

HISTORY AND LITERATURE
OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Second Edition









ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN
EAST

Volume Two

INTRODUCTION TO
THE NEW TESTAMENT

HISTORY AND LITERATURE
OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Second Edition

HELMUT KOESTER



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TO THE MEMORY OF MY TEACHER
RUDOLF BULTMANN

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Preface to the Second Edition

Like the second edition of the first volume of the *Introduction to the New Testament*, the new edition of the "History and Literature of Early Christianity" is no longer dependent upon my earlier German book, *Einführung in das Neue Testament*. When my German work was written during the seventies—the first English edition was essentially a translation of that German book—I was, to be sure, very much aware of the newly discovered library of Nag Hammadi and I had already participated actively in the efforts of publishing and evaluating these new documents with respect to their impact upon a fresh understanding of the history and literature of early Christianity. That effort was then only in its beginning stages. During the last two decades, however, all of the writings of the Nag Hammadi Library have been published in critical editions and numerous monographs and articles have been produced on these important texts, thanks to the efforts of my friend James M. Robinson and the group of scholars he brought together under the auspices of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity in Claremont, California. Moreover, the subsequent renewed interest during the same period in the wide-ranging corpus of writings generally designated as the "New Testament Apocrypha" has resulted in a number of new editions and translations of these works and intensified the scholarly scrutiny of their intent and value. Finally, a large number of learned commentaries on the books of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers have since appeared both in the United States and abroad—not to speak of the new flood of books on the historical Jesus. All this made it necessary to reconceive large portions of my book, although I have not been persuaded that I should change its perspective, approach, and overall structure. I remain committed to the methods of historical criticism, and to an interpretation of the early Christian writings and of the traditions that preceded them in the context of their own unrepeatable historical, theological, and social situations.

I am again indebted to my former student Philip Sellew, professor at the University of Minnesota, for his invaluable help in the arduous task of updating the bibliographies. He also graciously contributed the chapter "Narrative and Rhetorical Criticism" (§1.4e). My colleague Marianne P. Bonz read the entire manuscript, making numerous suggestions for improvements, and gave valuable advice for the chapter on Luke-Acts (§12.3e), for which I am grateful. I have learned much from my colleagues at Harvard, especially François Bovon, David Mitten, and Gregory Nagy, and also from my students; the close contact with these students and especially with my teaching fellows, Mark Kurtz, Melanie Johnson De Baufre, Anne-Marie Luijendijk, and Laura Nasrallah, was particularly valuable when I taught the course "Introduction to the New Testament" during my last semester of active service at Harvard University in the spring of 1998. I am, however, most indebted to the patience and moral support of my wife Gisela, who thought that I would finally retire and then had to discover that I was now devoting most of my time to

the completion of this volume. My thanks also go to the staff of Aldine de Gruyter for the congenial and expert efforts in the editing and production of the book.

Looking back at the course that New Testament scholarship has taken over the now passing 20th century, there is little question that Rudolf Bultmann was the one who set its parameters and defined its tasks for more than a generation. It has been the most fortunate turn in the events of my life—be it called divine guidance or providence—that the U.S. army, in the fall of the year 1945, released me from a POW camp in Marburg, Germany. With no other place to go (of my parents, I knew only that they were somewhere in the Russian occupation zone), I decided to enroll for courses in the theological faculty at the Philipps-University of Marburg, the oldest Protestant university in the world, founded in 1527 by Duke Philipp of Hesse. It was there that I soon became fascinated by the lectures of Rudolf Bultmann, going to his seminars with fear and trembling, surviving his unrelenting criticisms, and being revived by his faithful encouragement in my efforts to write a dissertation. What I owe to him is expressed in the continued dedication of this work to the memory of the unrivaled master in the art of interpreting the New Testament in its contemporary setting.

