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DEDICATION

Thank you Mom and Dad for your guidance, support, and encouragement in helping me achieve my goals.
I express my gratitude to the faculty in the history department at California State University, Northridge. Dr. Frank L. Vatai, I have benefited enormously from your mentorship, instruction, and friendship. Dr. Rachel T. Howes, thank you for your advice and encouragement. Dr. Patricia Jaurez-Dappe, I am grateful for your interesting classes that have taught me the historian’s craft. Dr. Clementine Oliver, I will always remember the several enjoyable classes I took with you as an undergraduate that inspired me to pursue graduate studies.
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ABSTRACT

CHRISTIAN DIVERSITY IN ROME:
THE DIALOGUE OF ORTHODOXY AND HERESY

By

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Master of Arts in History

Before the reign of Constantine, Christianity in Rome was characterized by remarkable diversity. Christians came from different ethnicities, social stratifications, levels of education, they believed in different forms of Christianity, and worshiped in several house-churches scattered throughout the city as well as cemetery grounds just outside the city walls. Although the Roman episcopacy developed in the second-half of the second century, their authority over Christians in Rome and throughout the Roman Empire did not occur until after Constantine’s reign. To prove that the Roman episcopacy lacked complete authority this thesis undertakes an analysis of the implications of the Council of Nicaea, illustrating that theological divisions continued to increase until the fourth century. This thesis argues that the absence of a central ecclesiastical authority not only instigated theological divisions within Rome but also on an empire-wide level. The analysis of the Council of Nicaea argues that Constantine acted as the central authority that assembled ecclesiastical leaders together to resolve their theological differences and personal grievances. In addition, this thesis argues that the Nicene Creed became influential in the formation of the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy by combating Christian diversity through labeling non-conformists as heretics and conquering paganism.
Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Thesis Statement

Christianity emerged full of diversity before the reign of Emperor Constantine. In the city of Rome, Christian diversity is revealed through several local conditions: Christians came from different ethnicities, social stratifications, levels of education, and they worshiped in several house-churches scattered throughout the city as well as cemetery grounds just outside the city walls. Christians worshiped in house-churches scattered throughout Rome because of the influence of the ancient household structure, wealth, and the desire for privacy. The diverse worship locations in the city and the countryside indicate the absence of a central governing authority, which resulted in significant theological diversity.

Although the Roman episcopacy developed in the second-half of the second century, theological diversity continued and even escalated among Christians in Rome and in other countries.\(^1\) During the reign of Constantine theological diversity reached an all-time new height. The Emperor Constantine’s legalization of Christianity, and the publicity that accompanied the transition from private to public worship revealed how varied theological diversity had truly become. The infighting, disagreements, and conflicts between various Christian divisions impeded Constantine from transforming his empire into the Kingdom of God and enjoying an unprecedented peace. In an effort to unite Christians, Constantine assembled ecclesiastical leaders at the Council of Nicaea. The outcome of this assembly was the creation of a doctrinal creed that forced unity, resulting in the creation of the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy, and the

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\(^1\) Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 404 has conducted research on how the Roman episcopacy formed from a Christian official he terms the “administer of external affairs.” His investigation into the Roman episcopacy is considered the definitive work on the subject, and is generally accepted by scholars. Lampe must be given credit throughout this thesis for his remarkable studies of Christianity in Rome. Any investigation of Christianity in Rome begins with Lampe as a reference. Another very important work that should be frequently referenced for the study of Christianity in Rome is Douglas J. Moo’s *New International Commentary on the New Testament the Epistle to the Romans*. Moo’s commentary is the most up-to-date synthesis of research into Christianity in Rome. [All dates in this thesis are C.E. unless otherwise indicated.]
conception of a philosophical framework that proclaimed Christianity’s superiority over anything the ancient world ever produced, thereby conquering paganism.

1.2 Historiography

The increasing range of scholarly work in Early Christian Studies has revealed the complexity of the discipline. Some topics have provoked an overwhelming amount of discussion; namely the Trinitarian controversy, the development of doctrine, the clergy and laity, or liturgy. The amount of different topics and themes under analysis by scholars has furthermore revealed the diversity of the religion itself.

For this reason it is common for a historian to clarify which Christianity they will discuss in their investigation. Scholars alike concede that Christianity did not emerge as a unified religion from the start, rather it was diverse in beliefs, practices, and in a nearly constant state of change in “ever-shifting geographical, social-political, and cultural contexts.” Indeed scholars concede that Christian worship in the first three centuries is far from a unified and coherent religion. Walter Bauer’s Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity for example, argued that Christianity began as a “pluralistic movement and that the claim of the later “orthodox” fathers that they alone had been there first was historically not verifiable.” As Bauer’s groundbreaking study proved it is quite incorrect to think of Christianity as unified since the beginning; the history of early Christianity is in fact the history of several different Christian communities distinct in content, interpretation, and practices depending on location. For this reason it is

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2 Karen L. King, Which Early Christianity? 66. The article, Diversity of Early Christianity published by PBS contains statements by various scholars about Christian diversity. L. Michael White for example speaks of diversity in the city of Rome in this article: “At one point in Rome,... Justin Martyr has his Christian school in one part of the city, and the gnostic teacher Valentinus is in another school in Rome, and another so-called heretic by the name of Marcion is also in Rome just down the street somewhere. All of these along side of the official papal tradition that developed as part of St. Peter's See in Rome, all there together. So, even within one city, we can have great diversity.”

3 Maxwell E. Johnson, The Apostolic Tradition, 32.

common for scholars to focus their study on the history of early Christianity in a specific location: Palestine and Syria, North Africa and Egypt, Asia Minor, Spain, Gaul, or Italy and Rome.

The early Christians acknowledged the existence of different forms of their religion by a dialogue of orthodox and heresy, right and wrong, or true and false. This is most apparent in the fourth century when the differences among Christians are vividly illustrated in the Trinitarian controversy. This discussion continued throughout the centuries as scholars, deeply moved by their religious convictions, frequently spoke of the various divisions of Christianity according to the same dialogue as early Christians and tried to minimalize theological differences by great intellectual effort. The rise of historical criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries emphasized the presence of theological and historical differences among texts, especially the New Testament and the writings of Church Fathers. With this discovery came the categorization of different forms of Christianity by scholars still practiced today: Jewish Christianity, Gentile Christianity, Gnostic Christianity, Elite Christianity, or Popular Christianity.

The most revolutionary development in defining Christian diversity came about when Helmut Koester organized his *Introduction to the New Testament: History and Literature of Early Christianity* by geographical regions. When Christianity is studied according to a specific geographical region the complexity of the religion is revealed, manifesting in the reality that it first emerged as a disorganized cluster of autonomous house-churches that were extremely fractionized, theologically divided, and existing simultaneously at times even within the same

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5 Eusebius, *Church History* 1.1 contains the first recording of the classic view of Orthodoxy and Heresy.
6 An example of an early work that analyzed theological and historical dissimilarities in the New Testament texts and the writings of the Church Fathers is F.C. Baur, *Church History of the First Three Centuries*. Baur argued that several New Testament works such as *Acts* and the Pauline epistles are best understood as attempts to unify the church by reconciling disagreements.
city. Previous scholarship into this topic in regards to the city of Rome includes the historian Douglas J. Moo, who comments in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament the Epistle to the Romans* that early Christians in Rome were fractionized, but without any explanation or thorough analysis as to why this phenomenon occurred.  

8 Peter Lampe also argued in *From Paul to Valentinus* that Christians, even the later heretics, worshiped in multiple house-churches that were scattered throughout Rome modeled after the fractionation of Jewish synagogues.  

9 Lampe’s observation of fractionation is widely accepted as an accurate depiction of pre-Constantine Christianity in Rome by other historians as well. Roger W. Gehring for example, asserted in *House Church and Mission* that early Christians developed a plurality of house-churches within Rome and other cities, mostly because of the influence of the ancient household structure.  

10 Also, although Kim Bowes’ investigation *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* mainly focuses on Christianity from the third until the fifth century, she nevertheless observes that the fractionation of pre-Constantine Christian house-churches in Rome and in other cities is due to their desire for privacy.  

11 This thesis continues the debate begun by these scholars by arguing that local conditions in the sense of social stratification, the desire for privacy, theological distinction, level of education, the ancient household structure *oikos*, and a lack of centrality is to account for the fractionation and

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8 Moo, 5 comments that Christians met in various house-churches in Rome and were theologically divided but without any explanation as to why or how this occurred.

9 Lampe, xiii asserts that Christians worshiping in several house-churches is a “social pattern [which] matches the profile of the separated synagogues in Rome.” Lampe, 364 furthermore reiterates “Christian fractionation stands against the background of a Jewish community in the city of Rome that was broken up into a number of independent synagogue communities.”

10 Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: the Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity*, 144 synthesizes the evidence discovered by other historians to prove that “a plurality of house churches” existed in Rome as well as in other Greco-Roman cities.

11 After briefly mentioning the privacy of house-churches Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*, 64 comments that pre-Constantine Christianity in Rome was “among the most heterogeneous and fractured.”
theological diversity of Christians until the time of Constantine, not only in Rome but also throughout the Roman empire.

Any discussion of Christian diversity naturally leads to an examination of the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy. James Dunn’s argument in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, for example, borrowed Bauer’s thesis that Christianity emerged full of diversity while also emphasizing the lack of any form of orthodoxy. Since the studies of Bauer and Dunn, scholars have generally agreed that Christianity did not exist in a unified and coherent form in the beginning with few exceptions. Such investigations by scholars tend to perceive Christian Orthodoxy as simply one of the various divisions of the religion all thriving at the same time sometimes in the same location. When Christian Orthodoxy is studied in its beginning stage it is sometimes labeled as “proto-orthodoxy,” a neologism by Bart D. Ehrman. Ehrman’s argument in *Lost Christianies* followed the trend established by Bauer and Dunn to argue that Christianity in the beginning is rather best thought of as “Christianities,” and that “proto-orthodoxy” emerged from the confusion of diversity to a position of dominance.

1.3 Methodology

Local conditions in the sense of ethnic identity, social stratification, level of education, residential quarters, place of worship, theological diversity, and the lack of centrality reveals the extent of Christian diversity in Rome. Diversity in the sense that Christians did not come from only one ethnicity, one social stratification, live in one residential quarter of the city, worship in one location (fractionation), and believe in only one form of Christianity (theological diversity).

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12 Andrea Kostenberger, Michael J. Kruger, and I. Howard Marshall, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity*. This work by several authors argues contrary to Bauer’s thesis and Dunn’s investigation in an effort to discredit the discoveries of these two scholars and their concept of Christian diversity. The weakness of this study is the authors’ narrow-minded theoretical argument that unity existed in the New Testament times and thus, completely undermines any trace of diversity. These scholars overlook the possibility discussed later in this thesis that the various divisions of Christianity may have tolerated each other.
By focusing on the role and significance of important individuals, locations, and or events in Rome and its surrounding countryside this thesis will examine the emergence and development of Christian diversity. The investigation of the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy will likewise focus on important individuals, locations, and events, but primarily outside of Rome. To avoid superfluous detail it is noted when scholars generally agree on a particular subject. This is especially the case when such a subject is quite the large discussion point, perhaps an entire thesis in itself. Also, to avoid generalizations and assumptions archaeology is used to supplement the literary evidence when possible.

1.4 Sources

This analysis relies on an assortment of literary and archeological evidence. Archeology has revealed the diversity of Christian communities. For instance, historians have examined what church buildings reveal about the liturgies performed within them. Archeology is not limited to architecture alone; but when combined with art, artifacts, or epigraphs the historian is able to discern how Christian communities expressed and transmitted their religious beliefs. The term “visual culture” is commonly used to refer to the material evidence of images and artifacts, which reflect aspects of the community that produced them. A study of Christian “visual culture,” as expressed in the material remains is especially useful since these pieces of evidence reflect aspects of everyday Christian life that may not be easily observed in written documents. Thus archeology is helpful in giving a “voice” to the “voiceless,” or that is to say that the everyday life of the commoner, the illiterate, and the poor is especially revealed through the material remains since these people are rarely heard of in the literary record that usually correspond to higher and

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13 An excellent example of an investigation that focuses on archaeology to discover the liturgies performed within Church buildings is Ramsay MacMullen, The Second Church Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400.
14 Mark Humphries, Material Evidence (1): Archaeology, 92-98.
more educated social stratifications.\textsuperscript{15} Of course it is difficult to extract specific details from archeology alone; it is usually necessary to appeal to some sort of documentation to make sense of physical evidence and tell the story of the place and objects.

Epigraphy, paleography, and codicology provide the document details to accompany the archaeological evidence. Although pre-Constantine Christian epigraphs are hard to verify if not discover in the first place, a significant number of inscriptions approximately 50,000 (mostly post- Constantine), have been published. Since Christianity largely was a world of texts the writings ranging from scripture, the Church Fathers, bishops, private letters, and graffiti are vital to studying the religion.\textsuperscript{16} Of course for the earliest descriptions of Christianity scholars frequently have to refer to the New Testament. Scholars beginning in the nineteenth century translated original Greek and Latin texts and made their translations known to the public in an effort to popularize or perhaps even publicize the study of early Christianity as a discipline.\textsuperscript{17} Such translations compose the majority of primary literary sources available to the student of early Christianity. Notable collections of texts include the \textit{Ante-Nicene} and \textit{Post-Nicene Fathers}, \textit{Ancient Christian Writers}, and the \textit{Fathers of the Church Series}. The translations vary ever so slightly, to such a small degree that it is sometimes difficult to notice a difference in the passages. The collection of texts used more frequently than all others in this thesis include the \textit{Ante-Nicene} and \textit{Post-Nicene Fathers}.

The majority of early Christian writers cited in this thesis lived between the first and fifth centuries and lived in or visited Rome. Clement of Rome (ca. 88 or 97) for example, is

\textsuperscript{17} Elizabeth A. Clark discusses the translation of primary sources in her article \textit{From Patristics to Early Christian Studies}, 9-14.
traditionally reputed to have served as the third or sometimes fourth bishop of Rome. Another important writer is Minucius Felix (late second or early third century), who is usually remembered as a Christian apologist. Hermas (ca. 90-150) is also frequently cited throughout this thesis and generally is referred to as one of the apostolic fathers. The writings of Hippolytus (ca. 170-236), a controversial bishop, although not as well known as other early Christian texts are nevertheless a glimpse into Christianity in Rome during the late-second century. One of the most familiar names to students of Christianity this thesis cites is Justin the Martyr (ca. 165), a Christian apologist and famous martyr who witnessed Christianity in Rome during the second century. Justin’s student Tatian (second century) wrote various works and became a popular teacher in Rome. Tertullian (ca. 200), a well-known prolific writer lived in North Africa and migrated to Rome to serve as a political consul.

This thesis also frequently cites Irenaeus (ca. 115-202), a bishop of Lyons who lived and studied in Rome before eventually suffering martyrdom in the capital city. Also, the works of Lactantius (ca. 250-325) are a valuable witness to Christianity during the reign of Constantine. Origen (ca. 185-251) was a very learned Christian teacher during his day and prolific writer. He settled in Alexandria and possibly visited Rome at least once, where he came into contact with Hippolytus. Eusebius’ (ca. 260-339) writings are a valuable source of information, he is remembered as “the first historian of the church” as well as a bishop of Caesarea and admirer of Constantine. Orosius (early fifth century) may not be as well known as other Christian writers but among scholars he is remembered as a historian from Spain that became influenced by Augustine’s the City of God.\footnote{The dates and biographical information of the different Christian writers is provided by Everett Ferguson’s Encyclopedia of Early Christianity.}
Secondary sources are quite extensive and are of a varied lot. Scholars and historians have focused on writing histories of the Christian Church in various lengths, sometimes producing very thorough multi-volume sets, studies of several hundred pages, or even short introductions. Since scholars concede that the study of Christianity is a complex undertaking it is common for an investigation to focus on one particular aspect of the religion, producing a monograph. Encyclopedias are also frequently written for a comprehensive yet all-encompassing reference of various subjects. It is also very popular for historians and scholars to frequently publish their work in various journals. Secondary sources are also valuable for their inclusion of archaeological evidence, which at times is difficult to locate and acquire.

