The Early conflicts of Christianity as seen in Acts /

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Thesis
THE EARLY CONFLICTS OF CHRISTIANITY
AS SEEN IN ACTS

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis constitutes the results of a study of the conflicts of early Christianity during the period from c.29 A.D. to c.60 A.D. It seeks to answer the questions of their causes, nature, and outcome. The basic source used was the Book of Acts. While other sources were consulted, the Book of Acts was the final authority.

Much work has already been done in the history of Christianity by other writers, among whom are S. Angus, S. J. Case, Clarence T. Craig, W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, A. C. McGiffert, and E. W. K. Mould. In the bibliography there may be found many of the important works on the subject. However, all these works give a picture of the general history of Christianity and cover a much larger time period than this thesis. In this thesis I have sought to cover only the beginnings of the Christian movement— the specific period from shortly after the Ascension of Jesus to Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

The term "conflict" denotes a strife for mastery, a clash or divergence of opinion, interests, and motives, a moral and mental struggle occasioned by incompatible desires and aims. It is so used here. The conflicts discussed here
are those of an external nature, and the thesis has no reference to those within the Christian group itself, as for instance, the controversy between Peter and the Jerusalem group (Acts/β).

The historical method has been used. I have attempted merely to describe the conflicts and to omit interpretation and evaluation. However, a degree of interpretation and evaluation may have crept in. The study has been confined to reporting the facts as given and no attempt has been undertaken to deal with any of the problems connected with the Book of Acts, such as its validity, reliability, authorship, and authenticity.

During this investigation I was constantly driven to ask this question, "To what extent can the account of the Book of Acts be taken as being accurate in factual content, reliable historically, objective in approach?" This problem does not fall within the scope of this thesis. However, I concluded that the author of the Book of Acts does not give exhaustive details about the rise and spread of Christianity. He is silent about much we wish to know— the outcome of Paul's imprisonment at Rome, for instance. The Book of Acts gives selected incidents which vividly depict how Christianity got its start and how it was spread by Paul, in particular, in the North Mediterranean world.

The investigation is organized under the following
headings: Christianity and Judaism, Christianity and the Followers of John the Baptist, Christianity and the Roman Empire, Christianity and Other Religions in the Empire, Christianity and Magic, Christianity and Greek Philosophy, Christianity and Vested Interests, and Conclusion.
CHAPTER II

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

The picture of the early Christians presented by the opening chapters of the Book of Acts is that of a society of Galilean followers of Jesus who had lived together in Jerusalem from the day of the resurrection and held views of their own concerning the person, mission, life, and death of Jesus. The twelve, and especially Peter, were the leaders of this society.¹

Christianity began as a species of Judaism. The Book of Acts portrays the earliest Christians as thoroughly loyal to the central beliefs and practices of Judaism. "Christianity in its initial period may be defined as Judaism with a plus."²

The plus consisted in the Christians' belief in the resurrection of Christ and their devotion to his person. The narrative portrays the early Christian apostles as actively connected with the temple (2:46; 3:1-4:22) where they both worshipped and taught. The Jews probably regarded them as a new sect (cf.24:15) in the same sense as they did the Pharisees. It is probable that the Christians were also recognized as a synagogue, for according to the Mishna ten male adult Jews could at any time form one. The members of this synagogue would have their own

¹ The Acts, Chap. I.
peculiar opinions, and possibly customs, but they would in no sense be outside the nation or church of Israel, and would have the same right to visit the temple as other Israelites. The narrative in the Book of Acts affords ample confirmation that this was the case (1:14; cf. 2:42 and 7:4). The disciples were arrested for behaving illegally or riotously in the temple, but it is never suggested that they were trespassing. Even during Paul's last visit to Jerusalem his own right to visit the temple and pay his vows was unquestioned, he was only accused of introducing unqualified persons into it.

The very first break in this relationship was of a political nature. It was led by the priests and captain of the temple and Sadducees (4:1-3). These were the temple authorities. At this time, the leaders of the Sadducean party in Jewish religion and politics, interfered with a propaganda which they felt was beginning to go beyond the bounds of safety and to become a really popular movement. The Christian proclamation suited neither their religious beliefs nor their political ideals, which were those of an aristocracy in possession of such power as Rome allowed to native authorities in Judea. The latter aspect of the case, as leading to the more practical consequences, probably appealed to them with greater urgency, for messianic enthusiasm meant a breach with

Rome and the upset of the existing order which they represented.

They were incensed at the fact that men whom they would regard as crude religious demagogues were haranguing the people at all within the precincts sacred to official religion, but still more by what they gathered of the preaching itself. It was bad enough to have ignorant men preaching under their very eyes a doctrine which they resisted— that of the resurrection— even when it was asserted by theological experts of the Pharisaic party. But to have it proclaimed, not as an abstract belief, but as a fact put beyond question in a concrete case (cf.3:12-16), and by men of the people, face to face with the people— was something more. It was fraught with imminent danger. For this "risen" Jesus was held by his adherents to have been thereby proved to be after all the Messiah and no impostor.

But such a belief, if it became general, seemed to spell revolt from Rome, Roman rule being inconsistent with that of the Messiah of popular expectation. The Jewish leaders remembered with grave fear Theudas and Judas of Galilee (5:36,37; cf.21:32). A messianic uprising, with all the severity and further restriction of native authority which it involved, was the thing most dreaded. Hence this kind of preaching seemed, even to men not generally intolerant of doctrinal differences, a thing to be stopped at any cost.5

This is brought out afresh in 4:17- "that it spread no further among the people"- evidences a fear lest a popular Messianic movement should arise. So without attempting to thrash out the question of fact, they thought to close the incident with a formal warning and threatening. This political aspect comes into view again in Chapter Five of the Book of Acts. There the Apostles are given a stern threat, emphasized by a beating.

However, the attacks against the early Christians did not continue as political. With the arrest of Stephen is seen for the first time the hand of religious persecution being laid upon them. According to 6:1-2, the Christians began to grow in numbers, and no doubt this gave great concern to the Jewish leaders. This growth indicated a powerful movement afoot and this movement was not under the control of the orthodox Jewish leaders. It was something outside the accepted framework of orthodox religion. Such a state of affairs was unthinkable to and could not be tolerated by these Jewish leaders. Their opportunity to do something about this menace came when Stephen, while preaching in the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyreneans, and Alexandrians, was accused by certain Hellenists\(^5\) (6:9-11) of "speaking blasphemous words against Moses, and against God." Such a thing could not be tolerated, and the

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\(^5\) The Hellenists were persons of Jewish extraction who used the Greek language as their mother tongue- distinguished from Hebraists or native Jews.
religious hounds were turned loose upon him. When he was brought before the Sanhedrin his speech before it (chap.7) gave confirmation to the "false charges" that had been placed against him (cf.7:51-60). In his speech before the Sanhedrin Stephen summarized Old Testament history from the call of Abraham to the building of Solomon's Temple. He spoke with great respect of the Mosaic Law. He accused the Jews of having misunderstood their own law, of having killed the prophets, and of having killed Jesus who was the true messiah. Their greatest offense, said Stephen, was that they had resisted the Holy Spirit and had rejected Jesus the righteous one whom God had sent. This speech greatly angered the people and their anger was unrestrained when Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (7:56). This statement substantiated the charge of blasphemy brought against him. He had made Jesus equal to God. Blasphemy according to Jewish Law was punishable by death.\(^7\) The people were so filled with rage that they, without waiting for a formal conviction by the Sanhedrin, stoned Stephen to death. It is not surprising that the religious leaders, who were concerned, above all, in the strict maintenance of ancestral law and custom, should take alarm and determine to crush out this growing heresy, which at first appeared so harmless and insignificant.