Helmut Koester

Lexington, Massachusetts
February 2000

Preface to the First Edition

The concept of an "Introduction to the New Testament" in the form of a history of early Christianity in its contemporary setting, including a survey of the political, cultural, and religious history of the Hellenistic and Roman imperial period, stems from the predecessor of this book, the *Einführung in das Neue Testament* by Rudolf Knopf (revised edition by Hans Lietzmann and Heinrich Weinel) in the series "Sammlung Töpelmann" (now succeeded by "De Gruyter Lehrbücher"). Thus, the *Introduction* presented here in its English version does not aspire to be an "Introduction" in the technical sense nor a "History of Early Christianity Literature" which treats the scholarship, date, integrity, and literary structure of each of the New Testament writings. To be sure, these questions are encompassed in the present work, but they are discussed within the context of a reconstruction of the historical development of early Christianity. My primary concern is to present the history of the early Christian churches, since it seems to me that the student of the New Testament must learn from the outset to understand the writings of the earliest period within their proper historical context.

It is obvious that this attempt to reconstruct the history of early Christianity requires one to relinquish some strictures of traditional introductions. I do not limit the discussion to the twenty-seven canonical books, but treat also sixty other early Christian writings from the first 150 years of Christian history, whether or not these writings are preserved fully or in fragments. These non-canonical works are witnesses to early Christian history no less valuable than the New Testament. A historical presentation of these materials requires that clear decisions be made about authorship, date, and place of each writing; in other words, the results of historical-critical inquiry have to be consulted fully in each instance. I have also made an effort to discuss the problems in making such decisions. If these issues remain controversial with respect to some parts of the New Testament, they are even more difficult for non-canonical literature: traditionally scholarly debate has focused on the canonical literature, whereas the so-called apocrypha and other non-canonical writings have received only scant attention. Furthermore, quite a few of the latter have been discovered only recently, and their critical evaluation has just begun. Nevertheless, it is much better to advance scholarship, and thus our understanding, through hypothetical reconstruction than to ignore new and apparently problematic materials.

In view of the present situation of New Testament scholarship, it would be misleading to suggest to the students of early Christian history that they can expect largely secure results. The New Testament itself furnishes evidence that the history of early Christian communities was a complex process, full of controversies and difficult decisions. Understanding this process requires critical judgment as well as the construction of trajectories through the history of early Christianity. The recent discovery of even more early writings not only demands a basic reorientation of our views, but will also enable the student to appreciate more fully the

depths and riches of this formative period, especially as it is seen in the context of the general history of the culture in which Christianity began.

The scope of this book does not permit me to base my entire presentation upon the results of my own research. There are many topics in my survey of the Hellenistic and Roman world on which the specialist will have better insights and judgment. I am not only indebted to the published works of many scholars, but also owe much to my students at Harvard University, who have enriched this book in its various stages of writing and rewriting with their suggestions and criticisms, and equally to my colleagues, from whom I have learned a great deal during the last two decades in seminars and in discussions. I wish to express my special thanks to colleagues and friends: to Klaus Baltzer, of the University of Munich, and to Frank M. Cross, Dieter Georgi, George MacRae, Krister Stendahl, John Strugnell, and Zeph Stewart, all of Harvard University.

This book is the author's own translation of the German *Einführung in das Neue Testament*, published in 1980 by Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York. Only in a few instances has the text been changed; one chapter was added (§6.3d). However, a number of minor errors and a few major mistakes were corrected. For this, I am particularly indebted to Eckhard Plümacher's review of the book (*Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 233 [1981] 1–22) and to the extensive notes which he kindly made available to me.

The bibliography has been redesigned so that editions and translations or texts are quoted first in order to encourage the student to read further in primary materials. English translations of texts are cited in the bibliographies wherever available. I am grateful to my colleague Albert Heinrichs of Harvard University for suggestions regarding the revision of the bibliography. The bibliography is not meant to be exhaustive, but is designed to emphasize what is, in my opinion, the most valuable and more recent material, and what will be best lead to further study. I have, however, included the most important "classics" which are still basic guides for scholarship today. For further reference, the reader should consult the standard reference works: *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (especially its recently published supplement), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, *Der Kleine Pauly*, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, and *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (specific references to these works are normally not given in the bibliographies).