1.5 Organization

This thesis is divided into twelve chapters. Chapter two provides an introduction to Christianity and its emergence into the city of Rome. Chapters three through six investigate local conditions that indicate Christian diversity: ethnic identity, residential quarters, social stratification, and fractionation or various worship locations. Chapter seven argues that the local conditions reveal theological diversity among Christians in Rome. Chapter eight relies on the analysis of chapter seven to examine the level of education that Christians in Rome likely had obtained. Chapter nine is related to the discussion of theological diversity investigated in chapter seven as well, arguing that the poorest Christians worshipped in the countryside and retained traditions from their pre-Christian past. Chapter ten provides an explanation for the fractionation

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19 Philip Schaff’s *History of the Christian Church* is a large multi-volume set. Peter Brown’s *The Rise of Western Christendom* and W.H.C. Frend’s *Rise of Christianity* are smaller than Schaff’s history but still of considerable size. Keith Ward’s *Christianity, A Short Introduction* is an example of a smaller introduction to Christian history.

20 Paul E. Bradshaw’s *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* is a monograph on liturgy. Everett Ferguson’s *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* is a monograph on Baptism.

21 Everett Ferguson’s *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* and Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker’s *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* are both popular encyclopedias for early Christian history.

22 The most popular journals include: *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, *Biblical Archaeologist*, *Biblical World*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, or *Journal of Late Antiquity*. 
and theological diversity of Christians in Rome by examining the lack of a central governing authority. Chapter eleven analyzes the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy with particular attention to the Council of Nicaea. Chapter twelve is the epilogue and it includes a “summary” of the main arguments put forth in this thesis as well as a section titled “significance,” which explains why this thesis is important and its implications.
Chapter 2. Christianity’s Emergence and Entrance into the City of Rome

2.1 Christianity’s Emergence

Jesus of Nazareth was born in the Jewish-Greco-Roman province of Judaea in the city of Bethlehem near the end of Herod’s reign. The experiences of his life are too great to fully explicate, “even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” of the things Jesus did as the writer of the Gospel According to John claims. All that is known for sure by scholars is a few simple facts about his life and how his contemporaries perceived him. The Jews perceived Christ as a heretic establishing a new sect of Judaism. The Romans viewed Christ as a Jew from the countryside crucified as a common criminal. But to his followers, Christ the suffering servant was despised and rejected of men. He had bore mankind's sorrows and sins and, as his life drew near to its end, writes the disciple Mark, Jewish leaders were responsible for instigating the Romans to bruise him for the iniquities of the human family and wound him for man’s transgressions. Christ certainly had compassion for the suffering of others, a love of the Judean countryside, and the belief that he had a special mission assigned to him by his divine Father. The memory of Christ outlived his death. In fact it is fair to say that the religious passion for Christ’s teachings literally lived on with the gospel’s good news of his resurrection. While the gospels clearly depict Christ as the victim of the Jews, the centurion’s recognition of Christ as the Son of God during the crucifixion foreshadowed his eventual reception and

23 John 21.25.
24 In Matthew 12.2 the Pharisee’s perceive Christ as heretical. Christ also distinguishes himself from both the Pharisee’s and Sadducees in Matthew 16.6-12. Both the Pharisees and Sadducees argue with Christ in Matthew 22. 25 Tacitus, Annals of Imperial Rome 15.330 remarks: “Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.” 26 Mark 15.15-20. Isaiah 53 speaks of the “suffering servant.” 27 Frend, Rise of Christianity, 54-58 gives an overview of what is known for sure about the historical Jesus.
acceptance among Gentiles.\textsuperscript{28} As tensions escalated in Jerusalem and the Jews marched towards war with the Romans in 70, the Christians began to form their own community separate from their Judaic roots.

The earliest believers of Christ in Jerusalem, usually referred to as the apostolic community, at first resembled a Jewish sect. The Jews at Qumran for example, traditionally associated with the Essenes, shared several similarities with the apostolic community.\textsuperscript{29} Like the apostolic community the Jews at Qumran expected the end to be near and they eagerly looked forward to a new age of Messianic Rule.\textsuperscript{30} Moreover, religious texts and initiation ceremonies such as ritual washings both played important roles within the apostolic community and among the Jews at Qumran.\textsuperscript{31} A significant number of the scrolls found in Qumran additionally are saturated with the imagery and rhetoric of a warrior Messiah of the house of David that would bring deliverance from oppressors and sin.\textsuperscript{32}

As the apostolic community assiduously preached to their fellow Jews, their religious fervent soon began to spread throughout Greek-speaking synagogues, which meant that nascent Christianity transformed from a rural to an urban movement. Previously the apostles gathered

\textsuperscript{28} Mark 15.19.

\textsuperscript{29} Several scholars have studied whether or not the Qumran community was in fact the Essenes. The usual evidence cited for the Essene Theory is the Genizah Manuscript of the Zadokite fragments see Lawrence H. Schiffman, Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls, 17 and Frank Moore Cross, Ancient Library of Qumran, 37.

\textsuperscript{30} Matthew 13.40, 49; 24.3; 28.20. These passages in Matthew provide references to the end of the world. The end of the World is also a central theme running throughout the book of Revelations. The War Scroll from Qumran describe the last battle and the end of the world, IQ33, 4Q491-7, 4Q471. The Messianic Rule scroll also speaks of the “last days,” IQ28a.i. The Book of War describes the beginning of the reign of a Messiah from the lineage of David, 4Q285, IIQ14. Messianic Rule scroll IQ28a and the Renewed Earth scroll 4Q475 both speak of a new age of Messianic Rule. The New Testament speaks of a new Millennium Age when the Messiah would reign in Revelations 20:4; 21.1 and 2 Peter 3.13.

\textsuperscript{31} Stroumsa, The End of Sacrifice, 28-55 observes the role of religious texts in early and later Christianity. The amount of writings found in Qumran and the fact they were stored with care although haste, illustrates the importance of religious texts within this Jewish community. See the Community Rule scroll 1QS ii.4-10, 25; iii.4 and iv.21-22 for the role of ritual cleansing in Qumran. Everett Ferguson in Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries, 68-70 speaks of the Essenes at Qumran and their ritual cleansings. Ferguson also discusses the role of ritual cleansings in the form of baptism in the early Church in Part II “Baptism in the New Testament.”

\textsuperscript{32} See Schiffman, Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls, 97-112. The Messianic Rule Scroll IQ28a speaks of a Messiah from the House of David.
their community in rural areas outside of Jerusalem, only entering the city to preach at the temple. When certain “Grecians” or Greek Jews felt that the apostolic community had neglected administering to their widows, however, Christianity transitioned from a religion of the countryside to the city.\(^{33}\) Quick to remedy the problem the apostles chose seven honest men to administer to the Grecians in the Greek-speaking synagogues, among them including Stephen the first traditional martyr. Luke recounts that with this special ordination the spread of the teachings of Christ increased and the number of members in the apostolic community multiplied in the city of Jerusalem.\(^{34}\) Nascent Christianity now had a network radiating from Jerusalem where its teachings could spread with its entrance into Greek synagogues. This explains why by at least the reign of the Emperor Claudius (c. 41-54 C.E.), Christianity had become established throughout Palestine, Syria, and even further abroad, especially into cities like Antioch and even into the capital city of Rome.\(^{35}\)

### 2.2 Christianity’s Entrance into the City of Rome

The New Testament speaks of Christians present in Rome before Paul but without any explanation as to how they arrived.\(^{36}\) The book of *Acts* perhaps provides a clue, it mentions that before Paul and his companions entered Rome they first landed by ship at the harbor of Puteoli.\(^{37}\) Christianity as a religion must have taken the same route when it first came to Rome that Paul and his companions likely traveled, by means of the Puteoli-Rome trade road. The identity of the first Christian preacher in Rome, however, remains unknown.

The lack of Christianity’s presence in other Roman cities in Italy in the first century makes the connection between Rome and its main harbor all the more convincing.

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\(^{33}\) Acts 6.1.  
\(^{34}\) Acts 6.7.  
Archaeological evidence of Christianity outside of Rome is highly debatable, unpersuasive, and inconclusive. Take, for example, graffiti on a wall of the house “Vico del Balcone Pensile” in Pompeii. The inscription CHRISTIANOS may in fact speak of Christians but the text is incomplete and today is hardly visible. Even if the inscription actually does refer to Christianity there is still the possibility that the writer is not a Christian at all but only knew of Christians by direct contact or word of mouth. The historian Peter Lampe is quite skeptical of this inscription altogether; he points out that the author may even have had contact with Christians outside of Pompeii. Also a curious column discovered by M. Della Corte, director of excavations at Pompeii on November 12, 1936 has various letters arranged vertically and horizontally, which may have had a peculiar arrangement to form the first two words of the Lord’s Prayer, Pater Noster (Our Father). The so-called “Magical Square” or “Rotas Opera Square” as it is called may also have a Mithraic or Jewish connection, however, when the letters are arranged in a different pattern. The significance of this inscription, the arrangement of the letters and its meaning is not known for sure though and attempts to solve its “mystery” are unpersuasive.

Scholars think Christians lived in Herculaneum because of the impression of a cross in the plaster of an apartment building wall in the Casa Del Bicentenario near the Forum. This cross shape on the wall may actually have held some kind of light fixture or served as a shelf of some

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38 Lampe, Chapter 1 provides a quick summary and reference of all the evidence of Christianity outside of Rome. This thesis has chosen the most-controversial evidence that Lampe briefly mentions. My analysis of the evidence relies on archaeological reports or the foremost respectable secondary sources.
39 See Paul Berry, The Christian Inscription At Pompeii.
40 See Illustration 1.a.
41 Lampe, 8.
42 See Illustration 1.b.1.
43 See Illustration 1.b.2. Floyd V. Filson, Were there Christians in Pompeii?, 14-16. Lampe, 8-9 briefly examines the evidence of Christianity in Pompeii, concluding that the evidence is unsatisfying.
sort and never had any religious purpose. Archaeologists also found wax tablets in the apartment, which when translated proved to be legal documents concerning a lawsuit involving one of the tenants of the house, Gaius Petronius Stephanus, a member of the lower middle class. Joseph Deiss asserts that Stephanus most likely was not a Christian given his morality. Stephanus had carried out an avaricious litigation against a former slave of his that had purchased her freedom. Since Stephanus perceived the slave girl as a financial asset he demanded some kind of reimbursement for his loss. According to Deiss, the moral character of Stephanus seems quite in contrast to Christians of his time who took special care to help the poor. Deiss furthermore stresses that, as a member of the lower middle class Stephanus probably would not have dedicated this room of moderate size as a chapel given his economic circumstances.

As Deiss shows the evidence that Christians lived in Herculaneum is still highly debatable since the cross shape may just share a coincidental similarity to a Christian symbol. Evidence is entirely inconclusive that Christians lived in Ostia during the first century. Scholars generally concede that Christianity followed the network of Jewish synagogues as it expanded beyond the borders of Palestine. Evidence of a Jewish presence in Ostia, however, is limited to a partly restored inscription found several miles outside the city. But within the city of Ostia archaeologists have yet to discover Jewish monuments or inscriptions. Even Christian inscriptions suggest the presence of Christians in Ostia much later than the first few centuries. Most of the Christian inscriptions found in Ostia come from tombs near the church of St. Ercolano likely erected sometime in the fifth century. The only piece of evidence for a Christian

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45 Deiss, 96-97.
presence in Ostia before the fifth century is an inscription dated to 192, which refers to the couple M. Curtius Victorinus and his wife Plotia Marcella. Their funeral inscription: *M. Curtius Victorinus et Plotia Marcella viventes fecerunt si deus permiserit sibi* is open to several different interpretations, however, and its association with Christianity is debatable.\textsuperscript{48} Interestingly the literary evidence supports the archaeological record since it suggests that Christians lived in Ostia by the middle of the third century but not any earlier.\textsuperscript{49} The lack of reliable evidence is thus inconclusive if Christians actually lived in Ostia before Constantine. If Christians did live in Ostia then they most likely would have lived outside the city-walls.\textsuperscript{50}

There is considerable evidence that the story of Paul arriving at Rome from Puteoli is historically accurate.\textsuperscript{51} The harbor of Puteoli represented the main gateway of Rome to the East.\textsuperscript{52} Fleets of ships destined for Rome usually always landed in Puteoli until at least the reign of Claudius. The main reason for Puteoli’s importance lay in the popularity of its market, which was saturated with goods from Campania. After conducting business in Rome traders returned to Puteoli and secured goods for their return trips.\textsuperscript{53} Ostia as a port city did not become of great importance until the time of Claudius when the Emperor ordered the construction of a new harbor for grain imports.\textsuperscript{54} Even after Claudius ordered the reconstruction of the port at Ostia,

\textsuperscript{48} Russell Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 389. Meiggs’ archaeological survey of Ostia is the most thorough and respected.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 389-391.
\textsuperscript{50} The possibility of Christian presence in rural Ostia will be discussed later in this thesis in *Chapter 9. Early Christians of Rural Rome*.
\textsuperscript{51} Lampe, 10 asserts that the evidence indicates that Christianity and Judaism must have followed the Puteoli-Rome trade axis.
\textsuperscript{52} Seneca the Younger, *Epistle*. 77.1 recounts that the Alexandrian grain fleet landed not in Ostia but in Puteoli still under Nero.
\textsuperscript{53} Meiggs, 56-57.
however, it still did not support large ships. It would take until the time of Trajan for large ships to securely anchor at a remodeled harbor of Ostia.\(^{55}\)

The evidence thus clearly indicates that Christianity as a religion entered Rome by means of the trade road from Puteoli. This discovery suggests that Christianity arrived at the capital city by the third method of Christian expansion spoken of by W.H.C. Frend, through merchants and travellers. This third method undoubtedly took the form of missions undertaken by Christians that preached and held public discussion near Jewish synagogues that interestingly, in Italy only existed in Puteoli and Rome in the first century.\(^{56}\)

As far as the identity of the first Christian missionaries is concerned, their names remain unknown. The New Testament does not provide any information about them nor does it explain how Christianity even entered Rome. The references of Christian preachers in Rome before Paul are unreliable. The \textit{Clement Recognitions} speaks of Barnabas as among the first Christians to preach in Rome and yet in the \textit{Clement Homilies} presumably written by the same author the preacher in Rome is not named and Clement meets Barnabas in Alexandria.\(^{57}\) Paulus Orosius’ allegation that Peter first taught in Rome around the reign of Claudius is problematic since the text states that the chief apostle “visited” Rome, implying that Christianity already existed before his arrival.\(^{58}\) Peter’s presence in Rome is furthermore questionable since archaeological evidence indicates that Christians merely adopted a tomb as the traditional resting place for the apostle

\(^{55}\) Meggs, 389. Cedric A. Yeo, \textit{Land and Sea Transportation in Imperial Italy}, 238-239.
\(^{56}\) W.H.C. Frend, \textit{The Missions of the Early Church} 180-700 A.D., 7 remarks that “Christian merchants from the Greek speaking parts of the empire seem to have done likewise in the western provinces, and outside Africa these immigrant groups may have been the original means whereby Christianity spread.” For information on the remains of Jewish synagogues see Josephus, \textit{Wars of the Jews} 2.104 and \textit{Antiquity of the Jews} 17.328. Also see Philo, \textit{On the Embassy to Gaius} 155. L. Michael White, \textit{Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence}, 34-38 discusses the archaeological evidence of Jewish remains in Italy in the first few centuries.
\(^{57}\) \textit{Clement Recognitions} 7. \textit{Clement Homilies} 7; 8-9.
\(^{58}\) Paulus Orosius, \textit{The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans} 7.6 claims that “on account of the coming of the Apostle Peter, and tender shoots, as it were, of Christians, still a few in number, breaking forth to proclaim their holy faith.”
sometime in the second century. \textsuperscript{59} Although we cannot determine the identity of the first Christian missionaries it is possible to establish the identity of the first Christian converts.

\textsuperscript{59} Lampe, 104-116 outlines the archaeological evidence that Peter’s tomb is in fact dated no earlier than 115 C.E. The most persuasive evidence is based on the dating of other tombs in the nearby vicinity of “Peter’s Tomb.” Moo, 4 gives a brief overview of the various reasons why historians and archaeologists conclude that Peter did not establish Christianity in Rome.
Chapter 3. Identity of Early Christians in Rome

3.1 Introduction

The identity of the first Christian converts in Rome is far from elusive. Early Christian literature and archaeological evidence reveal that mainly Jews and Greeks converted to Christianity. When the identity of the first Christians in Rome is discovered the framework is established for extrapolating their residential quarters, social stratification, worship locations, the various theologies they developed, and level of education.