\(^7\) Lev. 24:16; Deut. 13:6-10.
The question as to why Stephen became the first known martyr of the early church arises. A look into the problem may offer a solution. There is no reason to suppose that the teaching and practices of Stephen differed in any way from those of his fellow Christians and that his arrest was due to the fact that he was more radical than they. A comparison of Peter's speeches (chapters 2, 3, 4) and Stephen's speech (chap.7) shows striking similarity of content. It is significant to note that Stephen was establishing an ever-growing reputation. He had been appointed as one of the seven to "serve tables" (6:2) and "was full of grace and power" (6:8). Any attack upon him would bring notice immediately and would serve to force attention upon this new group—especially the type of attention suited to the purpose of the leaders. Again the charges against him were brought by Hellenists. This could be used by them to reaffirm and strengthen their loyalty to the Jews. Then, too, Stephen was a Hellenist himself. It is significant that in the persecution that followed Stephen's death, the Apostles were untouched (8.2). However, his execution, according to the Book of Acts, was the signal for the outbreak of a general attack upon the disciples in Jerusalem (8.1).

The persecution which began with the execution of Stephen became the occasion of a vigorous missionary campaign by the Christians (8:4 ff), and thus resulted in the rapid
spread of Christianity. They that were "scattered abroad", Luke tells us, went about preaching the word in Judea, Samaria, Cyprus, Antioch, and Phoenicia. It was, perhaps, at this time that the Gospel reached Lydda and Joppa, where Peter found disciples sometime later. There are indications that the spread was extensive, reaching perhaps even to Rome. We are not to think of the Christians as becoming travelling evangelists and spending all their time in going from place to place preaching—some did, as Philip—the gospel. But we may think of them as telling the "good news" wherever they settled down to make a home. The flight also meant the formation of a company of Christian brethren whenever a group settled (2:46; 16:15; 1:12f; 2:2; 18:7; 20:7ff; 28:30f). Christianity was torn from the narrow limits of Jerusalem. It now belonged to the world.

The trouble begun by the attack upon Stephen brought Christianity for the first time into distinct and open conflict with orthodox Judaism. Hitherto the disciples had worked within the framework of Judaism; now they were denounced as heretics, and thus their independence was clearly ushered into the open. Though they were still as strict and conscientious as ever in their observance of the Law, they now began to be looked upon in Jerusalem as an heretical sect, and the first step was taken toward their ultimate separation from the national body corporate.8 The heresy of the Christians consisted of their

attitude and of their preaching concerning the person, mission, death, resurrection, and vindication of Jesus. These factors formed the heart of their preaching (cf. Acts 3; 5:28; 5:29-33; 7:51-60). The disciples were constant and diligent in their declaration of Jesus as the true messiah. They were relentless in accusing the Jews of having killed the Son of God. The Christians boldly declared that they possessed "the Way" of salvation. All this the Jewish leaders denied. There could be no compromise though efforts were made to reach one (4:16-21; 5:17-40). The separation of Christianity from Judaism was inevitable.

However, the ultimate break with Judaism came over the question of circumcision. The problem involved the question whether a Gentile, in order to become a Christian, must first of all become a proselyte to Judaism and then become a Jewish Christian (15:1-33). Judaism itself had always insisted that Gentiles must submit to circumcision and food taboos to become Jewish proselytes. While the controversy over circumcision arose within the Christian group it is so bound up with Christianity's relation to Judaism that it must be considered here. The manner in which this problem was solved would decide the future of Christianity. If Christianity had insisted upon the Gentiles submitting to the demands of the circumcision party, then Christianity would have been merely a sect of Judaism and might have disappeared from history before the end of the first
The importance of this controversy cannot be over-emphasized. "With the decision to admit Gentiles to Christianity directly and not via Jewish ceremonial requirements, Christianity emerged a separate and distinct universal religion." 

The decision threw Christianity and Judaism into open hostility. Paul was to experience this hostility at Iconium (14:1-7), Lystra (14:19) Thessalonica (17:1-9), Beroea (17:13), and at Corinth (18:12 ff). It was to lead to his imprisonment (21:27 ff; cf. 23:12). In each city as Paul began his missionary activities, he would begin it in the Jewish synagogue. The fact that he did meet with some degree of success among both Jews and Gentiles and that he did not require the Gentile converts to submit to Jewish ceremonial requirements in order to become members stirred up the local orthodox Jewish leaders against him. Neither could these leaders accept the heart of Paul's preaching- "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ" (17:3). This opposition sometime took violent form, as at Lystra. It always forced Paul to seek another base of operation other than the synagogue. It led finally to his imprisonment. This happened when he visited Jerusalem to carry gifts from the churches of Asia Minor to the Christians at Jerusalem. There had been sent to Jerusalem certain

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reports accusing Paul of teaching "all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs" (21:21). In order to prove that he was still loyal to Jewish customs, upon the suggestion of some Christian brethren, Paul, with four men under a vow, went to the temple to perform certain religious rites. While there they were seen by "Jews from Asia" who accused Paul of defiling this "holy place" by carrying Greeks into it. (The "holy place" of the temple was opened only to Jews to enter and not to Gentiles.) The charge was not true, for the men who were with Paul were Jews and not Gentiles. Nevertheless, the city was aroused. The people seized Paul and would have then and there killed him had it not been for the timely arrival and intervention of the Roman soldiers of the garrison of Jerusalem. Although he was rescued from the angry mob he was placed under arrest. The Book of Acts ends with Paul in Rome awaiting trial on charges against him dating from the time of this arrest.