The English edition (as already the German work) would scarcely have been finished in such a brief time without the patience and interest of my wife and my children. Numerous persons have given their help in the various stages of translation and production of this work: Philip H. Sellew (editing, bibliography), Jonathan C. Guest (editing, copyediting, and proofreading), Gary A. Bisbee (maps), Pamela Chance (typing), Robert Stoops and Douglas Olson (bibliography). I am very grateful for their expert and untiring help. Rarely does an author enjoy such experienced and congenial production assistance as I had from my friends Charlene Matejovsky and Robert W. Funk of Polebridge Press at Missoula, Montana. Their dedication, care, competence, and advice accompanied every step of the book's production.

Inter Nationes, an agency of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn, made a major grant to offset the cost of assistance for this translation. Thanks are due for this generous help.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my teacher Rudolf Bultmann. He encouraged me more than thirty years ago to deal more intensively with the extra-canonical writings from the early Christian period. His unwavering insistence upon the consistent application of the historical-critical method and his emphasis upon the investigation of the early Christian literature in the context of the history of religions must remain basic commitments of New Testament scholarship.

Helmut Koester

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts
May 1982

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Additionally, the author wishes to present his thanks for permission granted him to take photographs used in this volume at the following institutions: the Byzantine Archeological Administration, Thessaloniki, Greece (p. 92); the Staatliche Museum Charlottenburg, Berlin (pp. 249 and 292), and the Pergamon Museum Berlin, German Federal Republic (pp. 121 and 341); the National Museum, Numismatic Collection, Athens, Greece (p. 81); the Museum of Ancient Ephesus, Selçuk, Turkey (p. 254); and the Corinth Excavations of the American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Greece (p. 129).

A final word of thanks is due to the research team for Religion and Culture of the Lands of the New Testament (Harvard Divinity School), which supplied the remaining photographs in this volume, as well as to Dr. Gary Bisbee, who drew the various maps.

Abbreviations: Serial and Journal Titles

| | |
|---------|--|
| AARAS | American Academy of Religion Academy Series |
| AAWG.PH | Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse |
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| Abh.RWA | Abhandlungen der rheinisch-westfälischen Akademie |
| ADAI.K | Abhandlungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Koptische Reihe |
| AGSU | Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums |
| AHR | <i>American Historical Review</i> |
| AJP | <i>American Journal of Philology</i> |
| AKG | Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte |
| ALGHL | Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums |
| AnBib | Analecta Biblica |
| ANRW | <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> |
| ANT | Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung |
| APOT | <i>Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> (ed. R. H. Charles) |
| APP | Ancient Peoples and Places |
| ASNU | Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis |
| ASP | American Studies in Papyrology |
| AThANT | Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| ATLABS | American Theological Library Association Bibliography Series |
| AVTRW | Aufsätze und Vorträge zur Theologie und Religionswissenschaft |
| BAC | Biblioteca de autores cristianos |
| BAR | Biblical Archaeology Review |
| BBB | Bonner Biblische Beiträge |
| BBR.NTS | Bibliographies for Biblical Research. New Testament Series |
| BCNH.ST | Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi. "Section Textes" |
| BETL | Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovanensium |
| BevTh | Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie |
| BFChTh | Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie |
| BHTh | Beiträge zur historischen Theologie |
| BibOr | Biblia et orientalia |
| BJudSt | Brown Judaic Studies |
| BJRL | Bulletin of the John Rylands Library |
| BKP | Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie |
| BT.B | Bibliothèque de théologie, 3. Ser.: Théologie biblique |
| BWANT | Beiträge zur Wissenschaft des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| BWAT | Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament |
| BZNW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der alten Kirche |
| CB.NT | Coniectanea Biblica. New Testament Series |
| CBQ | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| CBQ.MS | Catholic Biblical Quarterly. Monograph Series |
| CChr.SA | Corpus Christianorum. Series Apocryphorum |

