The great organization which is in so many ways the successor of the Caesars, the Roman Catholic Church, insists that complete obedience is the natural condition of the Christian soul, and in this view of human destiny, millions throughout the world ardently concur. They submit to a pontiff [the Pope] as sovereign, and they, like their secular predecessors [the Romans], address that sovereign as father, and he them as his children.⁹³

Rome and the Apostates were united in the Synthesis in order to accomplish a wicked end: complete mastery over all mankind. The institution formed by the blending of the apostate body of Christ and Pagan Rome was far greater than either had been before, an empire that laid claim to universal supremacy over the bodies and souls of all mankind. And wherever and whenever it could, the Roman Universal Church leveraged both spiritual and secular powers to crush its adversaries and expand its earthly dominion. It was a dirty business in which hundreds of thousands, if not millions, would eventually be slain in the name of the Prince of peace.

God’s Plan?

The change in believers from Paul’s day to the second century is remarkable. In Paul’s day, believers were a body into which one entered by receiving Jesus’ baptism of the Spirit (Rom. 6:3; 1Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27); by the second century, believers were an increasingly sacramental community into which one entered by joining. In Paul’s day, authority among believers was based upon spiritual gifts and power; in the second century, authority among believers was based upon ordination by religious officials. Paul’s gospel liberated believers from all ceremonial works, but in the second century, believers were competing for dominance, devising competing gospels with competing ceremonies.

Rather than “Paul’s gospel”, Harnack preferred the term “Paulinism”; still, what he said is true concerning the difference between the Faith as taught by Paul and the religion of believers in the succeeding centuries: “Paulinism is a ... Christocentric doctrine, more inward and more powerful than any other which has ever appeared in the Church. It stands in the clearest opposition to all merely natural moralism, all righteousness of works, all religious ceremonialism, all Christianity without Christ.”⁹⁴ What Harnack missed, however, is that Christianity has always been without Christ. He acknowledged that the Spirit-filled leaders of the earliest believers (apostles, prophets, teachers, etc.) were replaced by “a class of professional moralists and preachers, who bridled the people by counsel and reproof,”⁹⁵ but he did not judge that development as necessarily undesirable.

Some historians, Harnack among them, have argued that for the gospel to be adjusted to accommodate Pagan culture was God’s plan from the beginning and that for the gospel to be thus adjusted demonstrates God’s great wisdom in devising it. Hatch declared that

⁹³ Stewart Perowne, *Hadrian*, 88.

⁹⁴ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Neil Buchanan, trans., 135–136.

⁹⁵ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Neil Buchanan, trans., 128.

It is an argument for the divine life of Christianity that it has been able to assimilate so much that was at first alien to it.... The tree of life [he means Christianity], which was planted by the hand of God Himself in the soil of human society, was intended from the first to grow by assimilating to itself whatever elements it found there. It is possible to maintain that Christianity was intended to be a development.⁹⁶

So, Hatch's doctrine was that Christians adopted rituals from Pagans⁹⁷ and then adapted and readapted them according to "the needs of the times."⁹⁸ He went so far as to say that "not only some but *all* the elements of the organization [the Church] can be traced to external sources."⁹⁹ No scholar to this day has successfully contested that statement, for too much objective evidence exists which confirms it.

Christianity has indeed adapted to man's ways, and it still does, but that is because Christianity is not of God. It is a human institution, and yet, just as Hatch taught, the hand of God did plant it, but as a curse upon believers for rejecting His truth, not as a reward for righteousness.

A Religion the World Can Accept

The formulating of religious rites and rules is the human substitute for being led by God's Spirit, and believers remain free from religious rites and rules only as they remain in the Spirit. Harnack observed that "the number of sacred ceremonies already considerable in the second century (how did they arise?) was still further increased in the third."¹⁰⁰ And Robert Grant explained that "the cumulative effect of the decisions made by Christian leaders [in the first few centuries after Christ] was to bring the *body of Christ*^b into the world and to multiply its numbers until it could win the world to Christian allegiance."¹⁰¹ That is true, but when did God's goal become to win the world? Jesus refused even to pray for the world (Jn. 17:9). The Christians' alteration of the gospel in order to win the world is all the evidence a reasonable person needs in order to see that the world had won the Christians.

Jesus said that the world cannot receive the Spirit (Jn. 14:17a); therefore, the world requires a religion it can practice without it. Such is what the Synthesis produced the world: a religion that accommodated Spirit-less men – a religion that was and still is a "system of rituals", as Lutheran pastor and professor Frank Senn (1943–) aptly described it.