According to the Book of Acts the pattern of the relation of Christianity and Judaism had been set. Judaism was to remain the possession of Jews while Christianity was to go out into the Graeco-Roman civilization.
CHAPTER III

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The world into which Christianity came was a world ruled by the Romans. The task of gaining world control, begun by Philip of Macedonia and carried to almost complete success by his son, Alexander the Great, was just about completed when Christianity came. The Romans were completing the task of consolidation. Although the world had been brought under the rule of one great power all was not peace and quiet. However, when Christianity came conditions were comparatively calm, due to the leadership of the great statesman, Augustus Caesar (27 B.C.- 14 A. D.). From a general picture Christianity appeared in a favorable time and under favorable circumstances.

Since Rome was in control of the world, the question naturally arises as to Rome's attitude toward Christianity, as it began to spread over the Empire. For the answer we turn to the Book of Acts. According to the Book of Acts the Roman authorities, in every instance, save one, was a protecting and not an attacking power. Rome was tolerant. In a close study of the period from sources outside the Book of Acts, it can be

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2 Angus, S., loc. cit.
seen that this representation is quite correct. 3

The several instances recorded in the Book of Acts show the Roman attitude as a tolerant one, refusing to take part in a purely religious controversy - the one exception is recorded in Acts 16:22-24, the scene at Philippi-, this reflects the general policy of the Roman authorities towards the various religions in the Empire. 4

We turn now to the examination of the specific instances of the several contacts of Christianity with the Roman authorities. The first reference is found in the account of the trip of Paul and Barnabas to Paphos, on the island of Cyprus (13:4-12). Sergius Paulus was the proconsul there. On hearing of Paul and Barnabas he invited them to teach him the message they pro-

Reference is made to a persecution under Claudius (41 A.D. - 54 A.D.) in Acts 18:2. The Roman writer Suetonius states that this expulsion was because of Jewish rioting "At the instigation of one Christus," the name Christus may have been a misunderstanding of the name Christus, so Suetonius' statement may mean the rioting was stirred up over the preaching of Christ among the Jews of Rome (Mould, E. W. K., Op. Cit., p. 557). This expulsion was not confined to Christians alone but affected all Jews. The Book of Acts does not mention the persecution under Caligula (37 A.D. - 41 A.D.). Perhaps it is not mentioned because this persecution was directed against all the Jews also.

Angus, S., Op. Cit., Chap. II.
request they met some opposition from a fellow Jew, which they overcame. The proconsul became a convert. He was won over to the Christian cause.

In Thessalonica (17:1-9), in spite of the very serious charges brought against the missionaries and their converts the rulers of the city before whom Jason and others were arraigned did nothing more than take security from them to keep the peace, and then released them without punishing them in any way.

Again, when visiting and preaching in Achaia, Paul was brought before Gallio by the Jews, charged with "persuading men to worship God contrary to the law" (18:12-16). Gallio very quickly perceived that the real issue was not political but religious, and his answer reveals his attitude, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourself; I refuse to be a judge of these things." "And he drove them from the tribunal." (18:14-16). Even when the Jews took their revenge upon Sosthenes because of their failure before Gallio, he paid no attention to this affair, leaving the Jews to settle their own religious problem.

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5 Cf. poste, p. 31.
Another account is found in the report on Paul's work in Ephesus (19:35-41). At the behest of one Demetrius, a silversmith, certain Christians were brought before the town clerk. A Jew by the name of Alexander was prompted to prefer charges against them. The real issue was covered over by making the charges religious in nature. The town clerk refused to accept the charges as such, saying, "For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess" (19:37). He dismissed the assembly, refusing to prosecute the men. He advised Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen to seek redress in the proper manner and from the appropriate courts.

In chapters 24 and 25 there is another record of the attitude of the Roman authorities toward the Christians. Paul had gone to Jerusalem in order to carry gifts to the brethren there from the churches of Asia Minor. While there he was thrown into prison on accusations made by the Jews. Before he went to prison he was almost mobbed to death by his enemies. He was rescued by the timely arrival of the Roman garrison under command of Claudius Lysias. Following his arrest he was sent before Felix the governor. After listening to the charges as presented by the Jews Felix was unable to find cause for conviction. Felix was also acquainted with "the Way" (25:22) yet

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6 cf. poste, Chap. V.
he could find no cause for condemning Paul. However, he did not set him at liberty. But he gave orders to the centurion that Paul was to have certain liberties, and that his friends were to be allowed to visit him as well as to attend to his needs. Felix seemed favorably disposed to Paul and to the gospel (25:24-26). The Book of Acts accuses Felix of being hopeful that Paul would offer him a bribe for his freedom (25:26). This situation continued for a space of two years or more. This was at Caesarea, the seat of the Roman government for Palestine.

After about two years Felix was succeeded by Festus as governor. The matter concerning Paul passed into his hands. The trial hardly got started before Festus, for Paul, taking advantage of his citizenship in the Roman Empire appealed to Caesar and to Caesar Festus sent him. Yet there is strong evidence that Festus did not act hastily and that he sought to secure all the facts pertinent to the situation. This was made necessary, however, in order that an accurate report could be sent with Paul to Caesar. Again, Festus refused to be stampeded by the Jews and admitted that he found no grounds for condemnation. Perhaps he might have released Paul, but after consultation with his council, he informed Paul that since Paul had appealed to Caesar, the matter was out of his hands. To Caesar he would have to go. Even King Agrippa advised Festus that Paul was innocent of any crime against Rome. As a prisoner at Rome (28:16-30) Paul was not really treated as an
ordinary criminal. He was allowed almost unlimited freedom.

The treatment of Paul and the other Christians as shown by the Book of Acts, undoubtedly reflects the general principle of the Roman government toward the Christians, as well as towards other religions, during this period. While we have the record of individual governors, it is that also of the Central government. For the subordinate officers were not free to make the rules or lay down the overall principles. They governed according to Rome's edicts.

It is noticeable that throughout the Book of Acts, whenever Christianity is brought in any form to the cognizance of the Roman authorities, its harmless character is vindicated to their complete satisfaction. It is also a remarkable fact that there is no record in the Book of Acts of a condemnation passed, or a punishment inflicted upon Paul or his companions by the Roman authorities, except at Philippi (16:22-24), and then the officials themselves apologized afterwards for their action. It should be noted here that their apology was offered when they learned that the prisoners were Roman citizens (16:38-39).

The first real persecution of the Christians as a group by the Roman government is of a later date than the record in the Acts. It was under Nero (64 A.D.). "A disastrous fire wiped out a large part of Rome. One rumor accused Nero of starting the conflagration, and another blamed the Christians. Nero sought to escape opprobrium by charging the Christians with responsibility, and he instituted a persecution of Christians in Rome which was carried out with horrible torture, resulting in the death of many Christian martyrs." Mould, E.W.K., op. cit., p. 557.
This tolerant attitude meant much to the spread of Christianity. The seat of Christianity passed from Jerusalem to Asia Minor. The list of places is arresting. We find churches established at Syrian Antioch, Cyprus, Pergamum, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Damascus, Cilicia, Troas, Philippi, Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and even Rome. Christianity now belonged to the Roman Empire.
CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIANITY AND THE FOLLOWERS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

There is much evidence that a sect known as the Followers of John the Baptist existed in the first century and even later. In the Synoptic Gospels they are mentioned several times. Baptism, fasting, and prayer characterize these disciples in the time of Christ. Perhaps they were not called a sect but they were marked by characteristics that set them apart from others.