3.2. Foreigners in Rome

Rome had quite the diverse population by the first century. Besides native Romans the city experienced an influx of foreigners in the last century of the Republic. Greeks from all around the Mediterranean formed the largest body of immigrants succeeded by a variety of other ethnic groups from Asia Minor and Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, and even the Danube lands.  

Juvenal is quite vocal of his feelings toward the overwhelmingly large Greek population: “My fellow Romans, I cannot put up with a city of Greeks.” Romans must have felt foreigners had truly inundated their city. Juvenal surely did. In one of his satires Juvenal laments, “There’s no room here for any Roman.” For the most part the majority of these foreigners in Rome consisted of slaves and former slaves or their descendants. The long wars additionally had taken their toll on the native Roman population. Armies of citizens violently created a Mediterranean Empire at the cost of thinning out the Romans themselves. The withdrawal of colonies of citizens

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60 George La Piana, Foreign Groups in Rome during the First Centuries of the Empire, 188-189. La Piana’s investigation is considered the definitive work on foreigners in Rome.
61 Juvenal, Satires 3.60.
to the provinces and a decline in the birth rate among Romans, even of the poorer classes, furthermore made Rome an ethnically mixed city.\textsuperscript{63}

Foreigners in Rome retained their culture and even infiltrated wealthier social classes. Juvenal in speaking again of the evils of the city recalls that Syrians and Greek-speaking Easterners had for a long time settled in Rome near the Tiber River, carrying with them their language, customs, and music.\textsuperscript{64} The Roman satirist furthermore recalls observing foreign grammarians, rhetoricians, philosophers, painters, entertainers, doctors, wizards, and religious leaders thriving in the city.\textsuperscript{65} Rostovtzeff comments in his economic investigation of the Roman Empire that the Greeks retained their Hellenic culture for several generations.\textsuperscript{66} Foreigners were not confined to poverty, however, as is usually thought, but they also composed the wealthier classes.\textsuperscript{67} It was not uncommon for the senatorial and equestrian classes to include foreigners that invested their wealth in Italian land. By the middle of the first century when Christianity entered Rome foreigners composed a significant portion of the population of the city within various social stratifications, retaining their ancestral traditions amidst Roman culture.\textsuperscript{68}

3.3. Jews in Rome

A sizeable Jewish population lived in Rome as well as in other Roman cities.\textsuperscript{69} Dio Cassius notes that the Jews received special privileges granted by Romans not given to any other foreign culture, but how remained a mystery to him.\textsuperscript{70} Josephus similarly observes that Julius

\textsuperscript{63} La Piana, 188-189.
\textsuperscript{64} Juvenal, \textit{Satires} 3.62-65.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 3.75-76.
\textsuperscript{66} Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff, \textit{Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire}, 1.100.
\textsuperscript{67} James S. Jeffers, \textit{Conflict At Rome}, 7-8 relied on the investigation of La Piana but asserts that the majority of foreigners had to have been poor. Jeffers overlooked several important discussion points by La Piana, which clearly prove foreigners had wealth.
\textsuperscript{68} La Piana, 196-197.
\textsuperscript{69} Dio Cassius, \textit{Roman History}, 37.17.2.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 37.17.1.
Caesar “reckoned [the Jews] among [the Roman’s] particular friends.” In Rome the Jewish population had grown quite large by the time of Caesar. In 61 B.C.E. Pompey increased their number in the imperial city with the Jewish slaves he brought back to Rome from his conquest of Judaea. They had grown to such large numbers that Cicero complained about them: “You know how large a group they are, how unanimously they stick together, how influential they are in politics.” Despite Cicero’s personal grievances against Jews, Caesar’s tolerance essentially created an alliance between them and the Romans. Suetonius recounts that Jews in Rome even visited the Forum to mourn over Caesar for several nights after the Dictator’s assassination.

When the first Christians entered Rome they preached in the vicinity of the earliest synagogues, as was their usual custom. Locating the Jewish synagogues in Rome and discovering the area’s inhabitants should reveal the identity of the first converts to Christianity. Philo recounts the location of the Jewish synagogues in Rome during the time of Augustus in these words:

[Augustus] was aware that the great section of Rome on the other side of the Tiber is occupied and inhabited by Jews, most of whom were Roman citizens emancipated. For having been brought as captives to Italy there were liberated by their owners and were not forced to violate any of their native institutions He knew therefore that they have houses of prayer and meet together in them, particularly on the sacred Sabbaths when they receive as a body a training in their ancestral philosophy.

This passage by Philo agrees with the discovery of Jewish synagogues existing during the reign of Augustus in the area of the Trastevere near the Tiber River by archaeologists. Although thirteen synagogues are attested to in the literary record archaeologists have discovered only nine synagogues: seven synagogues existed in Trastevere, which are the earliest dating to the first

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73 Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 84.
74 See footnote 42.
75 Philo quotes Augustus in *On the Embassy to Gaius* 155, 157.
76 Peter Richardson, *Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome*, 19.
century exactly where Augustus assumed they were located, and both Campus Martius (Mars Field) and Subura hosted at least one synagogue each erected most likely during the second century. According to Juvenal the Jews also inhabited residential quarters near the Via Appia, southeast of the Porta Capena. Juvenal recounts that Jews had rented the temple of the nymph Egeria in the damp Capena, or, that is to say, the Appian lowland where they perhaps converted the old temple into a synagogue. Thus, the first Christians that entered Rome undoubtedly preached in the busy and crowded streets of Trastevere in the vicinity of the earliest synagogues as well as the residential quarters near the Via Appia since these areas contained the largest population of Jews. The residential quarters near the Via Appia are particularly of interest since this main road connected Rome to Puteoli and near it are the remains of Jewish catacombs.

According to Acts and Suetonius the Jews “constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.” The Emperor’s solution was quite simple: to expel the Jews from Rome or at least the main instigators of the conflict. Although the facts are minimal certain details are clear: Christian missionaries entered Rome at least during the reign of Claudius probably in the late 40s and they preached in or near the synagogues. While the identity of the first Christian missionaries remains unknown the Edict of Claudius reveals that Jews made up the earliest converts to Christianity. This interpretation agrees with the book of Acts, which speaks of the Jewish couple Aquila and Priscilla fleeing Rome for Corinth as a result of the

77 Leon, The Jews of Ancient Rome, 140-159. La Piana, 343.
78 Juvenal, Satires 3.12-16.
80 Suetonius, Deified Claudius 25.4. Orosius, The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans 7.6 also makes reference to the Edict of Claudius mainly citing Suetonius. There are many opinions as to whether not it is true that Christians instigated the unrest leading to Claudius’ Edict see Leonard Victor Rutgers, Roman Policy Towards the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome During the First Century C.E., 65-66. After a thorough analysis Rutgers states, “that the appearance of Christianity created unrest within the Roman Jewish community still remains, in my view, an attractive possibility.”
edict.\textsuperscript{81} Paul’s letter to the Romans further attests that former Jews are to account for a certain amount of the early Christians in Rome.\textsuperscript{82} But Paul’s letter to the Romans also addresses Gentiles.\textsuperscript{83}

3.4 Gentile God-Fearers in Rome

As mentioned earlier when Paul entered Rome he discovered Christians already living within the city. Although at first Paul’s missionary efforts took place among Jews, frequent persecutions at the synagogues encouraged him and his companions to “turn to the Gentiles.”\textsuperscript{84} According to the author of \textit{Acts} the “God-fearers” were among the most attentive listeners of Paul and his fellow Christian preachers.\textsuperscript{85} The “God-fearers” consisted of Gentiles according to \textit{Acts}, such as Cornelius a centurion of the Italian band.\textsuperscript{86} While these “God-fearers” did not convert to Judaism they did abandon worshipping pagan gods. Sometimes they are referred to as \textit{Gentile Sympathizers} or other terms such as \textit{Sebomenio}.\textsuperscript{87} Although scholars debate about the actual word used to describe these Gentiles that worshipped the Jewish God, in the end it does not really matter, rather it is the significance of these people in relation to Judaism that is important.\textsuperscript{88} While Irenaeus, a second century bishop from Lyons possibly referred to the first Christian converts as “God-fearers” when he spoke of the Church as a synagogue,\textsuperscript{89} the most explicit reference to the “God-fearers” is in Josephus’ \textit{Antiquity of the Jews}: “But no one need wonder that there was so much wealth in our temple, for all the Jews throughout the habitable world and those who worshipped God, even those from Asia and Europe, had been contributing

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{81} Acts 18.1-3.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Romans 3.9; 2.4-16; 9.24.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Romans 9.24; 11.13; 15.9-12.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Acts 13.46.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Acts 10.1-2; 13.16, 26. Josephus speaks of “God-fearers” in \textit{Antiquity of the Jews} 14.110. See also Ralph Marcus, \textit{The sebomenio in Josephus}.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Acts 10.1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Ralph Marcus, \textit{The Sebomenoi in Josephus}, 247.
\item \textsuperscript{88} See Louis H. Feldman, \textit{Jewish “Sympathizers” in Classical Literature and Inscriptions}.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Irenaeus, \textit{Against Heresies} 1.13, 3.6.
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to it for a very long time.” In this passage Josephus implies that the “God-fearers” not only lived in a close proximity to the temple in Jerusalem and contributed to its wealth, but also believers in the Jewish God who lived in Asia and Europe. This passage reveals Josephus’ knowledge that Gentiles living throughout Roman cities in the Mediterranean had a particular religious inclination, or, at least, felt some level of sympathy towards Judaism. Juvenal even mocks such a group of Gentile “God-fearers” in Rome:

They worship nothing except the clouds and the holy heavens. And, since their father abstained from pork, they think it is just as sacred as human flesh. In time they get rid of their foreskins. And while they are all brought up to despise the laws of Rome, they carefully earn and keep and revere the Jewish code, all that Moses handed down in his mystic volume.

Scholars for the most part agree that the “God-fearers” existed. In fact several inscriptions have surfaced attesting that Gentiles in various cities frequently respected and or even worshipped the Jewish God. These “God-fearers” may have revered the Jewish God and imitated aspects of Judaism according to Juvenal, but in the end they were not Jews.

The Jews in Rome lived in residential quarters neighboring Greek-speakers. Undoubtedly many of the Greek speakers in Rome actually came from the Greek mainland. It is very likely that many of the Greek speakers living in Rome also came to the city as slaves brought by Pompey, or even earlier when a sudden influx of Greeks into the Republic took place as Romans conquered Hellenic lands in the East. The archaeological evidence clearly suggests that the

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90 Josephus, Antiquity of the Jews 14.
91 Juvenal, Satires 14.96-103.
92 A.T. Kraabel, The Disappearance of the ‘God-Fearers,’ 113-114 gives an overview of several of the most important studies of who were the “God-Fearers.” Kraabel, however, concludes that all of the other investigations are wrong and that the “God-Fearers” did not exist. Marcus in The Sebomenoi in Josephus argues to the contrary, he believes beyond any doubt that the “God-Fearers” existed. John G. Gager, Jews, Gentiles, and Synagogues in the Book of Acts, 91-99 critiques Kraabel’s investigation and concludes that there is more than enough evidence that the “God-Fearers” existed.
93 See Joyce Marie and Robert Reynolds Tannenbaum, Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary Texts. Tannenbaum and Marie investigate inscriptions in Aphrodisias that unmistakably refer to the “God-Fearers.” Louis H. Feldman, Jewish “Sympathizers” in Classical Literature and Inscriptions, 200-208 argues that there are indeed inscriptions that refer to the “God-Fearers” but they do not call them Sebomenoi.
Jewish population in Rome mainly lived in Hellenic residential quarters since they spoke Greek. Harry J. Leon’s investigation of *The Jews of Ancient Rome* reveals through a survey of Jewish inscriptions that the majority of Jews spoke Greek, while few knew Latin, and even fewer actually knew Hebrew or Aramaic. Of the 534 inscriptions studied by Leon 405 are written in Greek, 123 in Latin, 3 in Hebrew, and 1 in Aramaic. If the inscriptions accurately indicate the language of Jews then roughly 76% spoke Greek, 23% spoke Latin, and only 1% spoke Hebrew or Aramaic.94 The large number of Greek speaking Jews in Rome is hardly surprising since they were of the Diaspora from the East. Greek speaking Jews and other Greeks from the East inhabiting the same region of the city makes perfect sense. As James S. Jeffers points out:

“Persons of the same nationality tended to congregate in the same parts of the city, since new arrivals sought the companionship of established compatriots.”

The “God-fearers” that readily listened to the Christian missionaries must have consisted of the Greek-speaking neighbors of the Jews that came to Rome from all over the Mediterranean.

The Greek identity of the early Christian converts, the “God-fearers,” is further confirmed by their language. Most Christians during the first and second centuries in Rome spoke Greek: Paul wrote to them in Greek, Church manuals and inscriptions are usually written in Greek, and they furthermore conducted their meetings in Greek.96 The names of early Christians in Paul’s letter to the Romans are predominantly Greek and primarily belonged to slaves or freedmen in the first century. In fact nearly all of the Christians in Romans 16 that Paul

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94 Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 76-77. Leon’s book is the most frequently cited study for any discussion of Jews in Rome. Leon, *The Language of the Greek Inscriptions from the Jewish Catacombs of Rome*, 211 concludes that “the language of the Jewish community was, it appears, predominantly Greek.”

95 Jeffers, 8.

96 See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* for an analysis of the early Church manuscripts, all of which are written in Greek.
greets have Greek names while a minority are Jewish in origin.\textsuperscript{97} Also, in the early second century Justin the Martyr frequently comments that Greek-speaking Gentiles composed the majority of Christians in Rome.\textsuperscript{98} Justin even wrote two works specifically intended for Greeks: \textit{The Discourse to the Greeks} and \textit{Hortatory Address to the Greeks}. Justin’s student Tatian also lived in Rome during the second century and wrote an \textit{Address to the Greeks}. The assertion in the \textit{Clement Recognitions} that Greeks predominantly heard the earliest Christians preach in Rome seems quite historically accurate after all.\textsuperscript{99} The opening words of Paul in \textit{Romans} now have a literal meaning since it is ascertained that Jews and Greek speaking foreigners made up the early Christian population in Rome. Paul remarked: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”\textsuperscript{100} To the Jew first because Christians first preached to them and then to the Greeks second since they lived in a close proximity to the synagogues.

The converted Gentile “God-fearers” most likely continued to worship on the fringes of the synagogue even when Christianity and Judaism separated, which began to take place in New Testament times and solidified into completely distinct religions at least one hundred years after Paul.\textsuperscript{101} The close proximity of Jews and Christians likely led the physician Galen in Rome for

\textsuperscript{97} Moo, 919-927 observes that the names referenced in Romans 16 provide historians a “gold mine,” into the socioeconomic composition of the early church. Overwhelmingly the names are Greek, some Jewish, and all suggest they were slaves or freedmen.

\textsuperscript{98} Justin the Martyr refers to Christians in Rome as Greek-speakers several times in \textit{Frist Apology} 53 and \textit{Dialogue With Trypho} 22; 30; 33; 34; 35; 41; 43; 46; 52; 64; 65; 83; 91; 92; 109; 110; 113; 119; 120; 121; 122; 123; 130. Justin also wrote two works intended for the Greeks: \textit{The Discourse to the Greeks} and \textit{Hortatory Address to the Greeks}.

\textsuperscript{99} Barnabass preaches to a crowd of Greeks in Rome in the \textit{Clement Recognitions} 9.

\textsuperscript{100} Romans 1. 16.

\textsuperscript{101} Scholars keep on pushing the formation of Christian culture further back. Averil Cameron studied Christian Identity in the third through fifth centuries in \textit{Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire}. Judith M. Lieu studied the formation of Christian Identity in the second and third centuries in \textit{Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World}. C. Kavin Rowe investigated the formation of Christian culture as an alternate way of life during New Testament times in \textit{World Upside Down}. 