Grant's comment that for apostate believers, "A certain measure of adjustment or even compromise was inevitable," is true, but only because their Christian religion was worldly, just like Rome's. Neither religion was holy, and being of human origin, both could compromise, for neither of them could resist outside influences. Making the same argument, that compromise with the world was inevitable, Hatch said that "it was impossible for the sophisticated Greeks to receive or to retain Christianity in its primitive simplicity."¹⁰² And such was equally impossible for sophisticated Romans, for theirs was a

⁹⁶ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 350, 351.

⁹⁷ Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, 208.

⁹⁸ Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, 19.

⁹⁹ Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans., Neil Buchanan, 335.

¹⁰¹ Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, 143.

¹⁰² Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 48.

Greco-Roman culture.¹⁰³ But Hatch's assumption that Christianity was once simple is wrong; it never had a "primitive simplicity". It began in 325, and from its beginning, Christianity's philosophical complexity, exemplified by the Holy Trinity doctrine, appealed to Pagan sophisticates of both Greece and Rome.

If Hatch had said, "It was impossible for the sophisticated Greeks to receive or to retain the Faith of Christ in its primitive simplicity," he would have been telling the truth. What no one on earth, without renouncing sin, can receive in its "primitive simplicity" is the gospel of God that was revealed from heaven, and it will never change. Paul warned the saints in Corinth to reject ministers who wanted to adjust the gospel of Christ: "I fear, lest, as the serpent led Eve astray by his craftiness, so your thoughts likewise be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2Cor. 11:3). And to the Colossian saints, he wrote, "Beware, lest someone carry you away with philosophy, or empty deceit, following human tradition based on the elements of the world and not based on Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of God's nature bodily, and you are complete in him" (Col. 2:8–10). The Son of God did not die for a chameleonic gospel, and Paul threatened with damnation anyone who would dare to alter the gospel that Christ had revealed to him: "As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone brings you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be cursed! I would that those who are troubling you were cut off [from God]!" (Gal. 1:9; 5:12). He even went so far as to say, "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, bring you a gospel contrary to the gospel we preached to you, let him be cursed!" (Gal. 1:8).

Harnack was right when he said that according to the apostle Paul, "the knowledge of Christ crucified ... had nothing in common with Greek philosophy" and that "the ideas of justification and the doctrine of the Spirit ... were irreconcilable with the moralism and the religious ideals of [Greek culture]."¹⁰⁴ As Paul said, "What harmony exists between Christ and Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? What compact does the temple of God make with idols?" (2Cor. 6:15–16a). Robert Payne made the same point when he said: "Christ and Jupiter belonged to different worlds, and there could be no peace between them."¹⁰⁵ It is impossible for the Faith of Christ to mesh with human wisdom and ways and yet remain the Faith; any change to the gospel wrought by man perverts and transforms it into something else, which was Paul's point when he scolded the Galatians for reverting to the use of earthly elements in worship: "I marvel that you are turning away so quickly from Him who called you by the grace of Christ to another gospel, *which is not another* [emphasis mine]" (Gal. 1:6–7a). There is only one Faith (Eph. 4:5).

Paul's sentiment is reflected in Jude's exhortation to believers to "earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints," for some men, claiming to be ministers of Christ, were already trying to change it (Jude 1:3–4). In their letters, Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John all warned the saints not to follow those who would alter the truth of the gospel. In this, they were like Moses, who told Israel shortly before his death, "I know that after my death, you will utterly corrupt yourselves and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you" (Dt. 31:29a). The difference is that God's New Testament people did not wait for the death of the apostles before they corrupted themselves, and after that, it only got worse.

Christian congregations increase their numbers by accommodating worldly sentiments and traditions, but by the Spirit, the body of Christ "increases with the increase of God" (cf. Col. 2:18–19). As the true gospel of Christ came to man by the Spirit, so it is kept pure by the Spirit (cf. Mt. 16:17–18;

¹⁰³ Michael Grant, *The Collapse and Recovery of the Roman Empire*, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Neil Buchanan, trans., 57.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Payne, *Ancient Rome*, 61.

Gal. 1:10–11). Hatch was right to say that “a large part of what are sometimes called Christian doctrines, and many [practices and procedures] which have prevailed and continue to prevail in the Christian Church, are in reality Greek theories and Greek [practices and procedures].”¹⁰⁶ But he was badly mistaken to think that such was God’s plan for His people.