It is held by several scholars that one of the reasons behind the Fourth Gospel was to offset the growing influence of these disciples of John the Baptist. It may be readily seen that the Fourth Gospel contains several allusions to John's Disciples (St. John 1:15; 5:33-36; 1:19-20, and 3:27:30). The writer of this gospel certainly had Johannites in mind when writing, for such a polemic presupposed a sect to argue against.

From the Book of Acts it cannot be determined just how strong or how widespread the sect was at this time. But the account does place a group at Ephesus, numbering about twelve (18:24; 19:7). It can be inferred that there were some in

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1 The unpublished translation summary by Wilma Davis of Joseph Thomas: The Baptist Movement in Palestine and Syria, p.16.
2 Mat. 9:14; cf. Luke 5:33; Mark 2:18; Mat.11:2; Luke 7:18-35, 11:2; Mat. 14:12, and Mark 6:29.
other places, and certainly in Egypt, for Apollos, a native of Alexandria (18:24-25), an ardent evangelist, "Knew only the baptism of John."

The account in the Book of Acts is very meager in details. However, it is sufficient to suggest that the presence of this sect gave the church at Ephesus much concern and was, perhaps, making some headway, or was creating a problem among the Christians. The description given of Apollos shows him to be a formidable foe. He was eloquent, well-trained, an ardent worker, well-versed in the Old Testament, and full of zeal. But his message was incomplete. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, possessed a fervent spirit, and was able to tell accurately about the historic Jesus, but "he knew only the baptism of John." Just exactly what his views were cannot be determined easily. Acts 18:25 suggests that he was a Christian in some sense, that he knew the story of the historic Jesus, believed in him as the Messiah, but did not know of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The other followers of John the Baptist were in the same condition (19:2-3).

What, at first, threatened to become a vexatious problem was handled amicably and turned out advantageously for the Christian cause. Two of the leaders of the church at Ephesus, Prisca and Aquila, attached themselves closely to Apollos, gave him complete instruction in the "way of the Lord", and the learned Alexandrian obtained from these tent-makers a
knowledge of that "mystery" which the ancient Scriptures had only partially revealed. Apollos, filled with new insight, went to Achaia. This move proved effectual, for "when he arrived, he greatly helped those who, through grace, had believed, for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that Christ was Jesus" (18:27-28).

The small company of John's followers, whom Paul met on his arrival, were instructed by him, in conformity with what had been said by John the Baptist himself, that that prophet only preached repentance to prepare men's minds for Christ, who is the true object of faith. On this they received Christian baptism, and were recipients of the miraculous gifts of tongues and prophecy, as were converts in all other churches. They then became a part of the Christian band.
CHAPTER V

CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS IN ROMAN EMPIRE

"Christianity did not grow up in a religious vacuum."^ It cannot, then, be understood out of relationship to its religious environment. The Roman Empire was tolerant toward all types of religion, and Christianity in its expansion met with a variety of religious cults and movements other than Judaism. The religions in the Roman Empire were syncretistic. They were made up of Greek-hero worship and mythology, Emperor worship and a large element of the mystery religions from the East—Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia. 2

Everywhere throughout the ancient world there were local deities and cults. As the Christian missionaries moved about the Empire proclaiming their gospel, they encountered such cults. The Book of Acts presents some vivid pictures of Saint Paul in relationship to these local cults, notably at Lystra, Athens, and Ephesus.

Paul's experience at Lystra (14:8-15) came about because of a miracle of healing performed upon a cripple. This miracle so awed the people that they were ready to concede the presence of the gods among them. They called Barnabas Zeus,

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1 Mould, E.W.K., Essentials of Bible History, p. 572.
and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, Hermes. Immediately the people, led by the priest of the local cult, made ready to offer sacrifices to them. With much difficulty, Paul and Barnabas restrained them in their plans. Some converts to Christianity were gained as a result of their work there.  

Another encounter is recorded as having occurred in Athens (17:16-34). While Paul was waiting there for Silas and Timothy to join him, he was attracted by the sight of a large number of idols. "His spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols" (17:16). He immediately set about on a preaching mission. Conybeare and Howson reconstruct the scene of Athens as Paul moved from the port, through the Peiraic gate, to the heart of the city. He marched past the sculptured forms of Minerva, Jupiter, Apollo, Mercury, the Muses, and Bacchus. His path led among the forms of great men and deified heroes, among the temples, the statues, the altars of the gods of Greece. He saw the creations of mythology represented to the eye, in every form of beauty and grandeur, by the sculptor and the architect. Petronius had said, "There were more gods in Athens than in all the rest of the world," and a Roman satirist, Pausanias had said, "It is easier to find a god there (Athens) than a man."

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3 cf. post, Chap. VI.
Paul, though horrified by this display of idolatry, sought to use the underlying yearning which was expressed in such destitution. It is said that the Athenians, fearing that they had not accounted for all the gods, erected a statue and labeled it "To an unknown God" so that the god would not be offended. Paul uses this fact as a starting point, declaring that "what, therefore, you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." (17:23). Paul attempted to place before them the resurrected Jesus as the answer to their yearning. His efforts met with little success—only a few believed and joined him (17:34). That his preaching was attended with small results is just what should have been expected. In verse 21 we have a fair characterization of the Athenians. Their interest centered in philosophical and religious speculation. His audience was ready enough to listen to his preaching, but could not accept his message. His appeal to them to repent in view of the impending judgment seemed nothing less than absurd. "So Paul went out from among them." (17:33).

The third encounter was at Ephesus (19:28-41). Ephesus was an important city on the main route from Rome to the East. Ephesus was always proud of her position of "warden of the Temple of Artemis." Hellenistic religious cults met and

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5 cf. *poste.*, Chap. VI.
mingled at Ephesus. Almost every cult known to this period found devotees there. The Book of Acts records a conflict with only one, perhaps the strongest one. The conflict was precipitated by Demetrius and his silversmith guild.\textsuperscript{7} The charge by Demetrius was cloaked under the guise of religion. Undoubtedly Christianity was making noticeable headway among the devotees of Artemis, not only in Ephesus, but throughout Asia (19:26). This summary of the speech by the leader of the tradesmen dependent upon the cult of Artemis, is not only highly realistic, it illustrates the degree of success of the Christians as well. It is rather significant that we find no account of any opposition from the cult leaders, but only from those who gained financially from the cult. The author of the Book of Acts seemed more interested in the opposition from business than from that of religion. The religious angle is deftly evaded. However, there is enough evidence to show that Christianity and the other Empire religions were in definite conflict with each other, and, also, that Christianity's success threatened the position of these religions.