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instance, to associate the followers of Moses with the followers of Christ even in the second century.\textsuperscript{102}

3.5 Summary

Thus when Paul arrived in Rome Christians came from a diverse background: some converted to Christianity from Judaism while the majority were Greek-speaking foreigners, mainly from Hellenic lands from the East and the Greek mainland. Greek, after all, was the linguae franca of the Mediterranean. It is not a far-fetched conclusion to assert that Christians in Rome were as diverse as the urban population itself: they came from many different lands although they mainly spoke Greek. Christians undoubtedly continued to live in areas predominantly Jewish since they converted to Christianity from Judaism but as the new religion began to make its way to a larger Gentile audience new areas of the city experienced Christian expansion.

\textsuperscript{102} Galen, \textit{Pulsuum Differentiiis} 2.4, 3.3.
Chapter 4. Residential Quarters of Early Christians in Rome

4.1 Introduction

There are various methods that can determine where in Rome Christians lived. Such methodologies include analyzing the veracity of traditions; evaluating archaeological evidence such as Christian churches, meeting places, and graves or cemeteries; and observing the presence of Christians in Jewish quarters. Peter Lampe in *From Paul to Valentinus* carried out a noteworthy study of each of these methodologies, producing sophisticated analysis tables that depict where Christians most likely lived in Rome. Lampe’s conclusions are accurate, generally accepted by other scholars such as Matilda Web, and definitely worth mentioning. Lampe’s study is not only quite extensive, but it is also considered the definitive work on the subject. His analysis illustrates that Christians not only lived in Jewish areas but they also inhabited other areas of Rome neighboring Jews, principally areas outside the pomerium since Christianity represented a foreign religion.103

4.2 Traditions

Lampe begins his analysis of Christian residential quarters in Rome by undertaking a close look at traditions. As is to be expected by “traditions,” however, their reliability is highly questionable and filled with uncertainties. Like the Jews and all the other foreign groups in Rome, Christians worshipped where they lived. Of course the most easily located Christian meeting places were erected after worship became public, but the site of the churches traditionally have their origin in the first and second centuries. After meticulously recounting the various traditions Lampe observes that the areas of Trastevere, the Aventine, Campus Martius, the Appian

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103 Dio Cassius, *History of Rome* 53.2.3-4 mentions that the gods of Egypt could not pass the pomerium in recounting the history or Rome at the time of Augustus. L. Richardson, Jr. *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 293 observes that the pomerium, or this religious “boundary was of the greatest religious importance for every Roman magistrate and priest.”
lowlands, Vicus Patricius, and Cispius particularly standout as locations of Christian worship. While Trastevere clearly correlates to a region inhabited by Jews, the Vicus Patricius and Cispius borders the Jewish area of Subura. The Appian lowlands linked to the Via Appia likewise are associated with known Jewish populations. But as for the Aventine and Campus Martius these residential quarters act like a sort of bridge between Jewish areas. Interestingly the traditions concerning the locations of worship and thus residential quarters of the earliest Christians all are either located in or border Jewish areas. Therefore, it would appear from this method that Christians continued to live in Jewish areas while branching out to nearby residential quarters.

4.3 Archaeological Evidence

While the archaeological evidence is expected to be more accurate than local traditions this method produces similar results. Christian graves and cemeteries outside the city indicate where converts lived in Rome. As Lampe’s study demonstrates this is certainly correct since Christians would have maintained their graves and cemeteries outside the city walls nearest the main roads to their residential quarters. Pre-Constantine Christian cemeteries and catacombs are located near the main roads of the Via Aurelia and Via Portuense, Via Ostiense, Via Appia, Via Casilina, and between the Via Tiburtina and Via Nomentana. Significantly almost all of the main roads entering Rome lead directly to areas within the city that according to local traditions hosted Christians. The Via Aurelia leads to Trastevere, Via Ostiense leads to Aventine, Via Appia leads to the Appian lowlands and Porta Capena, and Via Tiburtina and Via Nomentana lead to Cispius and Subura. The only area that does not correlate to local traditions is Caelius.

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104 Lampe, 44-45 created a sophisticated analysis table that depicts the various methods and the probability of Christians living in each location. See Illustration 3.a. for a map to accompany this chapter.
connected to the road Via Casilina.\textsuperscript{105} The Via Aurelia and Via Portuense leading to Trastevere and the Via Appia connected to the Appian lowlands and Porta Capena furthermore contain Jewish catacombs.\textsuperscript{106} Early Christian catacombs and cemeteries therefore point to the areas of Trastevere, Aventine, Appian lowlands and possibly Porta Capena, Cispius and Subura, and Caelius as the main residential quarters of early Christians in Rome.

Archaeological excavations have furthermore revealed the remains of Churches in the city itself, implying that several areas possibly served as locations inhabited by early Christians. Of course the majority of Churches were erected in the third and fourth centuries when Christianity became public under Constantine and subsequent Emperors, but archeological evidence suggests that several of these Churches possibly have their beginning with original Christian settlements. To narrow down the parameter of analysis, however, Lampe concentrated on the Tituli Churches. For the early Christians the Tituli churches acted like community centers or meeting places located in renovated apartments and private houses so they could accommodate more Christians. Titulus (Tituli plural) refers to the holder of the title of the building, which was rented, purchased, or donated to serve as a Church.\textsuperscript{107} Lampe observes that concentrations of Tituli indicate that early Christians congregated and lived in the areas of Trastevere, Aventine, and the Appian lowlands.\textsuperscript{108}

\textbf{4.4 Summary}

The results indicate several similarities between the local traditions and archaeological evidence (graves, cemeteries, and Tituli): Trastevere, Aventine, and the Appian lowlands and

\textsuperscript{105} See Lampe, 44-45; Map 2, 3. Matilda Webb, \textit{The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome}, 1 has created a comprehensive guide to all the churches and catacombs in Rome. Her map on page 1 clearly depicts the relationship between the main roads and the inner city gathering places of Christians.

\textsuperscript{106} Leon, 46-66.

\textsuperscript{107} See Titulus in the glossary of Webb.

\textsuperscript{108} Lampe, 44-45.
possibly Porta Capena are the most plausible locations of Christian habitation in Rome. Other notable areas include Campus Martius, Caelius, Subura, Vicus Patricius, and Cispius as possible locations. Taken as a whole each of these areas form a sort of perimeter around the inner-city outside of the pomerium conforming to the political-theological regulations of the time since Christianity emerged as a foreign religion from the East. Jewish residential quarters in particular act as the main Christian areas of concentration, which is expected since the first converts were Jews and the God-fearers living in close proximity to the synagogues. The other areas that usually are not thought to have domiciled Jews seem to act as a sort of bridge between Jewish areas for Christians, most likely where converts migrated and preachers found new audiences receptive to their religion. Christians thus did not congregate in one particular residential quarter of Rome, but rather the members of Christianity inhabited diverse areas of the city.
Chapter 5: Social Stratification of Early Christians in Rome

5.1 Introduction

Christians in Rome came from both wealth and poverty. Such a notion is supported by the previous investigations concerning the identity of Christians and their residential quarters as well as a survey of the earliest literature. After the social stratification of early Christians is known it is possible to further extrapolate their worship locations.

5.2 Evidence From Previous Chapters

Evidence depicts the residential quarters inhabited by Christians on the outskirts of the city as unhealthy and poor areas. Trastevere, the Appian areas, and Porta Capena all existed in unhealthy humid lowlands inhabited by poor merchants.109 Trastevere for example had a dense population of tradesmen from various crafts, mostly of Eastern origin.110 The Porta Capena and Appian regions appeared very similar to the Trastevere: poor, crowded, industrial, unhealthy residential quarters of merchants.111

Most Christians during the first and second centuries in Rome also spoke Greek, the language of the poor. As noted previously the majority of Greeks in Rome were either slaves or freed slaves, or their descendants.112 It is worth noting that the elites, to a certain extent, also spoke Greek. In Roman cities the most cultured of Romans learned to speak Greek in order to study Greek literature. Cicero witnessed the increasing popularity of the Greek language among the more educated Romans during his day. Cicero recalled his teacher Crassus spoke in Greek

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109 Grant Heiken, Renato Funiciello, and Donatella De Rita, The Seven Hills of Rome, 183. The authors describe Trastevere as a moist lowland, essentially an urban marsh that created unhealthy conditions.
110 Pliny, Natural History 3.66 reports that Trastevere had more than the average population. Martial, Epigrams 6.93; 12.59; 1.41. La Piana, 183-403. See Robert E. A. Palmer, The Topography and Social History of Rome’s Trastevere (Southern Sector) and S. M. Savage, The Cults of Ancient Trastevere.
111 Martial, Epigrams 12. 57 describes the typical Jew who was encouraged by his parents to beg. Juvenal, Satires 3.12 mocks the local Jews who asked for charitable donations. Martial, Epigrams 4.64 and Juvenal, Satires, 3. 236 speak of the recklessness of the city in these areas.
112 La Piana, 188.
“so perfectly as to suggest that it was the only tongue he knew.” The popularity of the Greek language among the most learned of Romans continued to the time of Augustus. Although educated Romans knew Greek as well as Latin, the poorer inhabitants of Rome and other cities alone used Greek for every day affairs such as business, or in the case of Christians for worship. For the more educated Romans Latin remained their primary language.

5.3. Literary Evidence

The first Christian converts in the city must not all have come from poverty considering Paul wrote to them about donations for the poorer Christians in Jerusalem and funding his missionary journey to Spain. This theme of alms giving to the poor is discernible in other early texts pertinent to Christians in Rome as well. The *Shepherd of Hermas* for instance, written in Rome between the late first and early second centuries explicitly addresses “the servants of God…the poor and the rich.” The message of the *Shepherd of Hermas* is simple; Hermas advises wealthier Christians that they have received their riches from the Lord and that it is their duty to provide for the poor. The author further rebukes Christians who desire the “extravagance of wealth, and much needless food and drink, and many other foolish luxuries.” Christians are furthermore encouraged to refrain “from adultery and fornication, from the

113 Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.2-4.
114 Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 48. Augustus clearly had interest in retaining what the Greeks had to offer Romans in regards to education. He even hired Greeks tutors to teach his children as well as the children of foreign leaders. These itinerant teachers skilled in the art of rhetoric and familiar with philosophy influenced contemporaries and modern day scholars to refer to this movement as the Second Sophistic: a time when Sophists, reminiscent of Ancient Greece traveled the Roman Empire teaching students with a particular influence in Rome see Anderson, Graham, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* and Bowersock, G.W, *Augustus and the Greek World* and *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*. The main primary source of the Second Sophistic is Philostratus, *The Lives of the Sophists*. Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 29. Augustus constructed libraries in Rome that had both Greek and Latin collections of texts and he acted as a patron to the Roman gods and the authors who wrote about them. Augustus encouraged education and learning to such a degree that his reign is referred to as the “Golden Age,” in which many of the most famous of Latin authors lived and wrote: Vergil, Horace, Ovid, and Livy.
115 Romans 15. 24-28.
116 Ibid, Parable 2.4.
117 Ibid, Parable 2.7-10.
118 Ibid, Parable 2. 1.
lawlessness of drunkenness, from evil luxury, from much eating, and extravagance of wealth.”

Instead of wasting their wealth in worthless pursuits Hermas tells wealthy Christians “to look after widows and orphans.”

It appears that the *Shepherd of Hermas* written in the late first or early second century is primarily written to an audience concerned with acquiring wealth and a luxurious lifestyle: a population of Christians who “are mixed up with many affairs of business.”

The author’s frequent concern that wealthier Christians care for the poor suggests social diversity among the converts. As Osiek observes in her commentary on the *Shepherd*, Hermas addresses his comments to Christians that are economically comfortable, striving to rise socially, and inclined to take part in commerce. Interestingly Osiek’s commentary agrees with the most probable occupation of these Greek-speaking Christians as merchants and traders, living in industrial quarters of Rome. David Rankin emphasizes that the real concern for Hermas is not so much that certain Christians are seeking wealth but that they are hoarding it. Once these Christians acquire wealth they ignore the poorer Christians and retract from proper worship of God and service to their fellow man. Hence the reason why Hermas advises Christians not to follow after the wealth of the pagans: for it is “unprofitable to you, who are the servants of God.”

Overall, this piece of literature implies that Christians in Rome may have come from poverty and anxiously engaged in various forms of business. For this reason the author is reprimanding them for abandoning God by focusing too much on commercial activities. In any case the *Shepherd of Hermas* supports the findings in previous chapters since it indicates that Christians in Rome

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119 Ibid, Parable 8. 3.
120 Ibid, Parable 1.8.
123 David Rankin, *From Clement to Origen*, 39-40. Rankin’s investigation is an indispensible source for understanding the social and cultural context of early Christian writers.
belonged to a merchant class that sought luxury, while further emphasizing that they had become so caught up in their business transactions that they neglected proper worship.

First Clement, another early Christian text from Rome written in the late first century depicts both wealthy and poor Christians. Although First Clement is written to Christians in Corinth the influences of Rome undoubtedly prompted the author to speak of certain themes. Similar to the Shepherd of Hermas the author of First Clement, presumably Clement himself speaks of the rich helping the poor.125 Clement reminds wealthy Christians that it is God “who makest rich and makest poor.”126 The poor are furthermore comforted by Clement as he reminds them that the Lord is their caretaker.127 For Clement the overall picture is similar to the Shepherd of Hermas: it consists of wealthy Christians that are distracted from God because of business and fail to support the poor.

The Octavius, presumably written by Minucius Felix in Rome in the second century likewise speaks of rich Christians so engrossed in business activities that they “gaze more upon their gold than upon heaven.”128 The poor on the other hand according to Felix “have both discovered wisdom, and have delivered their teaching to others.”129 This passage by Felix as emphasized by Rankin, does not actually attack wealth but like First Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas, Felix rather perceives wealth as a distraction to God.130 But overall the Octavius primarily depicts the majority of Christians as poor. In fact Felix literally asserts, “that many of us are called poor.”131 One particular passage almost comes across as more of a rationalization for Christian poverty in Rome. After speaking about Christians enduring poverty the author next

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125 Clement, First Clement 38. 2.
126 Ibid 59. 3.
127 Ibid 15.6.
128 Minucius Felix, Octavius 16.
129 Ibid, 16.
130 Rankin, 50-51.
131 Felix, Octavius 16.
remarks, “we prefer being good to being prodigal; and that we feel and suffer the human mischief of the body is not punishment—it is warfare.”

Despite the overwhelming presence of poverty Felix reminds Christians in Rome that their economic and social position is not a disgrace but their glory.

5.4 Summary

In summary, before Constantine the majority of Christians in Rome must have come from poverty while a small percentage had acquired wealth through commercialism. Their position as merchants and traders living in industrial areas of the city afforded them a location for business opportunities. While the majority of Christians must have struggled to acquire wealth the few that actually did became a concern to the authors of the various early texts. These writers cautioned the more wealthy Christians that the luxuries of life distracted them from worship and devotion to God as well as supporting their fellow Christians of less fortunate circumstances. Taken as a whole the identity of Christians, their residential quarters, and early texts clearly indicate that they formed a socially diverse body.

