

XV. AFRICA IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

North Africa in New Testament times was controlled by the Romans. The name “Africa” itself is derived from a Berber tribe that lived in Tunisia in Roman times – Aourigha. The Romans latinized the word to “Africa,” and the term later came to be applied to the entire continent.

Egypt hosted the infant Savior and his family shortly after His birth when an angel advised Joseph to flee in order to avoid the wrath of King Herod who was trying to ensure that another King of the Jews would never survive (Matthew 2:13). Thus Hosea’s prophecy, “out of Egypt have I called My Son” (Hosea 11:1) was fulfilled.

As Jesus carried His cross to His death, the Roman soldiers compelled a man from Cyrene in northern Africa to help Him. Simon carried Jesus’ cross to the crucifixion, and probably watched afar as Jesus died for the sins of the people of Africa and of the whole world (Matthew 27:32).

After Jesus’ resurrection, His final words of instruction to His disciples before His ascension were: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am, with you always, even unto the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 19-20)./ Thus Jesus demonstrated concern for the peoples of Africa and all other peoples of the earth. He commanded His followers to go to all peoples with the good news, to teach and baptize them, and to teach the converts again so that they also would become witnesses for Jesus. Then, just as He was about to be taken up from the earth,. Jesus said, “ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Some parts of Africa were then known, but knowledge of other parts had long been lost. Jesus was not content that His Gospel spread only in the well known and easily reached areas of the world. He intended it to reach every nook and cranny of Africa.

God helped the Gospel get started in Africa by seeing to it that amongst the God-seekers gathered on the day of Pentecost following Jesus’ ascension were several people from Africa. Egypt, and parts of Libya about Cyrene are specifically mentioned, as well as the nearby and closely related Arabian people (Acts 1:8-11). Undoubtedly these people had contacts in their homelands and spread the Gospel to those areas either by letter messenger or personal visit.

Later an angel interrupted Philip’s successful preaching in Samaria to instruct him to go to the south along the Gaza road. There he found an Ethiopian God-seeker, a treasurer for the Ethiopian queen or Candace (“Candace” was a general Meriotic word for “queen” – a title, not a name. The man was reading Messianic prophecies from Isaiah and sought Philip’s help to understand what he read. As Philip explained to him that the prophet was writing ahead of time about Jesus the Saviour, the Ethiopian believed and then was baptized along the road. He doubtless had had some influence in his country even before

as a God-seeker, and must have made the Gospel of Jesus known to at least some in his circles.

According to the early church historian Eusebius, the Apostle Mark, after helping the Apostle Peter, became the first evangelist to Egypt and the first bishop of the church at Alexandria there, which Eusebius says contained a “great multitude of believers, both of men and women.”¹ He was later burned to death during the persecutions in the reign of Trajan. This has been estimated at the early date of 42 A.D.²

Eusebius also records that the Apostle Matthew became an evangelist planting the church in Ethiopia. He was martyred when the Ethiopian king Hircanus ordered him speared to death.

Some Jewish events during the New Testament period shaped African history, too. Some Jews arrived in Morocco and made some converts, for example, after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

By 99 A.D., two of the four major centers of world Christianity were in Africa: Carthage and Rome, the other two being Antioch and Rome.³

REFERENCES:

1. Eusebius,
2. An Outline of the Advance of Christianity, compiled by Morris Watkins.
3. An Outline of the Advance of Christianity, compiled by Morris Watkins.

XVI. THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS TO 600 A.D.

ALEXANDRIA;

Alexandria was in the first centuries A.D. the most important city in the world, the undisputed intellectual and commercial center of the Greco-Roman world. It boasted a great university, an immense library, a museum, scientific study, a medical school, and was known as a center of philosophy. It was home to all kinds of religious groups including pagan temples and Jewish synagogues as well as Christian churches but was dedicated to its patron god Serapis. It had many wealthy citizens.

Alexander had seized Egypt from the Persians and established the city to which he gave his own name, Alexandria, on the site of a small fishing village called Rhacotis. It had been further built up under Ptolemy I Soter. In 323 A.D., he moved his capitol from Memphis to Alexandria. Alexandria, Egypt rapidly became one of the most outstanding centers of Christianity in the world so that Eusebius alternately lists the bishops of the church at Alexandria and the bishops of the church at Rome. His list for Alexandria begins with the Apostle Mark in 62 A.D. In 100 A.D., Alexandria was the world's third largest city with a population of 400,000, with Rome being the largest with a population of 1,100,000. Alexandria was a target for persecution, as were all the centers of Christianity in North Africa. In about 248 A.D. there was an anti-Christian program throughout the city. Many great secular figures lived in Alexandria, including Ptolemy, the great Egyptian astronomer -- mathematician (ca 100-150 A.D.)

THE ALEXANDRIAN BIBLE SCHOOL

Pantaenus:

One of the outstanding developments at Alexandria was its missionary training center, founded in 180 A.D. by Pantaenus as a Catechetical school to instruct for Christian baptism and candidates who were of higher intellectual ability than ordinary converts, these usually being taught by catechists. The aim of the school was to instruct educated converts about Christianity in terms and concepts familiar to them. Pantaenus had also been an author, making a careful analysis of the way prophetic books were written and publishing these studies, although they are no longer extant. Ten years later Pantaenus himself went to India as a missionary from Africa, and later, others trained at the school went to northwest and east Africa, Arabia, India and Ceylon.

Clement succeeded Pantaenus as head of the school and directed it for twelve years until in 202 A.D. he was forced to flee in the persecution under Severus. He talked of a conversion experience by which his salvation was assured, a conversion which he saw as a personal choice between Christianity and pagan Greek worship. Clement wrote several books, some of which were missionary in character.