In order to justify the difference between Church religion and the original Faith, Catholic theologian Johannes Quasten (1900–1987) taught that the more the Apostates’ religion “expanded among the Pagans, the more difficult it became to hold fast to ‘adoration in spirit,’ as Christ had asked for. No longer did it suffice merely to offer the people a substitute for pagan sacrifice and cultic music.”¹⁰⁷ First, Jesus never *asked* for worship in spirit; he demanded it: “God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24). And second, worship in spirit is God’s eternally sufficient substitute for all Pagan religion. In what way is it insufficient?

Acceptable worship of God is as impossible for men without the Spirit as is resurrection from the dead. Worship “in spirit and in truth” is a fundamental part of the Faith of Christ, and it will never change. It is altogether and eternally sufficient for all people at all times and places. Any worship that is not in spirit and in truth, including the Christian worship that Quasten was trying to justify, is altogether worthless for salvation.

The Revealed Gospel is Eternal

It is remarkable that while acknowledging that Christians made alterations to the gospel, Harnack, Hatch, and others saw no problem with it. Harnack wrote that the “primitive *Faith*^a has perished in order that the Gospel might be preserved.”¹⁰⁸ That is utter nonsense. The Faith “was once for all delivered to the saints,” and for men to make adjustments to it is to invent their own gospel. The original Faith did not perish so that the gospel could survive. The original Faith *is* the gospel, and that gospel changes men, not vice-versa. Nor can the Faith ever perish, for it is in the Spirit, and the Spirit is life itself (Rom. 8:10b). The gospel that Jesus revealed to Paul is an eternal gospel, and it is the standard by which all men will be judged (Rom. 2:16).

Ritualization of worship was the natural result of rejecting Paul’s gospel, for it is the only alternative to worship in spirit and truth. Paul told his converts to refuse ministers who proclaimed “another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or a different spirit, or a different gospel” (2Cor. 11:4). With every new doctrine or ceremony, however, early Christians were introducing another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel. This holds true concerning all Christian sects. Each sect has its own Jesus, its own traditions, its own doctrines, and its own rituals. They all praise Jesus as Lord, and his apostles as great men of God, even as they misrepresent both them and the truth they taught. The gospel of the real Paul, especially, they despise, for his gospel is entirely of the Spirit, and it exposes as false every Jesus, every doctrine, and every ceremony that Christians have ever invented.

The ardent and erudite ascetic, Tertullian (c. 155–c. 240), said that a man “can be marked down as a heretic who, forsaking what had once been, has chosen for himself that which previously was not. For that which is of later importation must needs be reckoned heresy, precisely because that has to be

¹⁰⁶ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 350.

¹⁰⁷ Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, 60–61.

¹⁰⁸ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Neil Buchanan, trans., 75.

considered truth which was delivered of old and from the beginning [to men from God].”¹⁰⁹ That is true. The original gospel is the only true one, and a gospel of “assimilation”, “amalgamation”, or “fusion” with the world is no gospel at all. For this reason alone, we may say that the gospel Paul preached cannot be any of the gospels proclaimed by Christians. Nor can the holy Spirit of God be the “holy Spirit” of Christians. Nor can the body of Christ, into which we are baptized by the Spirit, be any Christian church, for no church that can be joined is His. Nor can Christ Jesus be, as Harnack boldly said, “the powerless Christ of contemporary history.”¹¹⁰

“They Will Turn Away”

Book Two of this Series showed that even before Paul and the other apostles died, the body of Christ, with a few exceptions, had rejected the “perfect law of liberty”, as James called it (Jas. 1:25). Paul fell asleep in Christ grieving that although he had won his personal battle against “spiritual wickedness in high places,” he had lost the battle for the hearts of God’s people. They all had forsaken him, beguiled by teachers who proclaimed a gospel contrary to the one Jesus revealed to Paul.

The prophet Amos (3:7) said that God will do nothing without first revealing it to His prophets. That held true concerning the apostasy into which first-century believers fell. Jesus warned his followers that “false prophets will arise, and will deceive many” and “many will come, using my name, saying that I [Jesus] am the Messiah” (Lk. 21:8). Paul also prophesied, “Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2Tim. 3:13). As an elderly apostle, he told Timothy, “The time will come when they [believers] will not put up with sound doctrine, but will heap up teachers for themselves according to their own desires, having itching ears, and they will turn away from hearing the truth, and they will be turned over to myths” (2Tim. 4:3–4). Peter gave the saints the same grave warning: “There were false prophets among the [Old Testament] people, just as there will also be false teachers among you who will introduce opinions that lead to damnation, even denying the Lord who bought them” (2Pet. 2:1a). “The Lord is the Spirit” (2Cor. 3:17), and when those false teachers denied the way of the Spirit and introduced ceremonies, they were denying the Lord who had bought them, just as Paul said: “They profess to know God, but by works, they deny Him” (Tit. 1:16). In spite of such warnings, when false teachers arose, many believers followed them (2Pet. 2:2), which the apostles saw happening before they died (cf. 1Jn. 2:18; Jude 1:4).