These religions were competitors of Christianity for the souls of men as it made its way into the Graeco-Roman world. The Book of Acts shows Christianity successfully overcoming all of the other religions in the Empire.

\textsuperscript{7} cf. poste, Chap. VII.
CHAPTER VI

CHRISTIANITY AND MAGIC

In religion man is primarily concerned with the mysterious phenomena of the universe about him, which mysteries he cannot explain. He considers some of these mysterious forces as friendly and some as hostile. These forces are often regarded as personal. If he considers them friendly, man will seek to put himself in harmonious adjustment to them and will enter upon such practices as he thinks will secure for him the continued favor of these forces who control his world and his destiny. This is a form of what is called worship. If he regards them as hostile, then he will indulge in practices, which are termed magic, designed to compel the supernatural powers to favor him.\(^1\)

The practice of magic is abundantly evidenced in the course of civilization. It is present in proportion to the scale of human progress and is intimately associated with religion. The period covered in this investigation abounds in the practice of magic. There is no wonder, then, that in the Book of Acts are found several accounts of Christianity's contact with magic. We note six different examples of this contact.

\(^{1}\) Mould, E.W.K., Essentials of Bible History, p. 112.
When the Christians were scattered abroad following the stoning of Stephen (8:1-24), Philip went down to a city of Samaria. Under the power of his preaching and his power of healing he created great amazement among the people. They were more impressed by his power to heal than by his preaching. Among the people was one Simon who had won an influential position through the practice of magic. Apparently the wonders and signs which Philip did overshadowed those of Simon, especially when the Holy Spirit was given to the converts by Peter and John laying their hands upon them. Simon saw in this incident a chance, he thought, to improve on his own powers, so he offered to buy the power from the Apostles. He was rebuked by Peter and pleaded for forgiveness. The effect of the Apostles' work was wrought mainly by the wonder at the deeds of power performed in the name of Jesus. The people, Simon in particular, thought that the Apostles possessed the power of magic, and did not fully comprehend their mission.

The account of the work of Paul and Barnabas in Paphos is interesting chiefly because it was here that Paul for the first time, so far as we know, came into contact with a striking and characteristic form of superstition of the age in the person of the sorcerer Bar-Jesus (13:6-12). Bar-Jesus was a representative of a class of men, who possessed a familiarity with the forces of nature which was not shared by their fellow-men, and which was commonly regarded as supernatural in its
origin. They were looked upon as endowed with superhuman power and wisdom, and were able to wield a tremendous influence over the minds of their fellows, an influence which they turned to their own private advantage. Not only did they know how to impress and astonish the common folk but also how to win favor with the rich and the great. That there should have been one of them in the retinue of the proconsul is not at all surprising. It is still less surprising that he should have been hostile to Paul and Barnabas who represented another system and whose preaching might well seem to threaten his influence and credit with his patron. In the conflict with Bar-Jesus Paul exhibits the superior power of Christianity in the very field in which Bar-Jesus and his kind were most skilful.²

The outcome of this encounter was the winning of Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, as a convert to Christianity (13:12). The proconsul's belief is not represented as the effect solely of the miracle. He was already predisposed towards faith in the gospel message of Christ (13:7f.); but this proof of its divine authority overcame his hesitation.³

Paul's next encounter with magic was at Lystra⁴(14:8-18). The incident referred to here was caused by a miracle of healing wrought by Paul upon a man crippled from birth. Paul and

³ cf. ante, Chap. IV.
⁴ cf. poste, Chap. V.
Barnabas were immediately looked upon as gods. The identification of Barnabas, the more silent and passive of the two, with the supreme god Jupiter, and of the more active Paul with Hermes is entirely natural. Hermes was known as the herald or prophet of the gods. The Apostles were looked upon as gods because of their healing power. According to verses 21-22 they met with some success, although the Jews from Antioch and Iconium followed them to Lystra, and caused Paul to be stoned (14:19).

The incident recorded in 16:16-34 has been discussed elsewhere, but it needs mentioning here also. It is another illustration of the place magic held in the life of the people and what happened when it met with Christianity. This is the story of the slave girl at Philippi who had a spirit of divination, which took the form of ventriloquism. The popular reaction to such a condition was of such a nature that the owners of the slave girl were able to turn her power into much gain for themselves. But Christianity again demonstrated its superior powers and thus brought to an end the power of the girl as well as the profits of her owners.

The most vivid account given concerns Ephesus, and this is not surprising for the cult of magic thrived in Ephesus. It was there that Hellenistic religious cults met and mingled. According to the Book of Acts (19:11-20) Christianity made

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6 cf. poste, Chap. VIII.
practically a clean sweep of Ephesus. Paul preached and worked there for a period of better than two years (19:10) and thus was able to launch a continuous fight against paganism. "And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul." (19:11-12). Some itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to do their work through the name of Jesus. At one time "seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this," but an evil spirit leaped upon them causing them to flee wounded and naked (19:14-16). This became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, putting fear upon them and causing many to believe, to confess and to divulge their practices of the magical arts. The result was tremendous. A number of those who practiced the magical arts brought their books and burned them. The value of these books came to "fifty thousand pieces of silver." "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (19:20). Again, Christianity demonstrated its superior power over the forces of magic.

The last account of Paul in contact with magic follows his escape after shipwreck at Malta (28:1-10). The natives showed "unusual kindness" for they lighted a fire and welcomed all of the survivors to the warmth, drenched and shivering as they were in the rain and cold. The Apostle had gathered with his own hands a heap of sticks, and had placed them on the fire, "when a viper came out because of the heat" and fastened to his hand. Paul appeared as a real criminal to the natives now so
they said, "no doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live" (28:4). But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no harm. They waited for the results. At length, when they saw nothing happen to him, they were struck with awe and said that Paul was a god. He made a profound impression upon everyone and he performed several miracles there, notably the healing of the father of Publius, the governor of the island. The results of his stay there are not recorded, as far as the winning of converts is concerned, yet he won many friends. As he departed the islanders presented many gifts to him, and his company.