His work *Protrepticus* was some of the first important missionary documents. In it he attacked pagan religion and urged pagans to convert to Christianity. Apologetic in nature, it was a scathing denunciation of mystery cults, etc. Clement was the first well known Christian apologist. His writings show him as very practical and evangelistic. Although he dreamed of many literary projects and collected voluminous notes, he was always too busy to bring his projected dreams to fruition. Clement faced a critical situation in the Alexandrian Bible School because of the gnostics, who had brought theology into general disrepute and had caused many to fear contamination of the Christian faith by pagan philosophy. Yet it was hard at Alexandria to distrust philosophy when it was so dominant in the surrounding culture. He saw the Christian as the true gnostic, the one who had the true hidden knowledge. Clement felt that the church's appeal to the intellectual classes depended on its relation to philosophy, which was regarded almost universally as established truth at that time. Without an appeal to philosophy, Clement felt that the church would always be restricted to the uneducated.

His *Stromatis* was written to show the importance of philosophy, thus he hoped removing the common prejudice against theology. Clement said that God gave the Greeks philosophy as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, even as He gave the Jews His laws for the same purpose. Christians of his day commonly said that Greek philosophy originated from the devil, (for instance Tertullien of Carthage said that philosophy was the parent of heresy) in contrast to others, while Tertullian wrote against heretics, Clement wrote in a positive vein for the educated in philosophy.

Thus, Clement began to appeal to and relate to pagan philosophy, and his successors carried this tendency farther and farther. Yet Clement himself criticized even his favorite philosophers (the Platonists) and denounced the philosophy of others in comparison with Biblical values. He often talked about "true" gnostics in opposition to "false" ones so prevalent then. Thus, although Clement had missionary interests himself, he introduced

tendencies into the church that ultimately detracted from the missionary enterprise because he promoted the Greek opposition between the learned few and the ignorant multitude. This must have influenced missionary thought because the concern lay more with perfecting the few than with reaching the multitude.

Clement fell into a weakness of theology, too, that affected his student and follower Origen. He made so much of divine philanthropy that he could not accept the Biblical statement about God's justice and punishment. He believed that justice melted into mercy and that punishment must always be seen as remedial. This opened the door to many unbiblical teachings and practices.

ORIGEN

Origen succeeded Clement at the school in 203 A.D., taking this responsibility when he was only 18 years of age. He had been a pupil of Clement while still a boy and had been reared in a Christian home. He was made head of the school when Clement fled the city under the persecution of Severus which began in 202 A.D..

Origen was by far the most prolific writer of early Christianity, writing over 6,000 books and articles. At one point in his life a break with Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, led him to Caesarea, where he kept a whole company of copyists busy with his literary projects. He accepted the 27 books of the New Testament as we now have them.

Origen figures so prominently in church history that one Roman Catholic author writing about his life found it necessary in his preface to explain why Origen is venerated neither as a doctor nor as a saint of the church. Although he was loyal to the church his whole life and devoted his brilliant mind to her service, Origen went too far in some of his speculations and teachings, and was therefore condemned by several church councils. Origen was somewhat of a paradox. It held the Scripture in such high esteem that he would quote it extensively, yet he indulged in speculations for which only minimal support could be found in the Scripture. The truth is that Origen in practice used the Scripture and church tradition as a starting point for human logic. He adhered to Christian doctrine officially, yet the conclusions of his many speculations frequently were not nearly as orthodox as his basic views. After Origen's death, controversy over his influential views engrossed the Eastern church almost to the exclusion of all else, thus weakening the church. He was against Greek paganism, partly because he could see that the philosophers had severely opposed the church, yet he fell prey to many pagan errors. Himself.

It was in Alexandria that the system of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures became highly developed, Origen adding greatly to that development. In fact, literal systems of interpretation were held responsible there for most of the sins of the world.

Philip the Jew had first applied allegorical interpretation to the Old Testament Scriptures in Alexandria, chiefly to rid the Scriptures of what he considered offensive matters as well as to get Biblical authority for his own teachings. Clement had begun to lean

toward allegorical interpretation with his system of typology. He used it to discover hidden truths and to appeal to the gnostics who liked to find hidden truth. Clement defended it in *Stromatis* and illustrated it in detail in his sixth book, but Origen went much, much farther than he. Origen employed allegory, especially in his Biblical commentaries, on a grand scale.

It was the Marcionite heresy and its misuse of the Old Testament that first forced Origen to study allegorical interpretation seriously. Marcion had put the religion of Jesus in opposition to the God of Israel, depicting the God of Israel as a mean, ruthless tyrant. He had published a verse by verse criticism of parts of the Old Testament, as well as *HERACLEON*, a study of the Gospel of John setting forth many heretical ideas. His writings embarrassed Christians and made a great stir amongst educated Christians. Origen, reacting to Marcion's views, said that many of the Old Testament laws were worse than the heathen's unless viewed allegorically.

Origen began by questioning things like whether it's really a sin to have two garments and whether it is literally necessary to gird oneself with a sword for the day of tribulation. Origen sought food for the soul, and was probably influenced by the gnostic tendencies of the day, in which many were teaching that special, hard-to-find knowledge gave assurance of salvation.

Origen himself called his interpretation "analogical," but his opponents at Antioch called it "allegorical." Yet his system demanded first of all a thorough knowledge of the literal meaning, and Origen himself frequently consulted Jewish leaders at Alexandria for help in defining the literal meaning of the Old Testament, as he felt his allegorical interpretation should be based on a solid understanding. Origen himself was extremely serious in his Bible study, trying to go directly to original sources. He was certainly well ahead of his time in this. He also learned Hebrew to enhance his study, although he was not an expert in it. He studied from the Greek Septuagint and from several other Greek versions of the Scripture. From the Jews he borrowed the custom of comparing Scripture with Scripture. His method of teaching shows his extreme care in considering and teaching the Scripture. He would begin by slowly reading the passage, then continue with a grammatical commentary on the words. Then he would compare other available translations, explain the exact meanings of the words, the sense or the entire phrase, compare other similar texts from elsewhere in Scripture, and only then explain possible allegorical meanings. His teaching was so thorough that he wrote one whole commentary of the first six words of the Gospel of John. In fact, the first five books of his commentary on John explained less than ten verses in all!

The unfortunate truth is that what Origen taught carefully in moderation and in consideration of the basic literal interpretation, his pupils taught without moderation and in disregard of the literal interpretation. Thus the allegorical system of interpretation introduced many fanciful ideas and serious errors into the church.