British theologian James D.G. Dunn (1939–2020) cautiously observed that “Paul’s vision of a charismatic community under the control of the Spirit of Christ ... does not appear to have outlived him.”¹¹¹ Dunn needn’t have been so cautious. Paul’s vision obviously did not outlive him. In fact, his vision died before he did, which is why Paul lamented to Timothy shortly before his death, “All they in Asia have forsaken me” (2Tim. 1:15).

The Straw Man

In 1976, I was walking across my seminary’s campus when all of a sudden before me appeared a vision of a powerful and intimidating Roman military figure whose height reached to the clouds. He was wearing the battle gear of a Roman soldier, and everything about him exuded supreme confidence. His face was stern, and he looked straight ahead, over and beyond me, as if I was nothing. My first

¹⁰⁹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, I.i.7–9. Later, when Tertullian received the gospel that Montanus preached, he saw that the original Faith had since been added to, and so, perverted, by Christians.

¹¹⁰ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Neil Buchanan, trans., 72.

¹¹¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus And The Spirit*, 346.

reaction was awe, but then I noticed something that took all his intimidation away: he was made completely of straw!

Then I understood that the straw man conquered only by his intimidating appearance; in fact, intimidation was his only real weapon. I also understood that he represented the religion which that seminary promoted and that the straw was the reliance of Christian scholars and clerics on one another rather than on revelation from God. It came to mind how in research papers written for my classes, almost nothing was considered legitimate unless it could be footnoted. To have credibility, what the students wrote was expected to have already been said in some form by someone else, preferably a recognized scholar or cleric.

There was nothing at all to fear from this massive, mighty warrior; he was nothing to be accounted of, in spite of how powerful he at first appeared to be. One tiny spark, I realized, would burn him up completely, and just one word, just one experience, or one thought from God would provide that spark. Even if a little nobody received something from God, that mighty warrior would hate him, and he would do whatever he could to destroy him and put out the fire. *Anything* from God, no matter how small, is a terror to that warrior. You need not quote great scholars in order to tell God's truth; you need only to hear from Jesus and be bold enough to confess what he has said. But if you do, be prepared for a vicious response from Christians; it will come.

The way of Christ is simple, and "few there be who find it" (Mt. 7:14b), for although "many are called, few are chosen" (Mt. 22:14). With the vision of the straw warrior, the Lord was teaching me that the religion system called Christianity impresses with its size and intimidates with an appearance of power, though it has no authority at all over His children. Only years later, in 1993, did I fully understand the vision, that Christianity is an evil institution and that our heavenly Father is calling for His people to come out of it.

I should add that failing to grasp God's meaning when He speaks is by no means an experience unique to me. Through the ages, God has spoken to many people who only later perceived His meaning. None of the Old Testament prophets understood what God meant when He spoke through them about Christ (1Pet. 1:10–11). A modern example is from a convention of the Church of God sect in Dallas, TX, in August, 1972. There, the Spirit gave a message in tongues, with the interpretation, to the whole assembly. By all indications, that message was not understood by anyone there, certainly not by the leaders of that sect who later recorded that holy moment in their official record.¹¹² First, God made it clear who His intended audience was: "My Spirit has been placed in thee. Yea, you are My people, and I shall dwell in you, and I shall work in you, and I shall call you My people." So, God was addressing only those who have received His Spirit. Then, He gave the following directive: "Wherefore, come ye out from among them and touch not the unclean thing, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, and I will receive you, saith the Lord of Israel." What the Father was telling His children (i.e., those with the Spirit) was to come out of Christianity, the product of the Synthesis, which religion includes the Church of God sect. It, too, is a part of the straw man. But who in Dallas that day imagined such a thing?

¹¹² *The 54th General Assembly of the Church of God: 1972 Minutes*, 48.

Remembers from Chapter 2

Daniel's Iron Kingdom

- God revealed to Daniel that there would be four great kingdoms which would shape the history of mankind, which would conclude with a fifth, eternal one.

Where Is the Iron Kingdom?

- Daniel saw that the fourth kingdom would still be in power when Jesus returns to set up his everlasting kingdom on earth.

The Council of Nicea

- Regardless of what the Synthesis is called, every student of Roman or Church history acknowledges that the Synthesis took place.
- The Synthesis which took place at the Council of Nicea transformed the Roman Empire into the mysterious kingdom which the prophet Daniel saw.