| | |
|------------|---|
| CGTC | Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary |
| CNT | Commentaire du Nouveau Testament |
| ConB | Coniectanea biblica |
| CP | Classical Philology |
| CRBS | <i>Current Research: Biblical Studies</i> |
| CRINT | Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum |
| EdF | Erträge der Forschung |
| EHS.T | Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe 23: Theologie |
| EKKNT | Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament |
| EPhM | Etudes de philosophie médiévale |
| EPRO | Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain |
| ErJb | Eranos-Jahrbuch |
| ET | English translation |
| EtBib | Etudes bibliques |
| EtJ | Etudes Juives |
| EvTh | <i>Evangelische Theologie</i> |
| FC | Fontes Christiani |
| F&F | Foundations & Facets |
| FKDG | Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte |
| FRLANT | Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| GBSNTS | Guides to Biblical Scholarship, New Testament Series |
| GCS | Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte |
| GLB | De Gruyter Lehrbuch |
| GRBS | <i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i> |
| GTB | Van Gorcum's theologische bibliotheek |
| GWU | <i>Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht</i> |
| HAW | Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft |
| HCS | Hellenistic Culture and Society |
| HDR | Harvard Dissertations in Religion |
| Hesperia.S | Hesperia Supplements |
| HeyJ | <i>Heythrop Journal</i> |
| HHS | Harvard Historical Studies |
| Hist | <i>Historia, Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte</i> |
| HNT | Handbuch zum Neuen Testament |
| HNT.E | Handbuch zum Neuen Testament. Ergänzungsband |
| HSCP | <i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i> |
| HSM | Harvard Semitic Monographs |
| HSS | Harvard Semitic Series |
| HThK | Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament |
| HTR | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i> |
| HTS | Harvard Theological Studies |
| HUCA | <i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> |
| Hyp. | Hypomnemata. Untersuchungen zur Antike und zu ihrem Nachleben |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| IDBSup | <i>Interpreter's Dictionary to the Bible. Supplement</i> |
| Int | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| JAC | <i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i> |
| JAC.E | Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband |
| JAL | Jewish Apocryphal Literature |
| JBL | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |

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| <i>JEA</i> | <i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> |
| <i>JHS</i> | <i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> |
| <i>JJS</i> | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i> |
| <i>JQR.MS</i> | Jewish Quarterly Review Monograph Series |
| <i>JR</i> | <i>Journal of Religion</i> |
| <i>JRomS</i> | <i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> |
| <i>JSHRZ</i> | Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit |
| <i>JSNT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> |
| <i>JSNTSup</i> | Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series |
| <i>JSOT Press</i> | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press |
| <i>JSPSup</i> | Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series |
| <i>JSS</i> | <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> |
| <i>JTC</i> | <i>Journal for Theology and the Church</i> |
| <i>JTS</i> | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> |
| <i>KAV</i> | Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern |
| <i>KEK</i> | Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament |
| <i>KIT</i> | Kleine Texte für (theologische und philologische) Vorlesungen und Übungen |
| <i>LBS</i> | Library of Biblical Studies |
| <i>LCL</i> | Loeb Classical Library |
| <i>LEC</i> | Library of Early Christianity |
| <i>LHR</i> | Lectures on the History of Religions, Sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies |
| <i>MAPS</i> | Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society |
| <i>MBPF</i> | Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte |
| <i>MH</i> | <i>Museum Helveticum</i> |
| <i>MHGRW</i> | Methuen History of the Greek and Roman World |
| <i>Mn.Suppl.</i> | Mnemosyne. Bibliotheca classica/philologica Batava. Supplements |
| <i>MThSt</i> | Marburger theologische Studien |
| <i>MThZ</i> | <i>Münchener theologische Zeitschrift</i> |
| <i>NAWG.PH</i> | Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaft in Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse |
| <i>NF</i> | Neue Folge |
| <i>NH</i> | Nag Hammadi |
| <i>NHC</i> | Nag Hammadi Codex |
| <i>NHMS</i> | Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies |
| <i>NHS</i> | Nag Hammadi Studies |
| <i>NovT</i> | <i>Novum Testamentum</i> |
| <i>NovTSup</i> | Novum Testamentum. Supplements |
| <i>NS</i> | New series; neue Serie |
| <i>NTA</i> | Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen |
| <i>NTDSup</i> | Das Neue Testament Deutsch. Supplementband |
| <i>NTOA</i> | Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus |
| <i>NTS</i> | <i>New Testament Studies</i> |
| <i>NTTS</i> | New Testament Tools and Studies |
| <i>NumenSup</i> | Numen. International Review for the History of Religions. Supplements |
| <i>ÖAW</i> | Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften |
| <i>OBO</i> | Orbus Biblicus Orientalis |
| <i>OCT</i> | Oxford Classical Texts |
| <i>OLZ</i> | <i>Orientalische Literaturzeitung</i> |
| <i>OTS</i> | <i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i> |