132 Ibid, 36.
133 Ibid, 36.
Chapter 6. Fractionation of Early Christian Worship Locations in Rome

6.1 Introduction

The writings of the New Testament and early Christian authors as well as the archaeological evidence clearly indicate that the house-church was the principle-worship location for urban Christians before the reign of Constantine. As far as Rome is concerned, Scholars agree that Christians congregated in small house-churches scattered throughout the city.\(^{134}\) The presence of Christians meeting in various house-churches scattered throughout Rome depicts pre-Constantine Christianity in the capital city as extremely fractionized or divided.\(^{135}\)

6.2 Fractionation of House-Churches

The original house-churches spoken of in *Acts* consist of large rooms in houses on the second or third floors of apartment buildings. The first mention of such a house is the story of Jesus and his apostles meeting for the Last Supper.\(^{136}\) *Acts* furthermore recounts the apostles meeting in an upper room in a house in Jerusalem, praying together as a congregation and breaking bread.\(^{137}\) Another passage in *Acts* speaks of Paul meeting with a group of listeners in an upper chamber of a house in Macedonia. As Paul continued preaching until midnight one of his listeners, Eutchus, fell asleep and fell out of the third loft.\(^{138}\) Even in Rome when Paul was under house arrest he still preached to his listeners in his residential confines.\(^{139}\) In general it would seem that the New Testament refers to these house-churches as *oikoi*, a word that usually denotes a type of community rather than a physical meeting place. Therefore when a household is

\(^{134}\) See the Introduction of this thesis, section 1.2 Historiography, 3-4.
\(^{135}\) Lampe, 381-384 speculates in chapter 39 that fractionation is linked to “theological pluralism.” Bowes, 64 briefly mentions that Christianity in Rome is extremely fractionized as well. Lampe and Bowes bring up more questions than answers in their remarks, however, implying that more research is needed. Gehring, 177 briefly discusses the possibility that “party strife” existed between the various house-churches. The proceeding chapter discusses how fractionation is linked to the theological distinction of each house-church.
\(^{136}\) Mark 14.3.
\(^{137}\) Acts 1.13-14; 2.42.
\(^{138}\) Acts 20.8- 10.
\(^{139}\) Acts 28.16, 23,30.
mentioned such as the household of Aquila and Priscilla or Aristobulus for example, *oikos* refers to a community in the sense of a “household” or “family” rather than a house as in a physical worship location.\(^{140}\) The meaning of the word household or *oikos* is most apparent in the story of Lydia, a seller of purple dye from the city of Thyatira. Luke recounts that Lydia was baptized along with her household.\(^{141}\) Paul similarly baptized the household of the guard that watched over him and his companions while in jail in Macedonia. Before departing from Macedonia the household of Lydia had already become so well established that its members assembled to listen to Paul preach one more time in their house-church.\(^{142}\) Of course the New Testament is quite clear that private homes became the location of choice where households assembled. Paul for instance, directly addressed Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus and the church that met in their house, hence the origin of *the Epistle of Paul to Philemon*.\(^{143}\) Paul could not be any clearer when writing to the Romans in chapter 16: after greeting masters of households (*oikoi*) he next greets the church in general worshiping in their houses.\(^{144}\) Therefore in this thesis household and house-church are treated as synonymous terms since the members of the household or *oikos* congregated in house-churches.

Romans chapter 16 provides the earliest literary evidence for the existence of several house-churches in Rome. This chapter lists at least five to as many as eight different households of Christians each worshipping in a house-church undoubtedly presided over by a prominent

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\(^{142}\) Acts 16.31-40.

\(^{143}\) Philemon 1. Paul writes the letter to Philemon and his household as well as to Apphia, Archippus and their household from Rome while he was under house arrest.

\(^{144}\) Romans 16.5. Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 10.18.18 remarks that Romans 16 refers to prominent Christians and “their house church.”
teacher or priest. The text implies that the presiding teacher or priest must have been the head of the household. Although scholars debate over the existence of several house-churches existing simultaneously in Roman cities in the first and second centuries, their assertion usually avoids the principle that a lack of evidence is not the evidence of absence. If scholars actually concede that house-churches did in fact exist they sometimes have a tendency to downplay the significance of the evidence. Several house-churches have indeed surfaced, however, adding credibility to their existence in the literary record. Archaeologists have confirmed that Christians in fact worshiped in house-churches located in the residential quarters near the Tiber and the Via Appia. Such archeological evidence for house-churches in Rome during the first and second centuries clearly indicates the fractionation of Christians.

6.3 Wealth, Privacy, and House-Churches

The most logical explanation for the small house-churches is the need for privacy instead of a lack of wealth among Christians. After all the owner of the house where Christians

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145 Romans 16.11-15 lists believers into separate households: the saints gathered around Asyncritus, Phleon, Hermes, Patrobas, and Hermas (V. 14), the saints congregated around Philologus, Julia, Nereus, his sister, and Olympas (v. 15), the slaves of freedmen belonging to the house of Aristobulus (v. 10), and the slaves belonging to the household of Narcissus (v. 11). In addition Romans 16 refers to at least fourteen other people who we can assume created additional households, resulting in at least eight house-churches according to Lampe, 359. Gehring, 145 estimates that five households most likely existed and that Lampe is over exaggerating. Gehring’s estimate seems more accurate since Romans 16 lists several people as a block-unit, perhaps comprising only one household. Lampe’s interpretation that each person mentioned by Paul is a host of a household indeed seems an exaggeration, hence his large estimate.

146 MacMullen, The Second Church, 87 mentions that the search for house-churches in Rome has been quite in vain. He is skeptical about the evidence and his entire book basically argues that the majority of Christians worshiped elsewhere.

147 Callistus built a basilica across the Tiber and a cemetery on the Via Appia called the Callistan around 200 C.E. see Matilda Webb, The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome, 229-231 and MacMullen, The Second Church, 135. Both scholars mention several house churches located next to S. Crisogono in Trastevere built around the year 300 C.E. MacMullen, 136 mentions S. Sebastiano and its Catacomb was located on the Via Appia. MacMullen, 136 and Webb, 224-228 mention that S. Lorenzo Fuori Le Mura Church was located outside the city walls on the Via Tiburtina. MacMullen 137 and Webb, 240-245 both locate S. Maria in Trastevere erected in the early 300s C.E. See also Joan M. Petersen, House-Churches in Rome.

148 Carolyn Osiek, Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches, 96-97 observes that if Christians could host churches in their houses than they must have belonged to wealthier social classes. Osiek, 6-35 furthermore discusses the archaeological remains of house-churches, concluding that the locations of Churches in
assembled must have had acquired a considerable amount of wealth in order to donate a moderately sized room for worship. Christians undoubtedly wanted to worship in private locations to avoid scrutiny from their neighbors since they lived an entirely alternate way of life amidst a recently revitalized Roman culture. Before the fourth century Christians faced various persecutions, mainly in the cities. Public worship would not be possible until the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century. With Constantine’s adoption of Christianity came also massive construction projects of churches far different than the house-church. Constantine’s reign marks the transition from private to public worship.

The assembly of a large Christian population, or at least a big audience of course called for a larger worship location. In such instances the meeting place could take the form of a rented hall or a particularly large house. A large meeting place also indicates a significant amount of wealth among Christians since they could afford such a location to congregate. But a larger assembly of Christians could lead to public attention, which in turn could lead to persecution. Paul recognized the danger of public worship and frequently preferred private settings for his teachings. After preaching in the streets of Athens for example, which led to his famous

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149 Joan M. Petersen, *House-Churches in Rome*, 270 comments, “what kind of houses contained the house-churches at Rome? One’s impressions tend to be mixed. On the one hand, they seem to have been the houses of wealthy persons, with large rooms decorated lavishly with paintings, on the other, they have some connection with the world of craftsmen and artisans.” Petersen’s description of house-churches agrees with the argument of this thesis that Christians belonged to wealthier social classes, or industrious merchants who had financial success.

150 Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*, Chapter 1 discusses the regeneration of Roman culture that took place under the policies of Augustus.

151 G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 41 concludes that for the most part, persecutions and martyrdoms “take place in the greatest cities of the Roman world.” Bowersock furthermore observes “it was only in the period just before Constantine that there was a conspicuous deviation from this pattern of urban martyrdoms.”

152 Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*, 9 agrees with the usual argument that Christianity became public after Constantine. Paul Corby Finny, *The Invisible God: the Earliest Christians on Art* argues to the contrary, taking the stance that Christians since the beginning strove always to be as public as possible. The evidence argues the contrary to Finny and in favor of the position of Bowes. Justin the Martyr, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs* 2 for example, tells Rusticus that the only people who attend his congregation are invited to do so.

153 In Acts 19. 9 Paul rents a lecture hall. In Corinth, Gaius had such a large house that it could not only lodge Paul but host a large assembly of Christians in 1 Corinthians 1.11; 16.19.
confrontation with philosophers and politicians on Mars Hill or the Areopagus, Paul next preached in private homes in Corinth.\textsuperscript{154} In Rome so it appears Christians continued to meet in house-churches until a little before Constantine to avoid persecutions. The existence of several house-churches means that worship must have been a very private affair. According to Kim Bowes, entrance was by invitation only because the chapels hidden away in apartment buildings literally shut their doors to the public.\textsuperscript{155}

6.4 Tituli-Churches

In Rome during the second century large Christian assemblies congregated in worship locations better adapted to host greater numbers, but the setting was still one of privacy. These larger meeting places known as the Tituli churches, as mentioned earlier, acted like community centers or worship locations still located in apartments and houses.\textsuperscript{156} The Tituli churches in Rome underwent major renovations throughout the centuries, and for this reason it is difficult to have a clear picture of how they may have differed from a private house-church. A clear and very well persevered example of a renovated house-church, although outside of Rome, is found at Dura-Europos on the frontier of Roman Syria. This renovated house-church reveals that the private dwelling was simply enlarged to host a bigger assembly. The remodeled house-church in Dura consisted of multiple rooms, a built-in baptistery, and a courtyard.\textsuperscript{157} In Rome the Tituli churches most likely were renovated house-churches similar to the one at Dura-Europos, enlarged to serve the growing population of Christians in the city. In Rome the Tituli churches

\textsuperscript{154} Acts 17.18-34 recounts Paul’s confrontation with philosophers and politicians on Mars Hill. Acts 18.1-8. In verse 2 Paul lives in the house of Aquila and Priscilla as part of their household, undoubtedly a location where people heard him preach. In verse 7 Paul abandons preaching in the synagogues and turns to the God-fearers. He preaches to the household of a certain man named Justus, whose house was within a close proximity to the synagogue. In verse 8 Paul baptizes Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue and also his household.

\textsuperscript{155} Bowes, 63-71.

\textsuperscript{156} See footnote 107.

\textsuperscript{157} Ed. C. Bradford Welles, The Excavations at Dura-Europos, 7-32. This survey conducted by Yale University and the French Academy revealed that the Church was a private house adapted to serve a larger assembly of Christians. Osiek, 35 gives an overview of the adaptation of the private house in Dura-Europos.
indicate that Christians had a considerable amount of wealth to remodel pre-existing houses while still worshipping in private outside the pomerium and thus removed from public attention.

6.5 Summary

During the first and second centuries Christians gathered in several different house-churches scattered throughout Rome to worship. Early Christian literature attests that at least one of these house-churches in the second century belonged to the teacher and priest Justin the Martyr, whose followers met with him in his rented apartment above the bath of Timiotinian. Justin the Martyr admits that several house-churches like his existed in Rome, but their locations remained a mystery to him. Peter Lampe’s observation that “in the pre-Constantine period, the Christians of the city of Rome assembled in premises that were provided by private persons and that were scattered across the city” is accurate. But whereas Lampe’s argument focuses on the social pattern of separated synagogues in Rome to account for the fractionation of Christians, this thesis has contended that social stratification, the desire for privacy, and the ancient household structure resulted in the use of houses as churches, which accordingly were scattered throughout the city. Overall, the conditions of worship in Rome are perfectly summarized by Kim Bowes who observes that the Christian population in pre-Constantine Rome is among the “most heterogeneous and fractured” in the Mediterranean. Heterogeneous in the sense that Christians came from a diverse ethnic background belonging to different social classes and fractured because they worshiped in various locations, mainly house-churches and the later Tituli churches.

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158 Justin the Marty tells Rusticus the prefect that he lives in an apartment above a Roman named Martinus and the Timiotinian Bath in *The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs* 2.
159 Justin the Marty asserts that he is unaware of any other meeting places for Christians in Rome in *The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs* 2.
160 Lampe, 364.
161 Bowes, 64.
Chapter 7. Theological Diversity Among Early Christians in Rome

7.1 Introduction

The Christian house-churches in Rome did not practice a unified religion but rather had separate theologies.\(^{162}\) This is hardly surprising since the house-churches and later Tituli churches acted autonomously, congregating around the teachings of prominent teachers or priests. As is to be expected by this scenario the distinct theologies of these Christian communities are for the most part named after their teachers. The various theologies present in Rome before Constantine are complex to say the least. It is undeniable that philosophy influenced the emergence and development of these theologies to a significant degree, perhaps prompting Galen to remark that the Christians in Rome “act like genuine philosophers…even in self discipline and self control and by the most ardent longing for excellence, [they] have progressed so far that they are not a whit inferior to true philosophers.”\(^{163}\)

The actual doctrines of the various theologies is not so much important in this thesis as the fact that they were distinct from one another. A pattern first recognized by Irenaeus reveals the distinctiveness of each theology: students met with their teachers in house-churches, eventually the students separated from their teachers and formed their own house-churches, in their new worship locations the students now the teachers taught new theologies to their own

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\(^{162}\) Moo, 5 asserts that Christians met in house-churches in Rome. His commentary, however, mentions that it is speculative that the house-churches were divided theologically. Lampe, 381-384 remarks that the presence of several house-churches in Rome coincides with “theological pluralism.” Lampe, 379 does note that he is “opening up a can of worms,” and that more research is needed. Gehring, 177 asserts that several scholars have detected the existence of several house-churches in Greco-Roman cities, and that this may explain the tendency of party strife in the apostolic age. This chapter offers an explanation for the theological diversity by arguing that the leaders of the house-churches had a tendency to make a distinction between their theology and the theologies of their rival congregations.

\(^{163}\) Peter Brown, The Rise of Western Christendom, 70-71 observes that philosophy had a very close connection to religion in the ancient world. In fact he says, “morality, philosophy, and ritual were treated as intimately connected. All were part of ‘religion’ in the wide sense of the term to which we have become accustomed. All were based on the Law of God. They were to be found in their true form only in the Church. In the Christian churches, philosophy was dependent upon revelation and morality was absorbed into religio.” Galen, “Fragment of Galen’s Not Complete Writings” quoted by M.P. Charlesworth in the Roman Empire, 151
students, and the pattern repeats itself.\textsuperscript{164} This pattern proves theological diversity among the house-churches because of their separation and desire for distinction from one another. In addition, this pattern supports the archaeological evidence that depicts Rome’s worship locations as extremely fractionized.

\textbf{7.2 Prominent Teachers and Priests of House-Churches}

As discussed in the previous chapter the house-churches congregated around prominent teachers or priests such as Justin the Martyr. Justin was born to a pagan family in the beginning of the second century and immigrated to Rome from his home in Flavia Neapolis in Samaria.\textsuperscript{165} His pagan education introduced him to Stoicism before he became a student of a Pythagorean teacher. Justin also recounts in his various books that he investigated Platonism as well as several other philosophical schools.\textsuperscript{166} Even after converting to Christianity his philosophical background had such an impact on Justin that he retained the appearance of the philosopher, the pallium, sandals, staff, and a beard. Justin recounts that his philosophical appearance was unmistakable and easily perceivable. His appearance in fact instigated one of his most famous dialogues, the \textit{Dialogue With Trypho}.\textsuperscript{167}

As a Christian teacher Justin gathered around him students just as he might have done in his days as a philosopher. His most prominent student, Tatian, came to Rome in the second

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{164} This pattern is observed by Irenaeus in \textit{Against Heresies} 28.1: “Many offshoots of numerous heresies have already been formed from those heretics we have described. This arises from the fact that numbers of them—indeed, we may all-desire themselves to be teachers, and to break off from the particular heresy in which they have been involved. Forming one’s set of doctrines out of a totally different system of opinions, and then again others from others, they insist upon teaching something new, declaring themselves the inventors of any sort of opinion which they may have been able to call into existence.”

\textsuperscript{165} Justin, \textit{First Apology} 1.

\textsuperscript{166} Justin \textit{Dialogue with Trypho} 2. In \textit{Acts of Justin the Martyr} 2.3 Justin says before the Roman municipal praefect that he endeavored to learn all philosophical systems. Justin’s writings have several references to Plato: \textit{First Apology} 8, 18, 20, 44, 59, 60 and \textit{Second Apology} 12, 13. Justin also mentions Socrates in \textit{First Apology} 5, 18, 46 and \textit{Second Apology} 3, 7, 10. Just furthermore speaks of Homer in \textit{First Apology} 18 and \textit{Second Apology} 10. Justin frequently refers to Pythagoras in \textit{First Apology} 18 and \textit{Dialogue} 4, 5, 6, 7.

\textsuperscript{167} Justin, \textit{Dialogue With Trypho} 1 recounts that as he was walking one day a certain philosopher recognized him as a fellow philosopher because of his dress and began to debate with him. In the dialogue, Justin recounts his philosophical background and conversion to Christianity.
\end{footnotesize}
century from Assyria, separated from the house-church of Justin, and developed his own theology. Like Justin, Tatian had a significant educational background. He had received training as a rhetorician and various other subjects but lacked the philosophical training of his teacher. Tatian’s rhetorical education, however, influenced his teachings in a similar manner as philosophy had affected Justin’s interpretation of Christianity. Tatian claimed that Christianity, although not Greek in origin, nevertheless still constituted a “paideia” and a “philosophy.”