Opinions

- It is beyond question that early believers perverted the Faith.
- The Synthesis was a combination of Pagan and Christian elements in which everyone could participate.
- The original Faith of Christ and Christianity are far too different to be the same religion.
- The Faith of Christ is the only religion that has not and never will evolve, and it does not evolve because it had no earthly origin, but was revealed from heaven.

Paul's Gospel

- The body of Christ was created by and is sustained by the power of the Spirit of God.
- The revelation given to Paul was that believers are baptized, clothed, fed, sanctified, and sustained by the Spirit alone, just as they will be raised from the dead by the Spirit alone.
- In this covenant, earthly elements have nothing to do with the worship of God, or with anything else in His kingdom.
- After Jesus' sacrifice of himself, God crowned Jesus with so much glory that there was no glory left for the once-glorious law of Moses.
- Israel's religion and the religions of the Gentiles, which all employ earthly elements, are now equally useless for salvation.

Misguided Euphoria

- When first-century Gentile believers forsook Paul, they did not know that by doing so, they were also forsaking Jesus.
- In adding earthly materials to the kind of worship Christ purchased with his blood, they had made themselves adversaries of the God they claimed to be serving.
- It was apostasy from Christ to turn from worship "in spirit and in truth" to worship with dead earthly materials.
- In turning to elements of the world, believers had to "mind earthly things" in order to please the men who led them to do it.
- Jesus kept the law in order to fulfill it and bring it to its intended end.
- By the time of the Synthesis, the believers who "minded earthly things" were so dull of heart that they rejoiced in it as the fulfillment of God's ancient promises.

Rome Was Defeated?

- The Synthesis reshaped Rome's ancient cult into a more acceptable form, a form that both Christians and Pagans could accept.

- The Synthesis adjusted Rome's Paganism and adorned Pagan thought with Christian dogma, and immersed Pagan cult in the waters of Christian baptism.
- The institution of the Church was produced by the Synthesis; before then, it did not exist.
- Rather than defeating Roman Paganism, Christianity was, and is the preserver of the Paganism of Classical culture.

Christians Were Defeated?

- Christianity did not exist before the Synthesis.

Mutual Adaptation

- Christians absorbed Rome as much as Rome absorbed Christians; the Synthesis was both a conquest and a victory.
- The Synthesis was a mutually beneficial agreement between spiritual equals.
- Fellowship in spiritual darkness is what made the Synthesis possible.
- After Montanus, matters dramatically worsened for believers as their status in society was improving.
- Both Romans and Christians had shared a hatred of the true gospel for centuries before the Synthesis.
- The Synthesis was the *result* of apostasy, not the cause of it.
- When early Christians began shaping their apostate gospel, their apostate gospel began shaping them.

A Public Culture

- The Synthesis was the crowning achievement of both Christians and Rome along the dark paths each had chosen.
- Over the centuries, many Churchmen have acknowledged and even gloried in Rome's continued existence through the Church.
- Rome and the Apostates united in the Synthesis in order to accomplish a wicked end: complete mastery over all mankind.
- The institution formed by the blending of the apostate body of Christ and Pagan Rome was far greater than either had been before.

God's Plan?

- The change in believers from Paul's day to the second century is remarkable.
- Paul's gospel liberated believers from all ceremonial works.
- Christianity has always been without Christ.
- Christianity has indeed adapted to man's ways, and it still does, but that is because Christianity is not of God.

A Religion the World Can Accept

- The formulating of religious rites and rules is the human substitute for being led by God's Spirit.
- Believers remain free from religious rites and rules only as they remain in the Spirit.
- The Christians' alteration of the gospel in order to win the world is all the evidence a reasonable person needs in order to see that the world had won the Christians.
- The world cannot receive the Spirit; therefore, the world requires a religion it can practice without it.
- The Synthesis produced a religion that accommodated Spirit-less men.
- Paul warned the saints in Corinth to reject ministers who wanted to adjust the gospel of Christ.
- The Son of God did not die for a chameleonic gospel.
- Paul threatened with damnation anyone who would dare to alter the gospel that Christ had revealed to him.
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- With every new doctrine or ceremony, however, early Christians were introducing another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel.
- Every Christian sect has its own Jesus, its own traditions, its own doctrines, and its own rituals.
- The gospel that Paul preached is entirely of the Spirit, and it exposes as false every Jesus, every doctrine, and every ceremony that Christians have ever invented.
- The original gospel is the only true one.

“They Will Turn Away”

- When false teachers arose, many believers followed them, and the apostles saw it happening before they died.

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- The way of Christ is simple.
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