In every instance of Christianity's contact with magic it showed its superiority. Every encounter ended favorably for Christianity. It excelled in the very realm of magic. The Apostles were quick to direct the attention of the people from themselves by always making known the source of their power—Jesus Christ. However, the people were slow to grasp the fundamental lesson that the Apostles sought to teach by their mighty deeds. The people far too often looked upon them as greater magicians than the local wonder-workers. Some did, at least, some began to follow after the truth which the Apostles declared unto them.
CHAPTER VII

CHRISTIANITY AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Paul, having met with most unfavorable, and trying handling at the hands of the Jews at Thessalonica, went to Beroea. But the Jews followed him. Their work there stirred up the people against Paul, so the local brethren got him off to safety as far as Athens to prevent harm being done to him. While waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him (17:16-34), he opened a campaign for Christ. "He argued in the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there" (17:17). It was while there that he came into contact with the philosophers, the Epicureans and Stoics being specifically named in the Book of Acts. They were divided in their opinions on Paul and his message. In order to get from him a connected discourse they led Paul away from the confusion of the market place to the comparative quiet of the Areopagus, a sacred hill where sat a high court known as the "Council from the Areopagus".

On reaching the Areopagus, they requested Paul to present his cause or teaching (17:19-20). Paul proceeded to expound to them on Jesus and the resurrection (17:22-31). Their interest was more a matter of curiosity than anything else. The Book of Acts is careful to say that "all the Athenians, and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing
except telling or hearing something new" (17:21). They listened quietly until Paul spoke of the resurrection. This was more than their philosophical minds could take. "Some mocked; but others said, 'we will hear you again about this'" (17:32). This is the last of it, for Paul went out from among them. The ideas of retribution beyond the grave and of bodily resurrection (17:31) were incredible to both Stoics and Epicureans. Paul had run up against cold intellectualism and it was unable to comprehend this spiritual fact which he presented. Only one member of the Areopagus, Dionysius, was won.\footnote{cf. ante, Chap. VI.}

The Stoics were those who followed the philosophy of Zeno (c.342 B.C.-272 B.C.). Zeno thought that the world reveals itself as the embodiment of a divine will. All reality, however, is material, and the soul is only a kind of sublimated matter doomed to eventual dissolution. But since the world is the work of divine wisdom and is governed by divine law, it is man's duty to conform freely to whatever destiny may be his. The wise man should be free from passion, unsubdued by joy or grief, willingly submissive to natural law. The Stoic is not easily excited, apparently or professedly indifferent to pleasure or pain.

The Epicureans were those who followed the philosophy of Epicurus (341 B.C.-270 B.C.). Epicurus taught that
pleasure is the only good and the end of all morality. The life of pleasure, however, to be genuine, must be a life of prudence, honor, and justice, and a man's happiness is properly attained by taking away from his desires. An Epicurean is one given to luxury or to sensual gratification; adapted to luxurious tastes.

There is no wonder that Paul went out from among them without having attained unto greater success.
CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTIANITY AND VESTED INTERESTS

The conflicts already discussed have all hinged upon religion or politics in some form or another. In this chapter we see the conflict from another angle— Vested Interests. Religious and social theories, then as today, did not become dangerous or important until they threatened the stability of Vested Interests and government. We find at least, two cases which give insight into this conflict in the period under investigation.

The first account we find given in Acts 16:16-24. Here at Philippi we run across men who were exploiting a slave girl who was supposed to have a spirit of divination. This case was already treated in the chapter dealing with Christianity and magic but it is significant at this point also. This slave girl came under the influence of Paul and Silas and she was restored "to her right mind." Her natural powers resumed their course; and the gains of her masters were gone.

Violent rage on the part of these men was the immediate result. They saw that their influence with the people, and with it, all "hope of gain", was at an end. They proceeded therefore to take summary revenge. They hauled Paul and Silas before the rulers. Knowing that the Romans took no cognizance of religious disputes as such, they must have felt some diffi-
culty in stating their grievance. The law had no remedy for property depreciated by exorcism. The true state of the case was therefore concealed, and an accusation was laid before the rulers on this wise: "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice" (16:20,21). They attempted to fight out the issue on political and racial lines. Paul and Silas lost the battle but won the day for Christ in Philippi (16:25-40).

Paul and his companions ran hard against Vested Interests again at Ephesus (19:24-41). "Ephesus was the gate of the Orient, the portal to the Great Bagdad Caravan route, a colorful bazaar where the goods of the East and West were piled high in brilliant confusion. But chiefly Ephesus was celebrated as the home of magic and religion." Magic and religion are always lucrative atmospheres for financial speculations and unholy gain. Around the worship of Diana (Artemis) had grown up a strong craft of silversmiths. These silversmiths made and sold images and other relics of Diana to the people. This work had grown into a large and lucrative business. The preaching of Paul had played havoc with this industry. So Demetrius, apparently the president of the guild, called the craft together

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2 cf. ante, Chap. IV.
3 Spencer, F. A., Beyond Damascus, p. 301.
and presented the seriousness of the matter. He first appealed to their pocketbooks (19:25) and then to their religion (19:27). Such an appeal could not be lost when thrown like fire on such inflammable materials. The infuriated feeling of the crowd of assembled artisans broke out in a cry in honor of the divine patron of their city and their craft, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

The excitement among this important and influential class of men was not long in spreading through the whole city (19:29). The infuriated mob rushed to the theater. They were unable to find Paul so they dragged with them Gaius and Aristarchus, two of his companions in travel. These two individuals were brought before the town clerk who readily saw through the charges and dismissed the assembly.5

The real cause of conflict in both instances was that Christianity cut directly across the heart of the practices of these two interests. The position of Christianity was diametrically opposed to that held by the leaders of these two concerns. There are just two cases mentioned in the Book of Acts but it may be inferred that there were other cases (1 Cor. 8) and the results were the same in every instance. That is the pattern followed by true Christianity even to this day. The conflict was not with business per se but with those business practices that put profit before the worth of humanity,

5 cf. ante, Chap. IV.
that put selfish interest above ethical conduct, that sought to exploit every condition of mankind to satiate personal, individual, group, or class ambition, that meant the enslavement of the bodies, minds, and spirits of humanity.
CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

In the beginning Christianity was known as "the Way". Primarily this meant a way of salvation, but it also included a way of life. The people with whom Christianity started were not conscious that they were launching a new religion. No records were kept; no organization, ecclesiastical or physical was formed. For the first twenty years following the career of Jesus Christianity moved with the members unaware of the far-reaching significance of what was taking place among them. It took its place within the general framework of Judaism, and was content to follow in that beaten path until forced out of it.

However, the Christians held certain views which differed from those of Judaism— that of Jesus as the Messiah of Jewish expectation, that of belief in his resurrection, and that of loyalty and devotion to his person. By their boldness and daring to proclaim these beliefs publicly, and by so doing win others to their beliefs, they were brought into conflict with the leaders of Judaism. This conflict reached open proportions in the execution of Stephen and full cleavage over the issue of circumcision.