Like Justin, Tatian also acquired students of his own that met in his own house-church. Not much is known about Tatian’s students except his most prominent student Rhodon. Only a few sayings of Rhodon are extant as recorded by Eusebius. What little information is available about Rhodon nevertheless indicates that like Tatian he had received an educational training and transmitted certain rhetorical and philosophical teachings through his Christian theology.

Since Rhodon taught his own beliefs distinct from his teacher according to Eusebius, it is very probable if not certain that like Tatian and Justin, Rhodon also had students of his own that met with him in a private house-church in Rome during the second century.

Another house-church in Rome during the second century belonged to the teacher Cerdo. He arrived at Rome in the year 141. Cerdo’s teachings focus on an almost universal inquiry of gnostic Christians of his day, the obsession with the origin of evil. His teachings furthermore seem to be greatly influenced by Simon Magus and Saturninus, leading some scholars to

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169 Tatian, Address to the Greeks 42, 35 26.
170 Tatian refers to Christianity as a paideia in Address to the Greeks 12, 35. Tatian also refers to Christianity as a philosophy in Address to the Greeks 31, 32, 33.
171 Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.28 mentions Tatian and his followers as separate from Justin.
172 Eusebius, History of the Church 5.13.
173 Rhodon is Tatian’s student according to Eusebius, Church History 5.13. It is safe to infer since he is mentioned as writing books by Eusebius that he had his own group of followers just as Tatian and Justin gathered students.
174 Jerome, On Illustrious Men 47 remarks that Maximus first asked the famous question, “What is the origin of evil and was matter made by God?” Such a question of evil’s origin was a favorite among Gnostic Christians in the first few centuries.
speculate that he was once their student, or at least listened to one of their students. Like Justin, Tatian, and Rhodon, Cerdo also had students of his own. His most prominent student who succeeded him as the leader of their house-church in Rome was Marcion, the ship-owner. Marcion’s educational background shares similarities to Tatian and possibly Rhodon. Far from philosophical instruction, Marcion’s rhetorical and grammatical training focused on the biblical cannon, critically purifying biblical texts. His writings, however, at best still depict certain philosophical influences such as Epicureanism.

Marcion also had students that separated from him in the second century who formed new theologies within their own house-churches. The most well known student of Marcion is Apelles. When Apelles became involved with a mistress named Philumena and indulged in unseemly behavior he separated from Marcion. As a consequence of this separation Apelles developed his own theology that he taught his students. Apelles’ new theology still retained certain beliefs of his former teacher but also developed new doctrines. Although Apelles left for Alexandria with his mistress he eventually returned to Rome as an old man and enjoyed considerable popularity. The popularity of Apelles even prompted Tertullian to write an entire book against his doctrines just as he had done against Marcion. Another student of Marcion named Lucian also separated from his teacher and formed his own beliefs just as Apelles had done. Lucian taught similar beliefs to Marcion, but like Apelles he also added new doctrines to

175 Blunt, 104. Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.4. Hippolytus, Refutation Against All Heresies 7.25.
176 Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.4 recounts that Marcion was a student of Cerdo. Tertullian, Prescription Against Heresies 30; Against Marcion 5.1, 4.9 refers to Marcion as a Greek-speaking ship-owner. In Eusebius’ History of Church 5.15.3 Rhodon calls Marcion a seaman.
177 Adolf Harnack, History of Dogma, 278-279.
178 J.G. Gager, Marcion and Philosophy, 57.
179 Tertullian, Against Marcion 3.11 and Prescription Against Heretics 30. Hippolytus, Refutation Against All Heresies 7. 7. 26. Also see Blunt, 38.
180 Tertullian, Prescription Against Heretics 30, 33 observes similar teachings between Marcion and Apelles concerning the resurrection and other doctrines.
181 Tertullian, On the Flesh of Christ 8 remarks that he has written a work particularly to counter Apelles and his doctrines.
his teacher’s theology. Details about Lucian are few, and for this reason scholars generally overlook Lucian’s significance and instead focus their attention on Apelles.\textsuperscript{182} According to Eusebius, Marcion had several other students in Rome who clashed theologically with Tatian’s former student Rhodon.\textsuperscript{183} According to Jerome, Rhodon argued against the theology of Apelles and even asserted that the Marcionites disagreed about theology among themselves.\textsuperscript{184} Marcion’s separation from his teacher Cerdo, his establishment as a teacher of new Christian doctrines and acquiring students, who in turn later separated from him shares a similarity with Justin and his former student Tatian who also became estranged from his student Rhodon.

Various other Gnostic Christian sects also worshipped in private house-churches in pre-Constantine Rome. The Carpocratians for example, a branch of Gnostics derived their doctrine from Carpocrates of Alexandria. Carpocrates doctrines share several similarities with Basilides, leading scholars to speculate that Carpocrates was possibly a student of Basilides. The theology of Carpocrates entered Rome in 160 under the tutelage of a woman named Marcellina.\textsuperscript{185} Scholars have noted the existence of several sects that shared similarities with the Capocratians distinguished only by some small belief.\textsuperscript{186} The different forms of Carpocrates’ theology possibly became established under the same pattern noted earlier: the students of Marcellina separated from their teacher, they developed their own doctrines while retaining certain teachings of their former teacher, and they began new house-churches with their own particular school of theology. Irenaeus especially emphasized that in addition to images of Christ the

\textsuperscript{182} References to Lucian are very few: Hippolytus, \textit{Refutation of All Heresies} 7.11,37. Tertullian, \textit{On the Resurrection of the Flesh} 2 and \textit{Against Heretics} 6.3. Origen, \textit{Against Celsum} 2.27.
\textsuperscript{183} Eusebius, \textit{History of the Church} 5.13.
\textsuperscript{184} Jerome, \textit{On Illustrious Men} 37.
\textsuperscript{185} Irenaeus, \textit{Against Heresies} 1.25.6.
\textsuperscript{186} Blunt, 102.
Carpocratians also had images of the philosophers of the world set up in their midst, a clear indication of philosophical influences in their theology.\(^\text{187}\)

Another Gnostic form of Christianity, the Valentinians, also shared a similar affection for biblical writings as the Marcionites.\(^\text{188}\) This sect named after its founder Valentinus has its origin in Rome between 136-140, existing simultaneously with the Carpocratians, Cerdonians, Marcionites, Lucianists, Apellianists, and the followers of Justin, Tatian, and Rhodon during the second century.\(^\text{189}\) Valentinus, like the teachers of other house-churches, undoubtedly had a background in philosophy since the teachings of Platonism influenced his school of theology.\(^\text{190}\) Valentinus also had several students. Two of Valentinus’ students separated from him and founded their own schools, Ptolemy and Heracleon.\(^\text{191}\) According to Clement of Alexandria, Heracleon became the most influential and distinguished student from the school of the Valentinians.\(^\text{192}\)

Several more prominent teachers taught their students in house-churches scattered throughout Rome around the same time as the above-mentioned divisions of Christianity. One particular sect of Christianity named by Tertullian is the Praxeans. Tertullian even wrote an entire work against the teacher Praxeas who migrated to Rome from Asia.\(^\text{193}\) Although Tertullian lived in Africa he converted to a form of Christianity also found in Rome, the Montanists.\(^\text{194}\) This

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\(^{187}\) Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.25.6.

\(^{188}\) Ibid, 1.20.1.

\(^{189}\) The Carpocratians made it to Rome by at least 160 but most likely not any earlier. The Cerdonians existed in Rome between 125-155. The Marcionites worshiped in Rome by at least 140. The Lucianists and Apellianists taught in Rome during the same time of the Marcionites, probably at the earliest around 140. Justin the Martyr, Tatian, and Rhodon all lived in Rome and taught between 140-160. For the dating of these forms of Christianity in Rome see Blunt’s *Table of the Principal Contents*, which lists these sects in chronological order, as well as his various sections on each theology.

\(^{190}\) Tertullian, *Against Heretics* 30 and *Against Valentinians* illustrates a strong influence of Platonism. Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 29.


\(^{192}\) Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.9.

\(^{193}\) Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 1.

\(^{194}\) Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 53.
particular theology named after its author Montanus thrived in Rome sometime around 170.

Tertullian records that a religious conflict arose in Rome among the Montanists and Praxeans. The conflict became so intense that Praxeas persuaded another form of Christianity to recant its association to Montanus and his followers.¹⁹⁵ This other group that broke off its relationship with the Montanists, although unnamed in the sources is implied to be Christian Orthodoxy, or at least the predecessor of Christian Orthodoxy sometimes referred to as “proto-orthodoxy.”¹⁹⁶

Scholars generally concede, with few exceptions, that Christian Orthodoxy developed during the reign of Constantine.¹⁹⁷ Walter Bauer’s groundbreaking study *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* was the first investigation to argue that Christian heresies were not simply branches of Christian Orthodoxy. In certain geographical locations Bauer even contended that the heresies actually constituted the original forms of Christianity. Bauer’s investigation became controversial since it insisted that Christian Orthodoxy was simply just one of the many forms of Christianity that existed simultaneously with other Christian traditions, eventually gaining dominance because of its acceptance by Constantine, wealth, and its strong organization.¹⁹⁸ Most recently Kristina Sessa’s research has formed a similar conclusion to that

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¹⁹⁵ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas I.*
¹⁹⁶ See “Montanists” in the Catholic Encyclopedia. This article relates the relationship between Christian orthodoxy (“proto-orthodoxy” at the time) and the Montanists. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 179 created the neologism “proto-orthodoxy,” to refer to the pre-cursor Orthodox Church that arose to dominance among the various forms of Christianity.
¹⁹⁷ Francis A. Sullivan’s study, *From Apostles to Bishops: the Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* is one of the very few recently written books that still pushes the formation of Christian orthodoxy back to the apostles. His thesis basically relies on the argument of apostolic succession to the bishops of Rome. Such books as that of Sullivan, however, clearly are motivated by theological biases.
¹⁹⁸ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 231 asserts, “the form of Christian belief and life which was successful was that supported by the strongest organization, the form which was the most uniform and best suited for mass consumption in spite of the fact that, in my judgment, for a long time after the close of the post-apostolic age the sum total of consciously orthodox and anti-heretical Christians was numerically inferior to that of the ‘heretics.’” Bauer, 231-232 observes that, “the Roman government finally came to recognize that the Christianity ecclesiastically organized from Rome was flesh of its flesh, came to unite with it, and thereby actually enabled it to achieve ultimate victory over unbelievers and heretics.” Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church*, 13-14 agrees with Bauer that “the emergence of conflicting views regarding the teaching and organization of the new Christian communities may well have been arising simultaneously wherever Christianity took root.” Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church*, 33 furthermore concludes that, “Saints [orthodoxy] and sinners [heretics] were beginning to
of Bauer’s. For Sessa the role of the household played a critical part in the development of the Roman Church’s power from 350-600. In short, Sessa argues that Rome’s bishops adopted the ancient elite household as a model of government for leading the church. Her investigation, like Bauer’s argument, traces the formation of Christian Orthodoxy to the time of Constantine.\textsuperscript{199} Jaroslav Pelikan, moreover, in his multi-volume survey of Christian doctrine is quite clear that Christian Orthodoxy in the first and second centuries simply existed as just one of various forms of Christianity in Rome and the Mediterranean. Pelikan agrees with Bauer and observes that “the discovery that heresy may be a result of poor timing has come only as a consequence of modern historical research: the primitive church was not characterized by an explicit unity of doctrine; therefore heresy could sometimes claim greater antiquity than orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{200} Thus, it appears according to various scholars that Christian Orthodoxy at first simply existed as just one of the various Christian divisions in Rome.

\subsection*{7.3 Summary}

The pattern recognized by Irenaeus clearly depicts theological diversity among the Christian population in Rome. Interestingly his recognition is repeated in a Syriac document presumably written by Hegesippus, perhaps depicting an association between the two men as adherents of a similar theology. Hegesippus remarks that upon arriving in Rome he discovered “Marcionists, and the Carpocratians, and the Valentinians, and the Basilidians, and the Saturnilians. Each of these leaders in his own private and distinct capacity brought in his own private opinion.” Hegesiuppus and Irenaeus each observe that these divisions of Christianity emerge according to their interpretation of the New covenant, and perhaps also according to the location of the community to which they belonged.” Gerd Ludemann, \textit{Heretics: the Other Side of Early Christianity}, 219 boldly asserts that, “the heretics of the second century, men and women, are at least as close to Jesus as the orthodox, and must be welcomed back into the church.” Ehrman, 176 recounts both the evidence in favor and in opposition to Bauer’s thesis, concluding that in the end there is more evidence that his thesis is actually correct.

\textsuperscript{199} See the conclusion of Kristina Sessa, \textit{The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy: Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere}, 274-281.

existing at the same time in Rome and distinct in theology were not authentic, orthodox, or true but rather “split up the one Church into parts through their corrupting doctrines.” In an effort to justify their claim as the one true theology among several others, Irenaeus and Hegesiuppus importantly depict the distinctiveness of each theology: they assert that prominent teachers taught their students in private worship locations in Rome, certainly house-churches, only to have their students leave, create new theologies, acquire students themselves, and the pattern repeats itself.

*The Shepherd of Hermas* dating to the late first or early second century is a witness to the complex fractionation of the house-churches in Rome and their theological diversity. Hermas observed theological debates among priests and he advises them to “be at peace one with another.” In a similar passage Hermas speaks of the various Christians who “never [are] at peace with one another, but always at variance,” who are “foolish, indulging in such a rivalry for fame.” Such priests observed by Hermas correspond to men like Justin the Martyr, Tatian, Rhodon, Cerdo, and Marcion etc. The house-churches existed simultaneously at times, acted autonomously, were theologically distinct from another and scattered or factionized throughout the city, and “proto-orthodoxy” appears to be just one of these Christian divisions.

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202 Hermas, *The Shepherd of Hermas* Vis 2.4. The author is asked in the vision if he has given his writings to the priests who preside over the various churches.
203 Ibid Sim 8.7.
Chapter 8. Level of Education of Early Christians in Rome

8.1 Introduction

The Christians meeting in private house-churches undoubtedly must have had a high degree of education considering they were familiar with the various philosophies. Philosophy, after all, was the apex of the classical education. After receiving training in grammar and rhetoric, students that were wealthy enough and desired further instruction attended a school of philosophy. Justin’s school, and that of the Valentinians, Carpocratians, Cerdonians, Marcionites, Lucianists, and Apellianists, and the followers of Tatian and Rhodon clearly transmitted their philosophical knowledge through their version of Christianity. Although scholars debate concerning the level of education that the leaders of these house-churches had attained and to what social class they belonged, this chapter argues that to a substantial degree that each teacher was at least familiar if not a master of different philosophical schools and thus wealthy enough to afford a thorough education.

8.2 Level of Education

Although these Christian communities meeting in private houses reflect the household oikoi, the philosophical and religious teachings of a teacher to his students must also have appeared as a sort of school. It is hardly surprising that scholars have speculated that to the Romans these small congregations which gathered around a teacher like Justin the Martyr, Cerdo, or Valentinus meeting in private houses appeared similar to students receiving instruction from a

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204 Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 282 remarks “philosophy was a minority culture for an intellectual elite prepared to make necessary effort. It meant breaking with the usually culture, whose general tone, as we have seen, was literary, rhetorical and aesthetic. It meant even more, for Hellenistic philosophy was not only a special kind of intellectual training; it was also an ideal of life that claimed the whole man. To become a philosopher meant adopting a new way of life-one that was more exacting morally and demanded a certain amount of ascetic effort.”