Allegorism in particular was utilized in dealing with issues related to the destiny of the human soul. Like Clement, Origen could not accept the literal Biblical interpretation of

this point and introduced teachings of universal salvation into the church in Alexandria, even teaching that Christ would eventually save demons as well as men and hoped for the eventual restoration of even Satan himself. He taught that the pains of hell were temporary and disciplinary in nature, paving the way for the gross error of the idea of purgatory. He also was weak on assurance of salvation, and the reality and influence of sin and evil, and he came to believe in the preexistence of human spirits before birth, in second chances after death, and even in the souls of the stars! He spiritualized the resurrection, saying that we would rise with a spiritual, not a physical body, and spiritualized the future life. His first commentaries were not as allegorical, but as time went on he began to employ the allegorical method without reserve.

Origen was an ascetic. His father had died a martyr for Christ, and the family property had been confiscated by the state. Young Origen slept on the bare ground, fasted, gave up wine, and wearing sandals, and even voluntarily castrated himself because he felt it would help him to serve Christ more wholeheartedly. He never, however, required these things for his students, although it is evident he hoped they would voluntarily emulate him.

In one of his writings, Origen recognized the need to take the Gospel further, to “the Ethiopians beyond the river” and more completely to “the more remote and barbarous tribes.” Yet on the whole he was far more concerned with Christian perfection than with evangelism. One must balance this, however, with the recognition that all his works are directed to appealing to the educated heathen of the Roman empire of his day and so in a sense are all evangelistic in purpose. In general, however, Origen was not all that interested in the evangelism of the masses. He, like most North African Christians of his time, was extremely ethno-centric in favor of the Greco-Roman culture. In addition, his and other theological errors of universalism certainly must have undermined missionary motivation that had previously been present. Influenced by forces of his day, he denied the creation of the world, accepting instead the idea of the eternity of the universe. He lived in a day when it was hard to think of regions beyond because of imminent persecution, the surrounding predominant pagan culture of his own people, and the challenging of central Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and the deity of Christ by those close by. Origen did defend these key doctrines, and under his influence several heretics did renounce their heresies and return to the church.

Persecution broke out when Origen was 17 years old, one year before he took responsibility for the catechetical school. He began his work as a catechist knowing that every person he instructed was a candidate for imminent death. Several of his pupils were martyred. Origen visited them in prison and kissed them as they went to their deaths. The policy of the Roman governors in Egypt was to spare the leaders of the Christian community, therefore Origen himself escaped the fate of his students. Alexandria had many martyrs because the rulers had tried to develop there an official pagan worship, attempting to bring spiritual unity to a religiously diversified city. It was for this reason and purpose that Ptolemy Soter erected a temple to the pagan goddess Serapis. The persecution was a problem to Origen on many fronts. At one time a mob came against Origen, believing him responsible for the deaths of his converts. For

several years his life was in danger every time he walked in the street. Pressed to develop a theology adequate to sustain the martyrs, Origen reached the point where he saw persecution as a blessing from God, enabling one to come closer to God through suffering. The persecution came very close – Origen’s own father was martyred and all the family property seized.

When Origen’s large family of brothers and sisters was left destitute, he was helped by a wealthy Christian lady who supported his studies so that he became a teacher of “grammar.” This meant that he taught a group of pagan subjects, including the stories of Greek mythology, which he later used in developing his commentaries. The Christian leaders of the day agreed to his work as a grammarian, but insisted that he must help his students see that the pagan morals taught in the stories were sometimes evil and the Greek gods were in reality demons.

Bishop Demetrius, who had just succeeded Julian, made Origen the head of the Catechetical school one year after his father’s martyrdom. Origen then revived the classes Clement had conducted that had been disbanded. It was his desire to make the Catechetical school an outstanding school of Christian philosophy where students would learn not only by lecture, but by modeling after their teacher. This probably influenced and intensified Origen’s ascetic tendencies.

About 215 to 219 Origen withdrew from Alexandria and visited Rome. He died as a martyr himself in Tyre in 254 during the sixth imperial Roman persecution under Maximinus after suffering imprisonment and severe tortures which undermined his health in the Decian persecution of 249.

It was likely the over-flaming zeal for martyrdom displayed by Origen that give rise to many abuses soon after his time, such as the veneration of bones and remains of martyrs, prayers to the dead, “sainting” people, praying at graves, the idea of patron saints, etc. We know that it was the followers of Origen who first began to ask the intercession of the martyrs. Martyrs were greatly extolled by Christian poets of the time as well, so that in a short time prayers to the dead became more common than prayers to God!

ATHANASIUS

Another outstanding personage from Alexandria was Athanasius, 295-373 A.D. He is often called the “Father of Orthodoxy” because of his key role in the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and because of his vital role in defending the church against the Arian fallacy which taught Christ was less than God., a created being himself. Athanasius served as bishop of Alexandria from 328 to 373 A.D., which gave him authority over all of Egypt and Libya for 46 years, during which time he was exiled (a total of twenty years). He turned his exile time into profitable use, however, doing much of his writing during these times. Athanasius relied on the persuasion of the written word, and was masterful at arguing his case. His opponent Arius, however, composed catchy, easy to sing songs, and soon half the sailors of the Mediterranean were spreading his teachings (p. 35:11)

OTHERS

All who followed were not equally orthodox. Dioscorus, patriarch of Alexandria, was excommunicated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Proterius, the Melkite or anti-Monophysite, replaced Dioscorus, but six years later he was assassinated by Copts. After Chalcedon, the Coptic church was divided, most becoming monophysites. By 567 the Patriarchate of Alexandria was definitely split into two rival camps – the Coptic (monophysite) and the Greek (Byzantine). The Byzantines severely persecuted the Copts. In 631 the Melkites (anti-monophysites) persecuted the Copts for ten years, killing hermits, ascetics, pastors, and thousands of lay Christians.

