

Chapter 2



The Church Enters the World Part II

The martyrdom of Stephen unleashed a wave of intolerance and persecution against the new church in Jerusalem.

"And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison." (Acts 8:1-3 RSV)

"Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." (Acts 8:4 RSV)

One Jerusalem convert, Philip, first went to Samaria, and after success in his witness, went south toward Gaza and encountered an Ethiopian, a minister of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. Philip conversed with him which was followed by the Ethiopian's baptism--an affirmation of belief. (Acts 8:26-38)

"Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus." (Acts 11:19-20 RSV)

"...and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians." (Acts 11:26 RSV)

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The Boundaries and Meaning of Christian Textual Language

A universal phenomenon that affects all men on the Earth is the rising of the sun each morning--it's a physical occurrence that has continued throughout time with predictable regularity. The language that men use to describe the event is typically understandable and straightforward: "It's morning and the sun is rising" makes the point understood by just about everyone--the language description addresses all alike, rich and poor, all nationalities, and generally all areas of the Earth, with the exception of polar areas. For mankind the rising of the sun is a universal event. And the simple statement describing the rising sun is adequate in its abstraction of the physical phenomena to convey the reality of the event--the man on the street understands it clearly. (The perception of the man in the street may not explain the wider phenomenon of solar bodies orbiting and revolving in a manner that causes the appearance of a rising sun--the language may not need to explain that for common identification of the event's occurrence.)

One of the problems affecting the Christian religion is the convolution, the treatment, of textual language. Language originally meant to be straightforward was deemed to be poetic, or allegorical, with the 'soul' and 'spirit' of the text alleged to be impressionistically and subjectively interpreted. The text thus treated became distorted expressing bias. Biblical textual language treated subjectively and impressionistically is un-tethered and disconnected from what would otherwise be simple textual statements--direct objective meaning became non-objective. The change arose from the influence of Gnostic Hellenization brought about by the speculations of competitive church prelates, a phenomenon impacting the church in the 3rd and 4th centuries. And the church has been contending with obscure communication, vague symbolization, and supposedly erudite textual speculation since that time. This is particularly true as it relates to prophetic materials. Few today associate Biblical text with simple language, construction, and meaning, although it can be shown this generally was the medium of expression of the early advocates of Christianity.

Linguist Noam Chomsky in his book *Language and Problems of Knowledge*¹ posits that the mind/brain provides a facility to extract basic relevant representational information as a part of a biological learning mechanism that is innate to man. Man understands rudimentary language mapping to the real world. This is true even though abstraction expressions vary in different cultures. But when language references are deemed to be impressionistically oriented, the interpretative mechanism may lose its reference points to the external world. And then straightforward language expression becomes obscure.

Also in Biblical documents there is another interpretative problem. The following textual reference illustrates the issue: The story of the crucifixion of Jesus, along with two thieves crucified with him, is well known and is cited because it illustrates a communication issue. One of the two thieves crucified with Jesus asked to be remembered when Jesus would come into his kingdom.

"And he said, 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he (Jesus) said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'" (Luke 23:42-43 RSV)

These texts have been the basis of the belief of many that the thief, in spirit, went to be with the Lord that day to the transcendent state of 'Paradise.' Since the belief in dualism (the body and spirit or soul are two separate entities) is nearly universal, there has been no general question as to the meaning of the text. But if dualism, as a general belief, is questioned as the underlying reality of man's nature, the text becomes paradoxical. And the question arises: What other meaning may be alluded to in the text? The question is answered when the belief mode of the translator is taken into account. If the translator believes in dualism, the text is translated as it appears in the majority of translations. If the translator does not believe in dualism, the text can be translated quite differently. To wit: "And he (Jesus) said to him, 'Truly, I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise.'" The place of the comma, either before or after 'today' is critical to the interpretation, meaning, and physical denotation of this text. The placement of the comma before 'today' indicates that the thief will be in 'Paradise' with the Lord that day. The placement of the comma after 'today' shows only that the statement was made that day--'today' (right now), but the time of joint appearance in 'Paradise' may be a long way off, ostensibly at the end of the age. Since the Greek source text has no punctuation, the placement of the comma is a matter of the dualist/non-dualist belief of the translator. And an accurate understanding of this text requires that a view of the nature of man be elucidated--the text by itself does not prove that man is comprised of either a dualist or non-dualist nature, but rather is indeterminate, as the final meaning is ambiguous, and depends on the translator's belief mode and where the comma is placed. To observe where the comma is placed relative to the word 'today,' either before or after 'today,' is to know only the belief mode of the translator.[‡]

[‡] After a review of early Hebrew body/soul assumptions and a philosophy department review of Greek dualism, the author has opted for a unified body/soul view of man, rejecting dualism as ideologically deficient (epistemologically insufficient). Thus the author places the comma after 'today' in the instance of the text in question.²

The Early Church Fathers

Spokesmen of the early church had viewed scriptures as textually literal. Later, Gnosticism and Hellenization influenced the thought of church leaders. These influences became a significant force in molding Christian thought in the third to the fifth centuries of the church and in the formation of public policies.

Some later books of the New Testament, such as I John, condemned the early forms of Gnostic teaching as false teaching. Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian were early church anti-Gnostic writers. They identified the Creator and the supreme God as one and insisted on goodness in the material creation. Redemption was in Jesus, His Crucifixion and Resurrection, a redemption from evil rather than from an evil environment. In the sayings and life of Jesus, evil was juxtaposed with moral rightness.³

Polycarp (69 - 155 A.D.)

The main sources of information about Polycarp are found in the various documents. Some of the main documents are: (1) Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians; (2) the Epistles of Ignatius; (3) various passages in Irenaeus; (4) the Letter of the Smyrnaeans citing the martyrdom of Polycarp.

It is recorded that Polycarp was trained by John the Revelator and then appointed as the Bishop of Smyrna by John. It is also noted that Polycarp met and conversed with some of those who had seen the Lord; thus Polycarp is connected to the original apostles as well as becoming one of the early church fathers. Polycarp, by his position as Bishop of Smyrna, had become a leading figure in Asia Minor. But Polycarp's influence extended beyond Asia Minor as he trained Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, who is considered to be the first great Catholic theologian.

Polycarp was recognized to be an early opposer of Christian heresies--he particularly countered the teaching of the Gnostic Marcion.(Marcion had tried to alter Christianity by redefining God and rejecting Old Testament teaching.) Additionaly, Polycarp stood stoutly against other Gnostic heresies which were appearing throughout the Christian world. Polycarp also counseled on how the church should handle financial dishonesty that had appeared in some churches. In letters to the church at Philippi, Polycarp encourages members to remain strong in faith and to not be entrapped in materialism--either by financial lack or abundance.⁴

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are shown
as a chapter sample.**

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