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| <i>PBA</i> | <i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i> |
| Ph.S | Philologus. Supplement |
| PMAAR | Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome |
| PTS | Patristische Texte und Studien |
| PVTG | Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamentis graece |
| <i>RAC</i> | <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> |
| <i>RB</i> | <i>Revue Biblique</i> |
| RechBib | Recherches bibliques |
| <i>RechSR</i> | <i>Recherches de science religieuse</i> |
| <i>RGG</i> | <i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> |
| RPS | Religious Perspectives (series) |
| <i>RSR</i> | <i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i> |
| RVV | Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten |
| SAC | Studies in Antiquity and Christianity |
| SBAW.PPH | Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse |
| SBLDS | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series |
| SBLEJL | Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature |
| SBLMS | Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series |
| SBLSBS | Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Studies |
| SBLSCS | Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies |
| <i>SBLSP</i> | <i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i> |
| SBLTT | Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations |
| SBS | Stuttgarter Bibelstudien |
| SBT | Studies in Biblical Theology |
| SC | Sources chrétiennes |
| SCHNT | Studia ad corpus hellenicum Novi Testamenti |
| SD | Studies and Documents |
| <i>SEÅ</i> | <i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i> |
| SG | Sammlung Götschen |
| SHCT | Studies in the History of Christian Thought |
| SJ | Studia Judaica |
| SJLA | Studies in Judaism of Late Antiquity |
| SNTA | Studiorum Novi Testamenti Auxilia |
| SNTI | Studies in New Testament Interpretation |
| SNTSMS | Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series |
| SÖAW.PH | Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philologisch-historische Klasse |
| SQAW | Schriften und Quellen der alten Welt |
| SQS | Sammlung ausgewählter kirchen- und dogmengeschichtlicher Quellschriften |
| SSRH | Sociological Studies in Roman History |
| StANT | Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament |
| StHell | Studia Hellenistica |
| STL | Studia Theologica Lundensia |
| StPB | Studia Post-Biblica |
| StNT | Studien zum Neuen Testament |
| STRT | Studia theologica Rheno-Traiectina |
| SUNT | Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testamentes |
| SUNY | State University of New York |

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| SVTP | Studia in veteris testamenti pseudepigrapha |
| TANTZ | Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter |
| TEH | Theologische Existenz heute |
| TF | Texte zur Forschung |
| ThBü | Theologische Bücherei |
| ThHK | Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament |
| ThLZ | <i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i> |
| ThR | <i>Theologische Rundschau</i> |
| ThZ | <i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i> |
| TSJTSA | Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America |
| TStAJ | Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum |
| TU | Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur |
| UB | Urban-Bücher |
| VigChr | <i>Vigilia Christiana</i> |
| VigChrSup | Vigilia Christiana Supplement Series |
| VT | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| VTSup | Vetus Testamentum. Supplement |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |
| WdF | Wege der Forschung |
| WMANT | Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament |
| WUNT | Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament |
| WZ(J) | <i>Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena</i> |
| YCS | Yale Classical Studies |
| YPR | Yale Publications in Religion |
| Zet. | Zetemata |
| ZKG | <i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i> |
| ZNW | <i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der alten Kirche</i> |
| ZThK | <i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i> |