205 Jeffers, 119-120 asserts that house-churches may have hosted a large number of Christians from different social statuses, levels of education, and ethnicities. Lampe, 372 agrees with Jeffers in that the house-churches hosted both the educated wealthy Christians as well as the poor uneducated. Both Lampe and Jeffers assert that the degree of education of these early Christians is speculative at best.
philosopher.206 The house, after all, was the primary location where traveling teachers, the sophists, met with their students. Even during Republican times houses served as an ideal location for instruction. Cicero speaks of receiving an education in the home of Lucius Licinius Crassus (140-91 B.C.E.) under the Greek teachers he employed with Quintus and their cousins.207 Lucian Samosata writing in the beginning of the second century, the same time when all these various divisions of Christianity existed in Rome, remarks how his teacher had become ill and left a sign on the door that said “No philosophy class today.”208 Seneca likewise speaks of philosopher sophists meeting in houses during his time.209 Even the emperor Marcus Aurelius recounts attending classes in the house of the stoic teacher Apollonius of Chalcedon.210 Sophists of the Second Sophistic, the traveling philosophers and teachers of wisdom had invaded Rome in the days of Cicero and had grown in popularity by the time Christianity entered the capital city.211 For the Romans, Christianity must have appeared as a strange new philosophy-religion from the East discussed and taught in private houses.212 Just because Christianity was a private affair does not mean it was unknown by the inhabitants of Rome and other cities. As a religion

206 Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 44-45 remarks that several early Christians used the word “teacher” or “father” to denote their central role in a Christian community. These terms, however, also were used of the great sophists. Bowersock asserts, “Interpreting a community of teacher and disciples as a kind of spiritual family was characteristic of the ancient philosophical and rhetorical schools...” Lampe, 379 observes that the Christian communities both looked and acted like philosophical schools. Bruce. W. Winter in *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists* argues that the Christian congregations organized into house-churches also looked and acted like philosophical schools. Winter also argues that the sophists of the Second Sophistic movement had a particularly strong influence in Christian communities in Corinth and undoubtedly elsewhere in the Roman Empire.

207 Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.2-4.


209 Seneca, *Epistle* 76. 4.

210 Suetonius, *Life of Marcus Aurelius* 3.1

211 G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*, 9 commented that the “the Second (or new) Sophistic is a culmination, not a sudden burst or fad. This is true of the sophists’ style as much as it is of their role in Roman history. Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire*, 18-19 also asserts that the Second Sophistic was not a sudden reemergence.

and philosophy. Christianity was tolerated so long as its believers and students met outside the inner city and remained out of the public spotlight.

The appearance of the Christian communities as philosophical schools is attested to outside Rome. The city of Corinth provides a perfect example. When Paul first arrived in Corinth he preached in a Jewish synagogue. Persecution from the Jewish population, however, caused the apostle to look elsewhere to teach his listeners so he chose to preach in private houses.\(^{213}\) Acts lists at least three households where Paul preached in Corinth, the households of Justus, Crispus, and that of Aquila and Priscilla.\(^{214}\) According to Bruce W. Winter, Paul’s letters to the Corinthians in the New Testament provide substantial evidence that among the Christian communities (households) in Corinth certain philosophers and sophists had a significant influence. Winter’s textual analysis reveals that through Paul’s writings that his “critique of the sophist tradition appears to have angered at least some in the Corinthian congregation.”\(^{215}\) As Winter illustrates in his book *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists*, certain Christians in the house-churches in Corinth had become “puffed up” and sought the rhetorically acclaimed Apollos.\(^{216}\) Winter argues that Apollos refused to appease their request and as a consequence, 2 Corinthians 10–13 suggests that the Christians in Corinth hired itinerant teachers with training in rhetoric to instruct the congregations.\(^{217}\) Paul’s letters frequently depict an anti-sophistic stance. In short, Paul defended his authority despite the Corinthian Christians’ claim that he lacked speaking skills, had a weak appearance, and that his letters were lengthy.\(^{218}\) Also, Paul defended himself against accusations that like the Sophists, he had tricked the Christians in Corinth into supporting

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213 Acts 18.4-6.
217 Winter, 203.
218 2 Corinthians 10.10. Winter, 204-207.
him financially.\textsuperscript{219} Paul’s letters to the Corinthian Christians further rebukes them for sophistic boasting, taking part in rhetorical conventions, and falling prey to false wisdom (\textit{Sophia}) taught by foolish teachers.\textsuperscript{220}

Rome’s significant position as the capital city of the Empire and its elevation since the Republic to an intellectual center undoubtedly influenced its residents to perceive Christians meeting in house-churches as the Christian communities in Corinth, as schools of philosophy or higher education. The similarity is all but uncanny. Indeed, in Rome Christians as described in the previous chapters gathered around rhetorically and philosophically trained teachers as students, listening to their teachings before branching out for themselves and beginning a new house-church with their own distinct theology. While the amount of education these Christians had received is open to debate, their extremely “cultured” condition is beyond any doubt veracious since they had obtained instruction in different philosophies. Also, since an education in philosophy was quite expensive it is easy to infer that the members of the house-churches belonged to wealthier social classes.

\textbf{8.3 Summary}

In summary, the house-churches scattered throughout Rome must have been limited in number and accommodated a very small number of educated believers that attended the meetings by invitation only. Whereas past historians have asserted that house-churches may have also hosted poorer uneducated Christians the current and previous chapter have argued to the contrary.\textsuperscript{221} The evidence is clear that the members of the house-churches must have received an education in philosophy and had wealth, thus belonging to a higher-cultured stratification of

\textsuperscript{219} 2 Corinthians 12.16. Winter, 228.
\textsuperscript{220} 1 Corinthians 1-4. 2 Corinthians 10-13. Winter, 229-237.
\textsuperscript{221} See footnote 205.
Roman society.\textsuperscript{222} This naturally begs the question where the masses of Christians worshiped: the common poor Greek believers that could not have participated, or very unlikely worshiped in the house-churches since they lacked the education that the members of these households must have had. Therefore, while the educated and wealthy Christians worshipped in private meeting places in the city, the poor uneducated Christians must have looked elsewhere to congregate and worship, if not in the house-churches in the city then possibly outside the city-walls.

\textsuperscript{222} Wayne A. Meeks, \textit{The First Urban Christians: the Social World of Paul}, 73 concludes that urban Christians must have excluded the poorer Christians since the believers mentioned in the Pauline literature typically show signs of wealth, although not substantial to the level of aristocrats or senators.
Chapter 9. Early Christians of Rural Rome

9.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the level of education Christians in Rome likely had obtained and concluded that the members of the house-churches at least received a certain degree of instruction significant enough to allow them to have familiarity with various philosophies. These Christians in house-churches could not have amounted to a large population unless there was a great quantity of house-churches hidden outside the pomerium, which is an unlikely possibility given the scant evidence.223 A more plausible conclusion is that the house-churches were limited in number and only hosted anywhere from five Christians to perhaps thirty at the most in the congregations, the amount of people accommodated in a moderately sized room in an apartment house. If the house-church had undergone remodeling such as the Tituli it could host a larger congregation; Osiek estimates upwards to sixty-five to seventy-five people.224 Theories put forth by historians that argue large numbers of Christians attended urban house-churches seems inaccurate since the large congregation would have attracted public attention.225 The very spectacle that Christians avoided in the first place because of the fear of persecution; hence the reason for the several small private meeting places. If large numbers of Christians did actually attend remodeled house-churches then certainly these communities numbered very few, at least limited to the scarce Tituli churches. Yet the Christian population in Rome before Constantine

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223 See footnote 147 and 148 for evidence of the existence of house-churches. MacMullen, The Second Church, 87 argues that evidence is significantly lacking for the existence of house-churches in Rome, but he concedes that given the literary record they must have existed.

224 Osiek, Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches, 35 asserts that after a house-church had been remodeled it could accommodate perhaps 65-75 people. Before the remodeling that lack of space would have decreased the number significantly. I estimate 5-30 because even the biggest room in the house must have lacked space, forcing the listeners to squeeze into uncomfortable positions such as Eutchus, who fell asleep in the window cell and fell out of the third loft as recounted in Acts 20.8-10. MacMullen, The Second Church, 87 observes that the Tituli churches most likely originated from the house-churches, simply remodeled to accommodate larger populations.

225 See footnote 205.
must have steadily grown to a significant number great enough to cause controversy and receive unwanted public attention of Roman officials such as the Emperor Nero who used Christians as a scapegoat for the famous fires that burned almost the entire city. Unless the amount of house-churches significantly increased to host a growing Christian population and, furthermore, accepted less educated members into their philosophical-religious households, which is unlikely to have occurred, then the masses of poor Christians must have looked elsewhere to worship.\footnote{MacMullen, \textit{The Second Church}, 87 agrees with the supposition that the churches in urban Rome could not have accommodated the actual Christian population: “Accommodations for worship pre-313 appear to have been very limited both in the number of places and in their dimensions.” He estimates that even if the \textit{Tituli} churches existed in the dimensions that they are today, they could only host about 1 per cent of the city’s residents.}

The previous chapter that investigated Christian worship locations provides a clue as to where the masses of poor Christians worshipped. The catacombs and cemeteries outside the city walls within a close proximity to the main roads have almost an eerie and mystical element surrounding them. Although they served as burial places for the dead they also acted as places of worship for the living. Worship in the sense that Christians used these locations of the deceased for sacred rituals with religious significance that was quite in contrast to the liturgy performed by members of the urban house-churches. These tunnels for the dead so rich in history further illustrate the diversity among the Christian population that resided in Rome before the reign of Constantine: diversity in theology, worship location, and social stratification.

\textbf{9.2 The Catacombs}

At first Christians buried their dead in cemeteries used by their Roman contemporaries. Paul, supposedly Peter, and Justin all are buried in public cemeteries.\footnote{See footnote 58 and 59.} The \textit{Acts of Justin and Companions} for example speaks of the burial of martyrs, in particular Justin who was buried simply “in a suitable place,” undoubtedly a public pagan cemetery outside the city walls.\footnote{\textit{Acts of Justin and Companions} 6.}
Christians likewise buried Paul in a public cemetery near the Vatican hill near the Tiber River, in a cemetery of both Christians and Pagans. But a growing Christian population instigated private burials among the believers of this new religion. Christians soon constructed their own cemeteries outside the city walls. The wealthy Christians that hosted or at least attended the house-churches within the city likely donated or bought land to serve as Christian cemeteries in the countryside. Such an assumption is likely true since the names of the catacombs and cemeteries usually derive from a member of the family that owned the land. As the tombs of martyrs gained significance certain cemeteries became more popular as a place of burial. In the catacomb of St. Callistus for instance, a Christian named Serpentius proudly bought a grave from the digger Quintus near St. Cornelius. Competition for these favored spots was not limited to wealthy Christians, however, even the poor diggers laid claim to ideal burial plots. At least a partial inscription by a digger is still visible concerning his preferred spot for his own burial next to a Holy Martyr. Peter Brown’s *The Cult of the Saints* remains the classic study that investigates the rise and function of martyrs in Christian worship. Brown’s study, illustrates that men and women relied upon the intercession of the holy martyrs to obtain justice, forgiveness, and foster a close relationship with the divine. For these reasons the Christians assiduously

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230 J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs rediscovered Monuments of early Christianity*, 7-8 compares Christian and pagan burial practices, concluding that the household, *oikoi*, had the duty of burying their members. Since Christian communities first were organized according to households, which in turn became the house-churches, this is a very likely assumption. Stevenson, 25 mentions that the catacombs and cemeteries are frequently named after the owner of the land such as, Priscilla, Domitilla, Praetextatus, or Lucina. Nicolai, 23 observes that “the names of many of the earliest communal cemeteries in Rome, attested by the sources from the first half of the fourth century, evidently seem to refer to private intervention in the foundation of communal cemeteries. Only the Catacomb of Callisto appears from the very beginning, as seen earlier, to have been directly administered by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The names of these early funerary complexes transmitted by the literary and epigraphic sources, Domitilla, Priscilla, Pretestato, Bassilla, and Trasone, can only be suitably explained n connection with their foundation by private individuals.”
231 Nicolai, 35 asserts that the tombs of the martyrs and bishops seem to have resulted in significant monumental work and the popularity of certain catacombs. See Illustration 8.b.1 and 8.b.2.
232 Stevens, 22.
claimed locations near the graves of martyrs for themselves and their family members, making certain cemeteries quite popular.

The lack of available land, the cost of constructing tombs, a growing Christian population, and the popularization of private Christian cemeteries influenced Christians to employ professional diggers (fossores) to tunnel deep into the ground, creating the catacombs where tombs known as loculi could be hewn into the rock.\(^ {234} \) The diggers were undoubtedly Christians themselves, perhaps of the poorest stratification among the Christian population since they literally took part in backbreaking labor for very little pay. Just a glimpse into the labyrinth of underground tunnels gives an idea that this great undertaking by the diggers who extracted stone amounting to millions of cubic meters was far from a pleasant experience. The diggers kept the galleries and tunnels to a minimum width, which barely allowed them to swing their flimsy little pickaxes. They worked in unhealthy and dangerous environments and left their finished result in no better of a condition.\(^ {235} \) The diggers made the tunnels and hewed loculi to supply demand. They merely built what they could sell to families or perhaps to Christian households, which in turn seems to have donated the loculi to poor Christians who could not even afford to entomb their dead.\(^ {236} \) Hippolytus adamantly believed that the poorest of Christians should not be required to pay a hefty price for their burials. According to this priest in Rome, the family members should only pay for the cost of the grave; the bishop or presiding priest should cover the cost of the caretakers.\(^ {237} \)

\(^ {234} \) J. Stevenson, 18 gives an overview of the vocabulary of Catacombs in his book. See Illustrations 8.c. for an image of a fossor and 8.d. for an image of loculi. Nicolai, 15 lists several possible reasons for the construction of the catacombs: the growth of the Christian population, the desire for a sacred location where burial rites could be administered, and a burial place for the poor.

\(^ {235} \) See Illustration 8.e.

\(^ {236} \) MacMullen, 73. J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, 235. Nicolai, 23. MacMullen, Toynbee, and Nicolai all agree that to a certain degree the catacombs acted as communal burial places for poor Christians.

\(^ {237} \) Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 40: “Do not put a high price on burying people in the cemeteries, for they are for all the poor. However, they shall pay the wages of a workman to whoever digs the hole, and the price of the
The original theory that Christians used the catacombs as safe-havens during persecutions has proven quite erroneous for obvious reasons, demographics and physical conditions. These deep caverns carved into the dark and gloomy earth were incredibly humid with instable footholds, not to mention the overpowering smell of decaying flesh in the tunnels. Jerome’s description of the catacombs is quite descriptive of the horrid conditions of these subterranean cemeteries. He recalls:

When I was a boy receiving my education in Rome, I and my school-fellows used, on Sundays, to make the circuit of the sepulchers of the apostles and martyrs. Many a time did we go down in the Catacombs. These are excavated deep in the earth and contain, on either hand as you enter, the bodies of the dead buried in the wall. It is all so dark there that the language of the prophet seems to be fulfilled, ‘Let them go down quick into hell.’ Only occasionally is light let in to mitigate the horror of the gloom and then not so much through a window as through a hole. You take each step with caution, as, surrounded by deep night, you recall the words of Virgil, “Everywhere as I go fills me with terror, the very silence around me fills me with terror.”

The catacombs with their numerous loculi, carefully organized so as to fit the greatest amount of corpses into the tunnels and galleries supplied poor Christians a place for burial. The inscriptions inside the catacombs indicate that the Christians buried in these subterranean resting places spoke Greek and were so poor that they could barely afford to buy a burial place for their dead as implied by Hippolytus. The rapid cost of land, however, forced the wealthier bricks. The bishop will provide for the caretaker there from what they offer at the assemblies, so that there is no charge for those who come to the place.”

Catholic Layman, *The Catacombs at Rome*, 73. This short article presents the original theory quite well, that the catacombs acted as shelter for early Christians from persecutions. In addition, this article includes a second part to this original theory; it asserts that the catacombs were built by the giant excavations that took place to adorn Rome with marble and stone works during the reign of Augustus, with the empty chambers being used for the outcasts of Roman society such as the Christians. Nicolai, 13 also provides an overview of the original theory, stating that it has its origin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The original theory, as Nicolai observes, is mostly based on the incorrect interpretation of sources.


MacMullen, 70-72 and Nicolai, 15. Both MacMullen and Nicolai conclude that the catacombs predominantly were used as burial places for the poor.