EGYPT

In addition to the well-known school at Alexandria, several other Christian schools flourished and were highly esteemed in Egypt during the early years of Christianity. In 340 A.D. there were 100 Coptic Orthodox bishoprics in Egypt. In 550 there were 168 Coptic bishops in the four ecclesiastical provinces of Egypt in Egypt and all of North Africa, however, was politically unstable. Civil War erupted in 238 and again in 260-262 A.D.

CHURCH GROWTH IN NORTH AFRICA

The first Christians (Latin speaking) in the Roman province of Mauretania (today Algeria) were noted about 100 A.D., in Morocco (then a part of Mauretania) sometime before 200, for four bishoprics were noted at that time.

About 190 there was a widespread turning to Christ in vast numbers throughout North Africa. Around 200 the first Christians in the motherland Sahara were found.

What is now called Algeria was part of what was then called the Roman province of Mauretania. The first Christians, Latin speaking, were found there about 100 A.D.

Modern Morocco was also part of the Roman province of Mauretania. The first Christians were converted there about A.D. 150. There developed four bishoprics in the Tangier-Rabat-Fez area before A.D. 200.

Records show that by 230 A.D., there were about 900 Christian churches in North Africa. By 410 there were 768 bishoprics in Numidia and Mauretania and a total of 1,200 in North Africa (including Egypt, both orthodox and donatist).

MARTYRS

Africa gave many martyrs to the Christian faith as well, beginning in 180 in Carthage. Among these were Vibia Perpetua, a young mother about 22 years of age. Christians from Rome had brought the Gospel to Carthage, the town in northern Africa where she lived. In fact the presence of the first known Christians in Tunisia, the area where Carthage was located, dates back to about 80 B.C.. Perpetua died with the teacher who

had brought her the Gospel, her handmaiden Felicity, whom she had led to the Lord, and two others also died under the persecution edict of Septimus Severus (146-211 A.D.). She died because as a believer in Christ, she refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods, boldly confessing her faith in Christ alone. Her father pleaded with her to change her mind, but she refused. As she nursed her baby boy in prison, she knew she would be among those who would be thrown to the wild beasts as a part of the Emperor's birthday celebration. The day before, she calmly celebrated the Agape feast with other believers, prayed and sang. On the day of her death she walked into the arena smiling. She watched as the men were torn apart by a leopard, a bear and a wild boar, listening to the crowds ridicule them as being "well baptized in blood." From the arena she sent a message to her brother, urging him to stand fast in the faith, then she calmly walked into the arena to be attacked by a steer. The crowds were beginning to get tired of watching, behead Perpetua. But he was unskilled, and did not kill her on the first try, so she herself guided his sword to her throat, and she went home to be with her Savior. Perpetua and her group were amongst one hundred and one Christians martyred at that day's "games."

In the same year Christians were also persecuted in Egypt, and in Thebes a hundred were executed every day, from 193 to 211 A.D. The year 245 brought local persecution in Alexandria. In 253 A.D., the Roman emperor Valerian persecuted Christians more viciously, even, than had Decus. Among his victims were Cyprian, bishop of Carthage. In 308 A.D. Christians were hunted all over Egypt and when found, were often crippled by cutting the tendon just above their heels, and blinded in one eye. Thus incapacitated and humiliated, they were sent to work in the mines of the Sudanese desert as slaves./

It was not until the Edict of Toleration issued by Gallienus in 260 that Christianity became a legal religion. This lasted until the Emperor Diocletian issued a death penalty for all Christian believers in A.D. 304. Over 500,000 Christians were then killed between 304 and 314, until the time of Constantine, who legalized Christianity throughout the Roman Empire (313 in the Edict of Toleration)

Egypt was also the home of the first monasteries Pachomius, 292-346, is known as the great organizer of Egyptian monasticism, founding Egypt's first Christian monastery on an island in the Nile. He required those who lived in his monasteries to study the Scriptures diligently. By the time of his death, over 500,000 monks (7% of the population of Egypt) lived in numerous monasteries. Three large ones were Tabennesis (7,000), Mount Nitrea 5,000), and Arsinoe (over (10,000).

Anthony, 251-356 A.D, was born in Egypt. Impressed with Christ's command to the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give to the poor, Anthony, fled to a group of Christians who were living in the desert to escape persecution. Later he visited suffering Christians in Alexandria and the mines of the Sudan, where Christians from Alexandria were being enslaved in hard labor. From about 350 on, monasticism became very popular in Egypt, but Egyptian monks did live unto themselves and the Lord alone. They traveled extensively on missionary journeys, evangelizing in Europe, Britain and Ireland. The ascetic Egyptian monk Hilarion of Gaza (191-371) became a missionary to the idolatrous pagans of Palestine.

BIBLE TRANSLATION

Africa also was the site of much of the earliest Bible translation. Four out of five of the earliest Bible translations were done in Africa (only the old Syriac antedates the African translations) The old Latin North African manuscript was completed about 150 A.D. and is the oldest Latin version. Probably several translators collaborated on it. It is quoted frequently by Cyprian, 200-258 A.D., and Tertullian, 150-220 A.D. Portions of the Bible were translated into Coptic beginning about 170 A.D. and about 250 A.D. The Bible was beginning to be translated into two Egyptian dialects, Sahidic, the language of upper (southern) Egypt around Thebes, and into Bohairic, the languages of lower (northern) Egypt around Alexandria and the Delta region. It was Bohairic which, because of the prominence of Alexandria, became the basic dialect of the Egyptian church.

Later, the fourth century, the Bible was also translated into Fayumic and Achmimic, languages of middle Egypt around Memphis. All three Egyptian translations were referred to as "Coptic." The Bible was also translated into Ethiopic beginning in the fourth century (Old Testament) by Egyptian monks and in the seventh century (New Testament).

CARTHAGE

In addition to Alexandria, Carthage was also a major center of Christianity. It was a town built by Phoenician traders. They called it Kirjath Hadesath, meaning "new city," which the Romans latinized to "Carthage." It had been capital of Phoenicia's colonies in North Africa, but was won by Rome in the Punic wars. When the Romans were victorious in 146 B.C., they destroyed Carthage. It was rebuilt a hundred years later by Caesar as the Roman capital of the Roman Province of Africa, and was known as an important agricultural area.