On the issue of circumcision the separation was final and clear. The one tie that could have held Christianity within Judaism was perhaps broken. For one to become a Christian it
was no longer necessary to meet the external demands of Judaism. Thus Christianity was opened to Jew and Gentile alike, while Judaism retained its exclusiveness. With the stoning of Stephen Christianity was driven from the cloistered halls of Judaism and sought refuge in the farflung places of the Graeco-Roman world. Unlike the Jews of the Diaspora the scattered Christians did not sulk in their tents. They became missionaries. They took literally the command of Jesus, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). This became their vision; this became their task.

When Christianity arose, the entire Mediterranean world was under a single ruler, the Roman Emperor. The history of Christianity in the period under study is an interesting one and one of deep importance. This was without doubt a critical period for the early Church. This is confirmed by this investigation. Christianity did not enter a field void of competition. Christianity met with a fortunate and tolerant attitude, however, from the Roman government. It is noticeable that throughout the Book of Acts, whenever Christianity is brought in any form to the cognizance of the Roman authorities, its harmless character is vindicated to their complete satisfaction. It is also a remarkable fact that there is no record in the Book of Acts of a condemnation passed, or a punishment inflicted upon Paul or his companions by the Roman authorities, except at Philippi (16:22-24), and then the officials themselves
apologized afterwards for their actions. This tolerant attitude meant much to the spread of Christianity. Asia Minor became the center of Christian activity and it even reached to Rome itself.

While Rome proved tolerant, her tolerance did not remove every and all obstacles from the pathway of Christianity, for at every place it met forces with which it had to contend. All these forces were struggling for the souls of men just as was Christianity. Each claimed for itself the possession of the answer for which men had searched from time immemorial. These forces found expression in the Followers of John the Baptist, other religions in the Empire, Magic, Greek philosophy, and certain forms of business.

In a closer summary of the conflicts with various forces, I find that so far as the Book of Acts is concerned, the Followers of John the Baptist were to be found as a small group at Ephesus, numbering twelve in all. It is also probable that they were to be found elsewhere, even in Egypt— Apollos, an Alexandrian, knew about John the Baptist. We know from the Gospels that John's followers maintained their own separate existence even after their master's death, and that by no means all of them became disciples of Jesus. It is not clear as to what constituted the point of conflict. The account is considerably confused and the author himself seems not to have had a very clear conception of the position of those whom he describes. He calls them disciples, that is
Christian disciples, and yet he implies that they knew nothing about Jesus (19:1-3). Whatever the nature and activity of this group were, it is certain that they created a problem for the Christians. The very fact that they were introduced into the picture means that, in some way, they stood athwart the pathway of the Christians. However, they were won over to the Christian cause, and Apollos became an ardent and capable worker therein.

It was readily seen that Christianity did not grow up in a religious vacuum. The Roman Empire was tolerant toward all types of religion, and Christianity in its expansion, met with a variety of religious cults and movements other than Judaism. The religions in the Empire were syncretistic, made up of elements of Greek Hero-Worship and Mythology, Roman Emperor-Worship and Eastern Mystery-Religions. Christianity, in its spread, ran with full force into them. The clash came into the open at Lystra, Athens, and Ephesus, according to the Book of Acts.

The issue was tied up with the problem of salvation. The clash came over the question as to how salvation was to be had. The history of the period testifies to the desperate moral condition which existed. Men were in search of a way out of this moral morass. Each religion made claim to having the answer. It was at this point that the real conflict existed. Christianity proved superior in every encounter. "The word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (19:20). "And all
the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles." (15:12).

It was not surprising to find Christianity meeting with magic. Wherever there are ignorance and superstition and crudities of religious belief, there magic is to be found. Such a condition existed in the first century A.D. The Apostles joined battle with magic in Samaria, Paphos, Lystra, Philippi, Ephesus, and Malta. The Apostles possessed unusual power of healing and put it to use on several occasions. This power of healing was not an unmixed blessing. On several occasions it was the cause of deep misunderstanding of the Apostles' real mission and it obscured the heart of their message. It made it difficult for the Evangelists to effect their primary obligation--the preaching of the Gospel, and all that went with the preaching. One component of local magicians became hostile and dangerous for it was unable to match its powers with that of the Apostles. This threatened the position and influence of the local magicians. Such a state of affairs was more than they could stand. The other component sought to enhance its position by purchasing this power from the Apostles. However, this was not true in every case. Many others believed and were baptized into the Christian fold. The Book of Acts makes it very clear that the extraordinary powers of the Apostles were always used as the means to an end and never as an end in itself. They always gave the credit to
Jesus.

The account of the clash with Greek philosophy is remarkable in that it is the only conflict out of which Christianity does not come with colors flying high. However, her colors are yet unfurled although limp in the breeze. Success in Athens was small. Paul did not remain among the philosophers very long.

The final conflict was that with certain vested interests encountered at Philippi and Ephesus. Christianity cut directly across the practices of these businesses and interfered with the profits. At Philippi Paul restored to her right mind a slave girl whose power of ventriloquism was proving profitable to her owners and at Ephesus he caused to dwindle the profits of the silversmiths by turning the people away from the worship of Artemis. The men who thus were deprived of their sources of profit in both cases, rose up indignantly against the missionaries. It was not a pleasant situation. However, the Christians came out victorious in the end. Christianity had triumphed again. The fight here was against selfishness, exploitation, greed and hypocrisy.

In dramatic and vivid clearness the Book of Acts presents early Christianity as a powerful and successful movement. It was opposed by many strong and determined forces, which proved unequal to cope with the Christian message and its
spirit-filled messengers. The battle moved, not always in sunshine, under clear skies, and on unobstructed roads, but always successfully and victoriously.
Abstract of Thesis
THE EARLY CONFLICTS OF CHRISTIANITY
AS SEEN IN ACTS

BY

Charles Hebert Dubra
(A.B., Claflin College, 1928; B.D., Gammon Theological Seminary, 1932)
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

1946
ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis constitutes the results of a study of the conflicts of early Christianity during the period from c.29 A.D. to c.60 A.D. It seeks to answer the questions of their causes, nature, and outcome. The basic source was the Book of Acts. While other sources were consulted, the Book of Acts was the final authority.

Such problems directly connected with the Book of Acts itself, such as its authorship, historical accuracy, and factual reliability, did not fall within the scope of the thesis. Nevertheless I was to face these questions often in the course of the study. As important as they were the importance of this study did rest upon answers to them. However, I concluded that the author of the Book of Acts does not give exhaustive details about the rise and spread of Christianity. He is silent about much we wish to know about— for instance, the outcome of Paul's imprisonment at Rome. The Book of Acts gives selected incidents which vividly depict how Christianity got its start and how it was spread by Paul, in particular, in the North Mediterranean world. For a more detailed account of the work of Paul we must turn to his letters and epistles.