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HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The writings that are now included in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are the product of the early Christian churches in the countries of the eastern Mediterranean world and, eventually, in Rome. They are, however, not the only Christian writings from the earliest period of Christian history. Numerous other writings from the same period have at least partially survived. They belong to the same historical developments. This book endeavors to introduce the student of the New Testament to all of these writings in the context of a reconstruction of the expansion and growth of the Christian communities from their beginnings to the middle of the second century CE.

The political, religious, cultural, and economic factors that constituted the setting for early Christian history have been discussed extensively in the first volume, including the history of Israel in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods. What has been said in that volume is essential for the understanding of the development of early Christianity; cross references in this second volume will point to the importance of understanding the historical environment.

The sources for early Christian history, which are almost exclusively Christian, present significant problems that have been the subject of specialized works of many scholars. Some acquaintance with the scholarly approaches to these ancient writings and with the present status of their learned investigation is prerequisite to the study of this literature in its historical context. The first chapter of this volume (§7) is therefore devoted to the various problems and methods of the investigation of the New Testament and other early Christian writings.

Although Christianity emerged from the ministry of Jesus and from the first communities in Palestine, soon spreading to other parts of Syria and Egypt, its most significant literature, which was to determine the future of this new religious movement, developed in the urban cultures of the eastern Mediterranean, principally in Antioch and the cities of the Aegean Sea. Thus the history of the Christian churches will be treated not only in chronological order, but also with respect to the different regions in which the establishment of the churches in the major centers of the Hellenistic world (Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and even Rome) marks the end of the formative period of early Christianity and thus concludes the production of most of the New Testament writings.

THE SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

I. SURVEY OF THE SOURCES AND THEIR TRADITIONS

(a) The Formation of the Earliest Christian Writings

Early Christian writings, including all the documents incorporated in the New Testament, are highly problematic literary sources for our understanding of the beginnings of Christianity. It is important to recognize why the surviving written materials from that period yield only very tenuous information. During the first two centuries, the only Holy Scripture that Christians accepted was the Bible of Israel, the “Law and the Prophets”; only much later was it called the Old Testament. It was mostly used in its Greek translation, the Septuagint, which had been produced by the Jews of Alexandria (§5.3b). This is what is meant when early Christians spoke generally of “Scripture” or when they used the quotation formula, “It is written.”

Side by side with this “Scripture” stood from the beginning an oral tradition, which was transmitted under the authority of the “Lord.” This second authority comprised the sayings of Jesus as well as short narratives about him. The words of

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the Lord were by no means restricted to the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth, but also contained words of the risen Lord (§7.4a–c). Some traditions under this authority may have been transmitted in written form at an early date—the earliest Christian missionaries and church leaders were by no means uneducated people who could neither read nor write. The culture of the Hellenistic and Roman period was to some extent a literary culture. This is certainly true for the people of Israel, especially for its Greek-speaking synagogue of the Jewish diaspora, which became the matrix for the formation of early Christianity. However, that which was written down still was part of the realm of oral communication in preaching, instruction, and common celebration. Whatever was written was designed to be read aloud and thus to return into the medium of oral communication—“oral literature.” Therefore the earliest writings were collections of oral materials that were written down for ecclesiastical use, such as collections of Jesus’ words in the form of catechisms and church orders, or series of parables and miracle stories. Some of these were later incorporated into larger writings, for example, the parables that were first written down in Aramaic and then translated into Greek and incorporated in the Gospel of Mark (chap. 4), or the early Eucharistic prayers and church orders used in the composition of the *Didache* (§10.1c).

The oldest written documents that are preserved, however, are not materials

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