Tertullian, 150-220, was born in Carthage, the son of a Roman consul. Converted at age 40, he became presbyter of Carthage. Later (202) he became convinced by the arguments of the Monastists and championed that doctrine in North Africa. Tertullian is among the first to speak of the Christian Scriptures as the "New Testament." He used Latin widely and is credited with giving the church most of its Latin theological vocabulary. He wrote against the pagans who worshipped many gods or spirits, the gnostics who claimed secret knowledge, and the Marcionites. Although often regarded as the Father of Latin theology who contributed much to the development of Catholic thinking, Tertullian, along with Hippolytus, attached an edict of Bishop Callistus of Rome, who later came to be regarded as one of the Cyprian, 200-259, was converted to Christ at age 45 and made bishop of Carthage two years later against his will. He wrote many books (8) letters, and 12 long treatises in Latin and quoted Scripture the most carefully and accurately of anyone in his age. Although Cyprian fled Carthage in 250 A.D. he was condemned and beheaded under the emperor Valerian by the Governor Galerius Maximus for refusing to acknowledge the godhead of the emperor.

Carthage was a center of controversy over Christian teaching from 200 to 220. One of the subjects under discussion was the nature of baptism and who should receive it. Cyprian insisted on the rebaptism of all baptized in heretical churches.

In 397 the Council of Carthage gave formal ratification or approval to the canon of the 27

books of the New Testament as we have them today. A synod meeting at Carthage in 416-418 condemned the erroneous doctrine called Pelagianism, which held that man was not depraved and that he was saved by his own good works, not by faith.

PLAGUE

A catastrophic plague struck the Mediterranean world in 252 A.D., killing 25% of the population died. Devaluation of the Roman coinage and financial disaster followed. In Carthage, Cyprian organized medical aid to relieve the stricken city.

CATACOMBS IN TUNISIA

A huge maze of catacombs was built under ancient Hadrumetum in Tunisia, made as burial and hiding places by the early Christians of Roman Africa.

CONSTANTINE AND THE UNIFICATION OF CHURCH AND STATE (312))

Soon after Constantine's professed conversion to Christianity, he undertook to remodel the government of the church so as to make it conform as closely as possible to the Roman government then in control of the state. Thus immense forces of Romanization, syncretization, and paganization began to flood into the church. The church began to become power-oriented, and that power was increasingly centered in the political capital, Rome. At the same time, pagans flooded into the church on the basis of token baptism en masse, bringing their heathen gods, idols, festivals and practices with them, in many cases virtually unchanged. Many churches became filled with pagans whose "Christianity" was a thin veneer at best, and many of these eventually rose to positions of leadership and power, with disastrous results for the church. Thus it was that in the fourth century it was widely held acceptable and even virtuous to lie when by that means the interest of the church might be promoted! The Council of Chalcedon in 451 decided that ecclesiastical dioceses would be considered the equivalent of Roman political dioceses.

LITURGY DEVELOPED

Liturgy began to be developed in part due to criticism leveled at Christians by Jewish and pagan priests because of the simplicity of their worship and the fact that they had no great temples, altars, victims, priests, or ceremonies. Christians wanted to appeal to pagans and Jews who had elaborate rites. Then too, the churches were becoming filled with nominally converted pagans who were accustomed to such rites. Soon the pagan ceremonies had been christened with new names, and Catholic-type rites with priests offering sacrifices were developed. Gregory the Great brought the church far into paganism with his idolatrous reverence for relics, his exaltation of the merit of pilgrimages, his encouragement for the use of images (though the church still did not worship them as it did later), his imposition of a more ceremonious way of giving communion (which contributed to the development of the later idea of transubstantiation), his serious belief in purgatory and his ordering of missionaries not to abolish but rather to "Christianize" pagan practices.

AUGUSTINE

Augustine, bishop of Hippo in northern Africa was another great figure produced by early Christianity in Africa. His mother, Monica, 331-287 A.D., was born to Christian parents in Tagaste, an old Roman town not far from Carthage. By her prayers and godly life, she won her pagan husband to Christ, and later her wayward son Augustine. Augustine was baptized by Ambrose in Milan in 387 A.D. Living from 354 to 430 he served as bishop of Hippo beginning in 395, for 35 years until his death. He wrote his famed "Confessions" and "City of God" and made his town an intellectual center of Christendom. In Augustine's time the theory of the cessation of the gifts and miracles of the Apostolic age was beginning to emerge. He opposed this view, dismissing it as an overreaction to the excesses of Montanism and others. He documented many recent miracles.

FIRST SEEDS OF THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY

The original Christian worship as taught by Christ and His disciples left no room for the idea of the papacy or of the primacy of any particular bishop. Christ had taught, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." (Matthew 23:8-10). He said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36) and denied attempts to make him king by force (John 6:15). It is highly improbable in fact, that Peter (who is claimed by Catholics as the first Pope in Rome) was ever bishop of Rome. After all, the Apostle Paul sent greetings from the believers in Rome to the churches. It is inconceivable that if Peter had been there and was in fact Pope, that Paul would have or could have ignored him thus. The idea of Peter being the first Pope is not mentioned by one of the Apostolic Fathers, but is a much later idea. Thus the four ancient lists we have of bishops in Rome are partly contradictory one to another, because they were formed trying to impose later ideas on earlier history.

However, the political yearnings of the Roman bishops for power is very old. One of the earliest attempts of the Roman bishop to lord it over the others occurred in the Easter controversy toward the end of the second century. Victor, bishop of Rome, tried to order the Eastern churches to observe the Resurrection of Christ on the same day as Western Christians, but they refused. Victor then excluded them from fellowship with Roman Christians, but he had no power to break their fellowship with the other churches. Victor was admonished by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, and he backed off t the controversy was finally resolved by joint consent of the churches at the Council of ice. It is obvious, then, that neither the eastern nor western churches recognized the Bishop of Rome as having any special authority over them at that time.

Augustine of Hippo said that the rock on which the church was built was Peter's confession of faith, that is, Jesus Himself. Hilary gave the same interpretation.