Much work has already been done in the history of Christianity by other writers, among whom are S. Angus,
S. J. Case, Clarence Craig, W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, A. C. McGiffert, and E. W. K. Mould (See bibliography). However, their works give a picture of the general history of Christianity and cover a much longer time period than this thesis. In this thesis I have sought to cover only the beginnings of the Christian movement—the specific period from shortly after the Ascension of Jesus to Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

The term "conflict" denotes a strife for mastery, a clash or divergence of opinions, interests, and motives, a moral and mental struggle occasioned by incompatible desires and aims. It is so used in this thesis. The conflicts discussed here are those of an external nature, and the thesis has no reference to those within the Christian group itself, as for instance, the controversy between Peter and the Jerusalem group (Acts 10).

The historical method has been used. I have limited the work to that of a description of the conflicts as seen in the Book of Acts and have omitted, as much as was possible, an attempt to interpret and to evaluate. Nevertheless, a certain amount of both may be discovered in the thesis.

The thesis is organized under the following headings: Christianity and Judaism, Christianity and the Roman Empire, Christianity and the Followers of John the Baptist, Christianity
and Other Religions in the Roman Empire, Christianity and Magic, Christianity and Greek Philosophy, Christianity and Vested Interests, and Conclusion.
Summary

In the beginning Christianity was known as "the Way". Primarily this meant a way of salvation, but it also included a way of life. The people with whom Christianity started were not conscious that they were launching a new religion. No records were kept; no organization, ecclesiastical or physical was formed. For the first twenty years following the career of Jesus Christianity moved with the members unaware of the far-reaching significance of what was taking place among them. It took its place within the general framework of Judaism, and was content to follow in that beaten path until forced out of it.

However, the Christians, held certain views which differed from those of Judaism- that of Jesus as the messiah of Jewish expectation, that of belief in his resurrection, and that of loyalty and devotion to his person. By their boldness and daring to proclaim these beliefs publicly and by so doing win others to their beliefs, they were brought into conflict with the leaders of Judaism. This conflict reached open proportions in the execution of Stephen and full cleavage over the issue of circumcision. With the stoning of Stephen Christianity was driven from the cloistered halls of Judaism and sought refuge in the far-flung places of the Graeco-Roman world. Unlike the Jews of the Diaspora the scattered Christians did not sulk in their tents. They became missionaries. They took literally
the command of Jesus, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). This became their vision; this became their task.

When Christianity arose, the entire Mediterranean world was under a single ruler, the Roman Emperor. The history of Christianity in the period under study is an interesting one and one of deep importance. This was without doubt a critical period for the early church. Christianity did not enter a field void of competition. Christianity met with a fortunate and tolerant attitude, however, from the Roman government. It is noticeable that throughout the Book of Acts, whenever Christianity is brought in any form to the cognizance of the Roman authorities, its harmless character is vindicated to their complete satisfaction. It is also a remarkable fact that there is no record in the Book of Acts of a condemnation passed, or a punishment inflicted upon Paul or his companions by the Roman authorities, except at Philippi (16:22-24), and then the officials themselves apologized afterwards for their actions. This tolerant attitude meant much to the spread of Christianity. Asia Minor became the center of Christian activity and it even reached to Rome itself.

While Rome proved tolerant, her tolerance did not make Christianity's pathway entirely clear of obstacles. For at every place it met forces with which it had to contend. All these forces were struggling for the souls of men just as was
Christianity. Each claimed for itself the possession of the answer for which men had searched from time immemorial. These forces found expression in the Followers of John the Baptist, other religions in the Empire, Magic, Greek philosophy, and certain forms of business.

According to the Book of Acts, the Followers of John the Baptist were to be found as a small group at Ephesus, numbering twelve in all. It is not clear as to what constituted the point of conflict. The account is considerably confused and the author himself seems not to have had a very clear conception of the position of those whom he describes (19:1-3). Whatever the nature and activity of this group were, it is certain that they created a problem for the Christians. That they were introduced into the picture points in this direction and indicates that they stood athwart the pathway of the Christians. However, they were won over to the Christian cause, and one of them, Apollos, became an ardent and capable worker therein.

As the Roman Empire was tolerant towards Christianity so it was with other religions and Christianity, in its expansion, met with a variety of religious cults and movements other than Judaism. The religions in the Empire were syncretistic, made up of elements of Greek Hero-Worship and Mythology, Roman Emperor-Worship, and Eastern Mystery-Religions. Christianity ran with full force into them at Lystra (14:8-18),
Athens (17:22-29), and Ephesus (19:23-41). The issue was tied up with the problem of salvation. The history of the period testifies to the desperate moral condition which existed. Men were in search of a way out of this moral morass. Each religion made claim to having the answer. The clash came over the manner of how salvation was to be had. The real point of conflict was at this point. However, Christianity proved superior in every encounter. "The word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (19:20).

It was not surprising to find Christianity meeting with magic. Wherever there are ignorance and superstition and crudities of religious belief, there magic is to be found. Such a condition existed in the first century of the Christian Era. The Apostles joined battle with magic in Samaria (8:9 ff), Paphos (13:8-12), Lystra (14:11-18), Philippi (16:16-24), Ephesus (19:11-20), and Malta (28:1-10). Christianity had to fight magic in the very bailiwick of magic. The Apostles possessed unusual healing power and made use of it on several occasions. This was not an unmixed blessing, however. Most of the times their real mission was obscured by their work of healing. The healing was misunderstood by the people. Some of the local magicians became enemies of the Apostles because their influence and position were endangered by the superior work of the Apostles; others thought that it could be purchased for a sum of money; in one place the Apostles were worshipped
as gods. Yet some noteworthy results came out of it. Many became Christians. The Apostles never used the unusual powers as an end in itself but as a means to an end and always gave the glory to God.

The account of the clash with Greek philosophy at Athens (chap. 17) is remarkable in that it was the only conflict out of which Christianity did not come with colors flying high. However, her colors were still unfurled although limp in the breeze. Success was small, only a few converts to Christianity. There were only two philosophies mentioned, Stoicism and Epicureanism. Paul did not remain long among the philosophers.

The final conflict was that with Vested Interests encountered at Philippi (16:16-24) and Ephesus (19:11-20). In both instances we find gross exploitation. At Philippi it was the case of the owners of a slave girl, with the power of ventriloquism, who made use of this strange power to make money and at Ephesus it was the case of silversmiths who exploited the people by making and selling images of the goddess Diana. Both endeavors proved profitable to these two groups. But the work of Paul played havoc with both groups and it brought down their wrath upon him. It was not a pleasant situation. However, the Christians came victorious in the end. The fight here was against selfishness, exploitation, greed, and hypocrisy.
In dramatic and vivid clearness the Book of Acts presents early Christianity as a powerful and successful movement. It was opposed by many strong and determined forces, which proved unequal to cope with the Christian message and its spirit-filled messengers. The battle moved, not always in sunshine, under clear skies, and unobstructed roads, but always successfully and victoriously.
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