

The Early Church Part 1

Q. What is the period of history considered as 'early Christianity'?

A. This period "covers the (years) from its origins (30-36 AD) to the First Council of Nicea (325 AD)" (*Wikipedia* online).

Q. What was the character of the early Church like?

A. "It was Jewish...not just racially but religiously. In no sense did the first Christians see themselves as preaching a new religion. They believed Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, sent by God to restore Judaism. (Because of this) they continued to worship in the Temple, observe the (Jewish) Sabbath and study the Scriptures" (*Paul and His World*, Page 23).

Q. What changed the character of the early Church from almost exclusively Jewish to Gentile?

A. "The inclusion of Gentile 'God-Fearers' in the Church led to a departure from Jewish customs and the establishment of Christianity as a separate religion from Judaism (*Wikipedia* online).

Q. What did the early Christians call themselves?

A. "Early Jewish Christians referred to themselves as 'The Way,' probably coming from Isaiah 40:3 (which tells us to) 'prepare the way of the Lord'. According to Acts 11:26, the term 'Christian' was first used in reference to Jesus' disciples in the city of Antioch.. (Ibid)."

Q. What was a central theme of early Christian preaching?

A. The early Christians “preached the resurrection of the Messiah. Instead of just continuing to proclaim the message of Jesus, they proclaimed Jesus” (Ibid, Page 23).

Q. Where did the early Christians meet?

A. The Book of Acts “tells us they held public meetings in the Temple, in Solomon’s Portico. They also met in private, where they learned from their teachers, the Apostles” (Ibid, Page 23)

Q. What does the word ‘apostle’ mean?

A. It means ‘the Sent.’ ‘Apostle’ “was a rare word for ‘messengers and denotes all those who had met the Resurrected Jesus and had been commissioned by Him to preach” the Gospel (Ibid.)

Q. Why were there Twelve Apostles?

A. The Twelve may have reflected Jesus’ vision of the Church in which the Apostles were acting as “the twelve patriarchs of a renewed Israel”. The number Twelve also reflected the original twelve tribes of ancient Israel. Having twelve Apostles meant gathering the tribes of Israel into the Kingdom of God with the Apostles as their leaders (Ibid).

Q. What religious texts did the early Christians use?

A. “The Hebrew Bible” mostly translated into Hebrew or Aramaic, the Letters of the Apostles and the Gospels. The list of these books also later included The Book of Acts and The Book of Revelation (Ibid).

Q. What is the Book of Acts and why is it an important part of our learning about the early Church?

A. *The Catholic Bible Dictionary* tells us that “The Acts of The Apostles is the fifth book of the New Testament. Traditionally accepted as the work of St. Luke, the Acts of the Apostles is a

continuation of the narrative of Luke's Gospel, presenting a history of the Church from the Ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit to the period when St. Paul preached in Rome" (Page 20).

Q. What is the purpose of the Acts of The Apostles?

A. "The book is more than a simple history: the events in it demonstrate that the Holy Spirit guides the Church. The rapid spread of the Good News is part of the divine plan, not merely the dedicated work of the Apostles" (Ibid, Page 21).

Q. How did the missionary activity of the early Church bring the Good News to the world?

A. "Christian missionary activity spread Christianity throughout the Greek-speaking world and even beyond the Roman Empire. Over 40 churches existed by the year 100, most in Asia Minor, such as the seven churches of Asia (mentioned in the Book of Revelation) and some in Greece and Italy" (Wikipedia online).

Q. What is the *Didache* and what is its significance for our learning about the early Church?

A. The word '*Didache*' is translated 'The Doctrine of The Twelve Apostles.' It is a short treatise, discovered by a Greek Orthodox metropolitan in 1883. It has three parts; The Two Ways, a ritual for Baptism and Mass and a section about ministry in the Church. Scholars tell us that it was written before the year 80 AD, possibly in Egypt (From *Catholic Answers* online.)

In the *Didache* we catch a glimpse of the life of the early Church and of the society in which the Church existed. As we read the *Didache* and reflect upon its message we learn that the times in which we live have some parallels to the life of early Christians.