In the middle of the third century, another incident arose which shows that Christians still did not consider the Bishop of Rome as the Head of the Church. There was a dispute between Bishop Stephen of Rome and Bishop Cyprian of Carthage over the validity of baptism administered by heretics.

The practice of the African and Asian churches was to rebaptize those converted from heresy, but the European churches only laid hands on them when the African and Asian churches made a law which was contrary to the custom practiced in the European and Roman churches. Bishop Stephen of Rome was furious, but the churches held their ground and the Council of Carthage in 256 upheld their decision. Thus the churches

refused to recognize the Bishop of Rome as ruler over them. Both the African/Asian bishops and the general church council contradicted him.

Yet from the time of Constantine there was a move to consider Rome as the center of both political and spiritual power. This move was naturally promoted by the Roman rulers. Thus in 372 the Roman emperor Valentinian passed a law empowering the bishops of Rome to examine and judge the other bishops of the churches. There was also a move before the end of the fourth century to refer questions to church leaders in consideration of apostolic descent. In other words, those leaders were considered with greater favor who received their posts in a direct line from one of the apostles. A key element in this move was the donatist controversy over appropriate treatment The church historian Eusebius also spent much time showing that the bishoprics of Rome, Alexandria and Jerusalem went back directly to the apostles.

NOTE!! Portion missing to be worked on later

Still another incident shows that as late as 415 the Bishop of Rome still had no special power which was recognized by the churches. Apiarius, Bishop of Sicca in North Africa, was deposed from his position for immorality and fled to Rome, tried to demand that the African churches reopen his case, claiming that the Bishop of Rome had the privilege of requiring the church to reopen cases on request. The African bishops refused, asserting that all the churches were independent.

The Greek term *papas* (father) had been commonly used as a general title for all of the bishops. Siricius, ca 384, was the first who used it as an official title. Later, after 600, the title was claimed exclusively by the bishops of Rome.

Thus, during the first four centuries there was only a limited idea of the supremacy of the bishop of Rome, and this in spite of strong influences of Romanization. The supremacy of the Roman bishop was due to the fact that the city was the capitol and the most influential in the Empire. On that same ground, the Council of Chalcedon (451) gave the Bishop of Constantinople equal power with the Bishop of Rome. The declaration of Chalcedon was extremely odious to Leo, bishop of Rome at the time, who wanted full power over all the churches, but he had no power to stop or influence it. Yet strangely enough this very decision helped to extend the power of the Roman bishops, for its result was to make a despot of the bishop of Alexandria, who like the Roman popes of later years, could not handle power. Any of the churches, then, withdrew from Alexandria's influence and appealed to the bishops of Rome, thus gradually enabling Rome to extend its influence to the east.

In 588 John, Bishop of Constantinople, assumed the title of universal bishop for himself in a great power play. Gregory, bishop of Rome, probably jealous of not having thought of it first himself, opposed John bitterly, calling the title "vain," "execrable," "anti-Christian," "blasphemous," "infernal," "diabolical," "haughty," and "new and profane."

He did not argue, however, that it belonged to the Bishop of Rome rather than the Bishop of Constantinople! Rather he said that no true saint would presume to accept it and that

none of the Roman bishops had ever claimed such a title. He said, “whoever adopts or affects the title of universal bishop has the pride and character of Anti-Christ.”

References for Chapter XVI, The Apostolic Father to 600 A.D.

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.XVI A. THE GOSPEL IN AFRICA’S NEIGHBOR-COUSIN—SAUDI ARABIA

PAUL IN ARABIA AFTER CONVERSION

The first Christians appeared in Saudi Arabia around 100 A.D. By 244, the Christian hierarchy was established there. Missionaries from Alexandria Bible School evangelized there. Anthony, father of Monasticism, visited the imprisoned Christians there. Around 431. Monophysite missions to Yemen began in 570 and in 578 An-noman III, the last of the Lachemids (Arab princes) was also converted to Christianity. In 629 the Persian monk and theologian Marutha was placed over the East. He had 15 suffragan bishops in Arabia. Christianity there was later eradicated in the seventh century by Islam.

The Bible was not translated into Arabic until 680 (in part). The whole Bible was completed in 750.

In 1897 Samuel Zwemer (1857-1952), known as the Apostle to Islam, said that Arabia and indeed the whole world could easily be evangelized within the next thirty years if it were not for the wicked selfishness of Christians.

XVII ETHIOPIA TO 600 A.D.

As we have seen, Ethiopia had a long tradition of knowledge of God. Although they used the ram as the symbol of the sun-god they worshipped, Jews and God-seekers had lived there for many centuries. The treasurer of the Queen in the time of the Apostles was God-seeker who turned to Christ and was baptized as a Christian when the Apostle Philip explained that the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Jesus. Later Matthew came to Ethiopia and evangelized there until he was put to death. Traders and nobles of Kush traveled widely. One was baptized in Jerusalem.

A SHIPWRECK BRINGS ETHIOPIA TO CHRIST

Ethiopia was a land thoroughly prepared for the Gospel, but we have no records that many turned to Christ until about 330, when two young men from Alexandria were shipwrecked off the coast of Ethiopia. Frumentius and Aedesius, closely related to the Coptic church, preached the Gospel. In 350 the Ethiopian emperor, King Ezana, was converted from worshipping the idol Mithras to Christianity, and Christianity rapidly became the official religion of the land. Because of the Christian influence, Greek became the official court language for the next two hundred years. It was only during

this time that Geez gained much prominence as an Ethiopian literary language. The New Testament was translated into Ethiopic around the beginning of the fourth century.

In the fourth century the ancient Ethiopian city-state Meroe was conquered by other Ethiopians whose capital was at Axum. Christian monks of the Eastern tradition, notably Julian, arrived in Ethiopia in 543, and from the Western tradition, John of Ephesus arrived at about the same time, a messenger of the Roman emperor Justinian. It was under the following Byzantine influence and control of the fifth century that Christianity took deepest root. In fact, Ethiopia became a protector of other Christians. In 526 the King of Axum sent expeditionary forces to Yemen to protect persecuted Christians there.

The Bible began to be translated into Ethiopic about 400 A.D. by Egyptian monks.

In about 500 the Syrian orthodox church established an influential monastery in northern Ethiopia, thus securing the monophysite character of the Ethiopian church. In 543 monophysite missionaries sent out by the Empress Theodora converted Silko, king of Nobatae of Nubia to monophysite Christianity. Melkite (anti-monophysite) missionaries sent by the emperor Justinian followed. The main Nubian pagan temples (including Abu and Simbel) were converted into Christian churches, and Christians were found also in Darfur and Kordofan. In 567, the monophysite Longinus was consecrated bishop of Nubia and became known as the apostle of Nubian Christianity. Other Nubian kingdoms also became Christian – the akoritae (south of Nubia with the capital of Dongola) becoming orthodox and Alodiae (twelve miles north of Khartoum with the capital of Alwa) becoming monophysite.

THE GOSPEL IN NORTH AFRICA

The first known Christians in Tunisia, then termed the Roman province of Africa) dates to about 80 A.D. Believers from Pentecost (consult map)

The end of official Roman persecution did not mean the end of all troubles for Christians. In 399 persecution did not mean the end of all troubles for Christians. In 399 pagans in what is now Tunisia massacred sixty Christians to express their disgust that the Christians had toppled the statue of Hercules. euta and Melilla, included what Spanish cities were then part of the massive Roman province of Mauretania. The first Christians were converted there in about 400 A.D. from amongst the Roman population.

CARTHAGINIAN COLONIES

Hanno of Carthage “discovered” Cameroun in the fifth century B.C.. Cafrthage established colonies as far as Cerne, south of Gibraltar.

VANDALS OVERRUN NORTH AFRICA

Carthage fell to German tribesmen known as Vandals in 439, and Arian Vandal kings persecuted orthodox believers. From 492 to 642 A.D. the Vandals began entering North

Africa through Spain. Byzantines from the east entered shortly after, conquering North Africa in the name of Justinian I (the Great Byzantine emperor).

XVIII. BANTU POPULATION EXPLOSION TO 600 A.D.

Camels, reintroduced into the Sahara about 200 A.D. by the Romans, enabled limited life to continue in the Sahara in the face of increasing hardship. They, however, rapidly ate all the remaining vegetation that had provided some anchor for the sandy soil. With the plants gone, the sands shifted and blew and the desert increased in size and in aridity.

The peoples of Egypt and the Middle East were acquainted with the dark skinned Ethiopians and with the darker Sudanese, but by this time only a few Arab traders probably knew that a black people existed to the west of the Sahara. For about a thousand years, the Bantu people had been multiplying prolifically in the Niger-Benue river valleys of the land that today lies in Cameroon and Nigeria. Geographers do not mention blacks living on the eastern coast of Africa prior to the fourth century, suggesting that their move there was probably not long before that date.

By about 100 A.D., their homeland savanna was thoroughly overrun with people, so some of the group set out in search of new lands. Immediately to the south of them was the inhospitable rain forest of the Congo River basin. Following the streams and tributaries of the Congo, they traveled to the southeast, until at last they emerged on the Shaba Plateau in what is now the Shaba region of Zaire. This plateau was a savanna much like the homeland they had left behind. For the next thousand years, groups continued to leave the northern homeland and travel southeast to the Shaba Plateau that had become the secondary Bantu homeland. They displaced the hunting bands of the Bushmen and the cattle herding communities of the Hottentots, who probably voluntarily moved farther and farther south, as the Bantu dominated more and more of the continent south of the Sahara.

At first the Bantu were limited to the savannah areas, but about 200-300 A.D. they found some southeast Asian food plants growing in the mouth of the Zambesi River. With the cultivation of these Asian yams, taro and bananas, they were able to make homes in the hotter forest areas as well. By about 500, they had reached Africa's east coast.

Although the Bantu did not leave written records, science gives us some clues as to their history. Linguistic analysis shows that the Bantu speakers were first split into western and eastern dialects, suggesting that the first moves from the Shaba homeland were to the east (into what is today Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania) and to the west (into what is today Angola). Close similarities between Bantu languages shows that they differentiated recently (after the move to the new homeland) and that they spread out quickly, which suggests that once the Bantu found new land, individual families spread out widely rather than congregating in one spot

This spreading caused isolation and thus, differentiation in the languages. Luba and Bemba are amongst the very oldest Bantulanguages still surviving today.

Bantu culture has changed little until recent years, so it is likely that the Bantu who first moved to southern Africa lived much like their ancestors who lived in the savannah north of the rain forest. Evidence suggests that Bantu religious ideas were influenced by the religions of Kush to the west. Today, for example, the ram is used all over western Africa, including Nigeria as a symbol for major gods, yet the ram is not indigenous to this area. The symbol may have been borrowed from ancient contact with Kush, where the ram was used as a symbol of the sun god or may have been common to black culture as it developed in the Sahara, or may with both groups taking with them common symbols and beliefs.

Meanwhile other cultures of black people were continuing to develop to the north, all along the Sahel region where the Sahara desert turns into a more livable savannah. Other cultures were developing along the rivers and lakes of the horn of western Africa. Although what we now call the “Golden Age of West Africa” did not begin until about 700 A.D., the beginnings of these cultures are of course much more ancient.

The beginnings of Ghana, for example, go back to about 300 A.D. and a group of related tribes called the Soninkes. These people called their land Duagadou and spoke the Mande language. They traded gold and salt and claimed Kumbi as their capital.

FIRST CHRISTIANS

The first known Christians appeared in Niger about 650. They were North African Berbers driven south by Islam.

XVIII. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM (600 ON)

In 454, Rome was sacked by barbarian forces from the north. 476 marked the end of the Roman Empire as the Emperor was deposed and banished by the Gothic conqueror. Before the fall of Rome, the Roman bishops appealed to their “rights” as leaders of the church in the capitol of the Empire. After the fall, not wishing to lose and even hoping to expand their powers, they found it necessary to claim power on other bases.

The fall of Rome contributed even more to the rapid paganization of the church. The conquering heathen had ascribed an almost godlike quality to their own sorcerers. They now transferred those qualities to their conception of the Roman primate. The church accepted a great and tragic compromise. The conquering barbarians accepted the name Christian, and in return, the church left them with their pagan practices, now baptized “christian.”

Boniface had succeeded Gregory as bishop of Rome, and he quickly applied to the Emperor Phocas to have the “blasphemous title” of universal bishop applied to himself, with the privilege of passing it on to his successors

The Emperor had a grudge against the bishop of Constantinople so he forbade him to use the title he had invented and gave it instead to Boniface (606 A.D.) He then declared the bishop of Rome to be the head over all the other churches. Before 606, Rome had no real power to impose its will on anyone, regardless of the political ambitions of the Roman bishops. Therefore, the heathen practices which were received in one church might be rejected totally in another. Many kinds of worship were observed by the various churches. After 606, Rome began to impose its will, resulting in total acceptance of pagan traditions and uniformity in practice.

Much later, in the 1800's, as the Roman Catholic Church met at Vatican I to consider the issue of papal infallibility, ultramontanes addressed to Pope Pius IX hymns which had previously been addressed to God. (See 2 Thess. 2:4). Gaspere Mermillod, suffragan bishop of Geneva, spoke of a threefold incarnation of the Son of God: in the virgin's womb, in the eucharist, and in the Pope! The pope was even called the redeemer. St. John Bosco called him "God on earth" and declared, "Jesus has put the pope on the same level as God."

XIX. THE RISE OF ISLAM AND THE ARAB CONQUEST OF NORTH AFRICA 600-on

Mohammed, the founder of Islam, was born in Mecca, Arabia about 570. Observing the pagan polytheistic religions of the Arab tribes, and the decadent Judaism and Christianity about him, he rejected all of these and began to claim "visions" from God. His teaching forced him to flee to Medina in 622 (celebrated by Islam as the Hegira or flight). He soon became a successful political leader and warrior, leading what he claimed to be a world-wide crusade against idolatry and infidelity. He enflamed the prejudices of the wild Arabian armies, ordering them to exterminate all heathen and apostates. Jews and Christians were to be offered a threefold choice: convert to Islam, pay tribute to Islam, or die. The armies of Islam set out to obey their prophet's instructions, and swept across North Africa destroying the church.

Beginning in 639, the Arabs (Saracens and Moors) invaded Egypt, establishing both Islam and the Arabic language. From 639 to 649 the Arabs conquered all of Egypt, however the Fatimid rulers accepted Coptic and Nubian Christians with some degree of tolerance. The great library of antiquity at Alexandria was destroyed systematically by the Muslim conqueror Amr in 642. He used it over a period of six months as fuel to heat the city's 4,000 public baths. Although Christians were persecuted and Islam was in control, the church was not wiped out. Mass conversions of Egyptians from Christianity to Islam took place in 660, however. Okba bin Nafi and his Arab army reached the Atlantic shore of Morocco in 683 and many of the Berbers promptly succumbed, partly because the life the Arabs offered them – one of looting and conquest – appealed to them. Carthage fell in 698, Morocco in 684, and Gibraltar, Spain (mostly Berber forces) in 710.

With North Africa securely in Islamic hands following the fall of Carthage, large numbers of Christians were annihilated by the Saracens throughout the land.

The Arab armies were finally turned back in 732 with the crushing defeat of their armies by Charles Martel and the Frankish soldiers at Tours, but their control over North Africa remained.

In 996 caliph-al-Hakim destroyed 3,000 churches in Egypt and forcibly converted thousands of Copts to Islam in a violent persecution. Not until 1415 did any other power regain control of any portion of North Africa, and then Prince Henry won domination of only one city, Deuta.

With Islam, a much harsher type of slavery than Africa had previously known was introduced. Early African slavery had always been a temporary matter, a punishment or a result of being taken as a prisoner of war. Even then, although bound to serve his master, the slave's total time and being were never regarded as belonging to his master, and he was not stripped of property, dignity and family and could not be abused. In contrast, Islam introduced a perpetual slavery that took away all hope. Arabic slavery was total humiliation, castrating the men and denying property and basic human rights as they felt unrestrained in dealing with those they considered infidels. Islamic slavery was chiefly centered in eastern Africa. It did not extend, for example, to the Congo River basin.

In 738 the first history of West Africa was written in Arabic by Wahb ibn Munabbih. He lists as descendants of Kush the people of Sudan called the Qaran (maybe identified with the Goran who live east of Lake Chad), the Zaghawa, the Habesha (Abyssians), the Qiby (Copts) and the Barbar

(BERBERS)

In 837 Islamic rulers in Egypt prohibited all Christian education and all celebration of Christian festivals. All churches were demolished, and Christians were ordered to wear five-pound crosses around their necks. Throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, nominal Christians throughout North Africa and the Middle East continued to apostasize to Islam. By 949, half of all former Christendom had been captured by Islam, including the nomadic Berbers of Mauretania. There were still, however, some Coptic bishops in Egypt, although the number declined from 168 in 550 to 110 in 950. In 996 the Caliph-al-Hakim (985-1021) destroyed three thousand churches and forcibly converted thousands of Copts to Islam in a violent persecution. By 1,000 A.D., most of North African Christianity was wiped out. By 1050 there were only 47 Coptic bishops left. In the twelfth century, the Saracens invaded North Africa from Syria. They followed a much more militant type of Islam and were entirely intolerant of Christians and those of other faiths. In 1276 they overtook the throne of Nubia, the northern Nubian kingdom, and took Makuria, the middle Nubian kingdom a century later. Alodia, the southern kingdom, however, did not fall to Islam until the fifteenth century, and the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia never did fall. In 1301 all churches in Egypt were ordered or destroyed by the Mamluk dynasty (1250-1517). Even in Syria, Copts suffered a century of systematic persecution. In 1321 almost all remaining Coptic churches and monasteries were burned or destroyed in a mob fury, and there were mass executions of Christians.

In the sixteenth century, Libya came under Turkish control, and remained a part of the Ottoman Empire until colonized by Italy in 1911.