Nicolai, 147-158 asserts that most of the inscriptions were written in Greek while a small percentage were Latin. Nicolai’s overview of Christian names that predominantly were Greek furthermore illustrates that the Christians spoke Greek. See footnote 237 for Hippolytus’ opinion for the burial of the poor.
of Christians to bury their deceased in the catacombs during the third century onwards. These more fiscally advantaged Christians used their wealth to decorate the elegant galleries, the cubicula, usually used as illustrations in books about the catacombs. Although scholars once speculated that these burial chambers, the cubicula, served as chapels for worship such theories have been debunked, these notable galleries merely acted as tombs for wealthy families. The cubicula in the various catacombs were not built until the turn of the third century during or after the reign of Constantine and after the persecutions. In addition, the cubicula could in the very least only have accommodated small gatherings of family members for reunions during anniversaries of the dead. The catacombs’ narrow tunnels of loculi packed ever so tightly into narrow spaces and stacked one on top of another merely served as a cemetery, literally under the ground for the poor.

9.3 Funeral Banquets

Paintings in the Cubicula and relief sculptures attest to the usual practice of funeral banquets among Romans and Christians alike. Romans in the early Christian period believed that the dead dwelt in the tomb, which acted as a sort of house for the deceased. The living relatives frequently visited the catacombs and tombs to provide their deceased kindred offerings of food and drink. Archaeologists have even discovered several instances in which sarcophagi or

242 MacMullen, 73.
244 MacMullen, 73 observes that from the turn of the third century on, the administration of cemeteries by the Roman church made the subterranean galleries and chambers increasingly popular. It is around this time that elegantly decorated galleries for private families develop. Nicolai, 37-49 provides an overview of the development of catacombs during the reign of Constantine and subsequent emperors, concluding that these subterranean burial places became more elegant and monumental.
245 MacMullen, 70-74. Nicolai, 29-35. MacMullen and Nicolai observes that the larger cubiculum date to the second half of the third and the beginning of the fourth centuries.
246 J.M.C. Toynbee, Death and Burial in the Roman World, 240 addresses the original theory and concludes that it is completely debunked since the galleries could have only housed very small numbers of Christians. Also, the galleries acted like areas for reunions of relatives and friends on the anniversaries of the dead. See Illustrations 8.g.1-8.g.3.
247 See Illustration 8.h.
248 See Illustrations 8.i.1-8.i.5.
tombs have small holes leading to the corpse for offerings of liquid, so in a sense that the dead are drinking in the tomb.\textsuperscript{249} The Christian funeral banquet differed very little from the feast of their pagan contemporaries known as refrigerium: it consisted of eating a meal and drinking wine while socializing.\textsuperscript{250} Inside the Cubicula there are benches for mourners and stone chairs for the souls of the departed.\textsuperscript{251} Also, the Cubicula contain paintings and the remains of chairs surrounding tables set with plates of food for family members that reclined on cushions or couches and sat in chairs.\textsuperscript{252} Such locations for funerary banquets in the catacombs were more symbolic than literal, however. As MacMullen observes, “no one would willingly linger for very long” in these subterranean cemeteries given their uninhabitable environment.\textsuperscript{253}

The refrigerium usually took place above ground where family members and friends gathered to eat a meal and drink wine in remembrance of their ancestors who had departed. In Isola Sacra in Ostia for example, there are dining couches, tables, and provisions for cooking at the entrances of tombs.\textsuperscript{254} The tombs in Pompeii similarly have masonry couches and tables where family members and friends of the deceased could eat meals, drink wine, and socialize.\textsuperscript{255} A pavilion, a sort of triclinium or triclia used for dining in a garden are frequently attached to tombs for the commemorative or funeral banquet.\textsuperscript{256} The typical funeral banquet is depicted in a painting inside a tomb in Ostia: five men in white tunics are feasting around a table. Other scenes depict the funeral banquet as a sort of picnic where family members sitting on cushions feast on the food placed on the ground before them.

\textsuperscript{249} Katherine M.D. Dunbabin, The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality, 127.
\textsuperscript{250} Dunbabin defines refrigerium in the glossary of her book. Paul uses the word refrigerium in at least two places in the New Testament: 2 Timothy 1.16 and Romans 15.32. In both instances Paul unmistakably is referring to some sort of banquet that he is anticipating, he simply is looking forward to “refreshment.”
\textsuperscript{251} See Illustration 8.j.1-8.j.2.
\textsuperscript{252} Again see Illustrations 8.k.1-8.k.5. See Illustration 8.j. for an image of a table in the catacombs for such meals.
\textsuperscript{253} MacMullen, 76.
\textsuperscript{254} See Illustration 8.L.
\textsuperscript{255} Dunababin, 128-129. See Illustration 8.m.1-8.m.2.
\textsuperscript{256} See Illustration 8.n.
Christians clearly took part in religious rituals that commemorated their deceased kindred. The dead were very much still a part of the lives of the living. They remembered their deceased kindred, prayed for them, and, according to Jeffrey A. Trumbower, were even concerned for their salvation. The unique religious ceremonies of these rural Christians depicted in paintings consisting of families eating meals together around their ancestors that had past away is a far different religion compared to the urban philosopher Christians. If the urban Christians that met in house-churches sanctioned these rituals or at least took part in them, then a trace of these banquets should exist in their writings. The only comments about the funeral rituals by Christian authors, however, rebuke rural Christians for eating and drinking in the cemeteries. Augustine recalls bishops rebuking Christians in Africa for their drunkenness at the feasts that honored the martyrs or remembered their deceased kindred. Even Augustine’s mother took part in such rituals, a particular memory it seems Augustine shamefully recalled. And in Italy St. Ambrose similarly forbade the feasts and offerings to the martyrs and the dead because of the association of the practice with the pagans. Only a small passage in the *Shepherd of Hermas* may refer to the funeral banquet as an acceptable and common practice among Christians. Hermas is carried away in a vision and goes to the countryside, he sees cushions and possibly a table and is filled with horror since he was alone. As he is seated six young men come to sit and dine with him and they pray together. This passage by Hermas, however, is open to interpretation and its meaning is debated as is the case with any sort of religious vision. The evidence thus depicts

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257 Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: the Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity*. Nicolai, 15 observes that the catacombs were possibly created for the celebration of burial rites and even praying for the dead. Such a prayer for the dead, possibly for their salvation includes Thecla’s prayer for Falconilla, Perpetua’s prayer for Dinocrates, and even Gregory the Great’s prayer for Trajan.  
258 St. Augustine, *Confessions* 6.2.2. Augustine’s description of his mother, carrying her basket with meals to the tombs is perhaps the only passage of early Christian literature that describes the banquet discussed in this chapter. In short, Augustine recalls his mother Monica carrying bread, cakes, festive meats, and wine to the tombs, where both males and females gathered to eat and drink in honor of the dead saints and Christians. Augustine calls this activity “festivals in honour of the dead.”  
rural Christians as an entirely different sort than their urban counterpart. It is true that these rural Christians may have had some association with the house-churches, possibly employed by the wealthier urban Christians to work as the diggers and caretakers of the communal cemeteries and catacombs, but undoubtedly such a poor population of believers was not easily included into the philosophical theologies of house-churches inside the cities.

9.4 Summary

The Christians that participated in the banquets, the poor Greek-speaking believers living on the fringes of the city, must have found themselves alienated from the house-churches and they looked elsewhere to worship still outside the pomerium. Thus Christians worshipped outside the city walls in locations where they already congregated, the cemeteries. Since these poor Christians lacked philosophical instruction and must have found it difficult to understand the philosophical theologies of the house-churches, they had an entirely different theology that was more connected to their pagan past. So it appears that these Christians who feasted at the banquets add to the theological complexity of the various divisions of Christianity inside the city of Rome. The cemeteries and catacombs not only indicate wealthy and poor Christians that spoke Greek, new worship locations in addition to the urban house-churches already scattered throughout the city, but they also reveal further theological diversity among the Christian population of Rome.
Chapter 10. Explanation of Christian Fractionation and Theological Diversity in Rome: The Lack of Centrality

10.1 Introduction

The previous chapters argued that beginning in the first century and continuing into the second century priests or teachers presided over wealthy Christians in house-churches in Rome. These house-churches had distinct theologies from one another and acted autonomously. Further theological diversity existed among the poorest of Christians that worshiped in the countryside who retained their pagan traditions. The sources at times give the appearance of unity among Christians, however, thus completely undermining this argument of Christian diversity. This presence of unity among Christians is best understood as a common Christian identity, or, that is to say, that even though theological diversity existed among Christians in Rome they nevertheless acknowledged, tolerated, and cooperated with each other as Christians. Despite the outward appearance of unity, the reality of fractionation and theological diversity originated in New Testament times because of a lack of a central governing authority. Such diversity reached unprecedented levels by the second century as students separated from their teachers. Although Peter Lampe observes that in the end of the second century theological diversity for the most part ceased when the office of “administer of external affairs” transitioned into the Roman episcopacy, such a theory fails to account for the continuation of theological diversity not only in Rome but also on an empire-wide level in the third and fourth centuries. The continuation of

\[260\] Several sources address Christians as a unified community. The majority of Paul’s epistles for example address the Christian population in a certain city. Another early letter, First Clement also addresses the entire Christian population in Corinth. The Shepherd of Hermas likewise addresses the Christian population in Rome. The New Testament, as will be shown in this chapter, clearly depicts Christian diversity in Rome and other cities.

\[261\] The argument of this chapter about diversity even developing during New Testament times is in response to Andrea Kostenberger, Michael J. Kruger, and I. Howard Marshall, The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity, which argues to the contrary.
theological diversity is plainly depicted by the development of the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy discussed in chapter 11.

10.2 Lack of Centrality

In Romans 16 Paul’s greeting to the hosts of house-churches implies a personal acquaintance between them and the apostle. Such an acquaintance is the reason why Paul knew about the Christians in Rome in the first place. Paul had not visited Rome yet when he wrote them his letter. In the same chapter Paul asks the different households to accept Phebe, the carrier of his letter. The house-churches in this passage certainly must have had communication and cooperated with one another if Phebe is able to locate each of them so she can deliver Paul’s letter. Overall, the apostle’s greeting suggests that the Christians in Rome meeting in different house-churches, at least during the time of Paul’s letter acted as one body of believers, adhering to the same theology and belonging to the same “church” but simply meeting as various “households” scattered throughout the city. In the same chapter, however, the picture drastically changes as Paul admonishes the Christians in Rome to “mark them, which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine, which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” This new development in the text indicates that Paul’s acquaintances informed him of the theological diversity developing within the Christian population in Rome, possibly even among or at least affecting those that he is addressing caused

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262 Moo, 887. In particular Paul had access to information about Christians in Rome because of his friendship with Prisca and Aquila. Such a friendship with these two prominent Christians implies, although it is not certain, that Paul may have written the letter to the Romans from Corinth.

263 Romans 16.1-2: “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.” In Colossians 4.9-16 Paul similarly addresses several house-churches in Colossians and asks them to also pass his writings onto the church of the Laodiceans.

by the rhetorical eloquence or “fair speeches” of certain Christian teachers.\textsuperscript{265} Therefore even in
the beginning of Christianity’s emergence in Rome during New Testament times the religion is
characterized by divisions, and yet Christians are united enough that Phebe can circulate Paul’s
letter among them.

During his house arrest in Rome Paul preached to anyone that came to his house.\textsuperscript{266} Such
a scenario actually adds credibility to the fractionation and theological diversity argument of the
house-churches in this thesis while acknowledging Christian unity. Paul received Christians into
his private house-church where a centurion or prisoner guard strictly governed his every move.
These Christians, according to the text, merely “visited” Paul’s house to hear the apostle preach.
Such visitors must have come from the various house-churches scattered throughout Rome that
Paul first mentions in his epistle to the Romans just a few years back, as well as from the house-
churches that formed as a result of the “fair speeches” of “false teachers.”\textsuperscript{267} The passage in Acts
does not imply at all whether or not Paul preached a different theology than what his listeners
were accustom to hearing in their own house-churches; such a notion is unknown. The apparent
lack of information about Paul’s perception of the situation likely has to do with the fact that the
apostle was not permitted to travel abroad to the different households and thus actually witness
for himself the extent of theological diversity developing in Rome. But considering that divisions
among the Christians had already begun before Paul arrived as indicated in Romans 16, and,
furthermore, existed shortly after Paul’s time in the city according to the Shepherd of Hermas, it
is not difficult to infer that even while the apostle lived in Rome that fractionation and

\textsuperscript{265} Moo, 929 acknowledges that recognizing the identity of these “false teachers” is impossible. There is reason to
believe that Paul is not only warning Christians in Rome that false teachers will arise among them, as such was the
case in other cities where he preached Christianity, but that divisions already were occurring. Paul’s acquaintances
that he addresses in Romans 16 likely informed him about the problems among Christians in Rome. Such false
teachers, speculates Moo, may have been Jewish-Christians or even Gnostics.

\textsuperscript{266} Acts 28.16-31.

\textsuperscript{267} Romans 16.5-18.
theological diversity affected the Christian population. Bart D. Ehrman for instance argues that Paul in fact taught a different theology to the Christians in Rome than what they had customarily heard from the hosts of the households, and the apostle’s letter to the Romans had the primary purpose of persuading them that his gospel was legitimate, to accept him, and even to help fund his further missionary journeys to Spain. While Ehrman’s argument may lack evidence since it primarily relies on the letter to the Romans, it is important to note that the Christian population in Rome certainly knew the location of Paul’s house and thus some form of communication existed between the various house-churches. The passage in Acts about Paul’s house arrest makes it very clear that it was quite popular among the Christian community in Rome to go and listen to the apostle preach.

Directly following the New Testament period Christianity in Rome had clearly become fractionized and theologically diverse. For this reason in the late first century and early second century Hermas frequently encourages the priests and teachers presiding over the house-churches to be at peace one with another and to cease their constant rivalries and debates. This is around the time when different forms of Christianity emerged in Rome, mainly migrating from other areas of the Empire to the capital city. So in addition to the fractionation and theological diversity already present during the time of Paul, during the time of Hermas the situation becomes even more complex. Justin, Tatian, Rhodon, Cerdo, Marcion, Apelles, Lucian, the Capocratians, Valentinus, Heracleon, Ptolemy, Praxeas, Montanus, “proto-orthodoxy,” and undoubtedly countless other teachers or priests are arriving in Rome and teaching their own

268 Ehrman, Lost Christianities, 177 and Ehrman, New Testament, 350-352. Moo, 19-20 similarly observes that the Christians in Rome lacked the “apostolic foundation” and for this reason, Paul may have written to them in an effort to formally establish the “Church.” Moo furthermore notes that Paul’s letter implies that the apostle wished to secure a missionary base for his work in Spain and to unify Christians around “his” gospel. Moo, 16, 898-907 agrees with Ehrman, that Paul tried to flatter the Christians in Rome so that they would support his missionary itinerary.

269 Hermas, The Shepherd of Hermas Sim 8.7.
version of Christianity to their followers. Theological diversity and fractionation had clearly already begun early on when Christianity emerged in Rome, only becoming more complex in the second century.

The reason for the development of divisions in the first place as observed by Paul is theoretical at best, but the evidence provides a reasonable answer. The majority of Paul’s writings in the New Testament are in response to divisions and problems among the Christians in certain cities. Such divisions arise because of the lack of centrality. Paul and the other apostles are not present in the cities when divisions occur and thus, unable to impede itinerant teachers from dominating the Christian population with their rhetorical eloquence and philosophical teachings. For this reason, as such was the case in Rome and Corinth, the various house-churches became divided by the teachings of teachers not authorized by Paul. Paul’s response is always the same to this problem throughout his writings. He frequently reminds the Christians meeting in various house-churches of his apostolic authority and only to adhere strictly to his teachings. This explanation for the development of divisions among Christians is quite

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270 See Chapter Seven of this thesis: Theological Diversity Among Early Christians in Rome.
271 W.M. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches, 17-19 argues that the letters of Paul and in general to the churches actually constitute an entirely new form of letter writing. At first the letters are suitable for only one group of people but eventually they gain wide application to the total Christian population. Ramsay points out that the critical situation in Colossae illustrates his point. New divisions of Christianity not sanctioned by Paul had arisen among the Colossians and the apostle at first wrote his letter to them to address the critical situation. But the letter is soon applicable to Christians everywhere because as Ramsay asserts, “the crisis that has occurred in one congregation is likely at some period to occur in other similar bodies, and the letter which speaks direct to the heart of one person or one body of people will speak direct to the heart of all people in virtue of their common human nature. Here lies the essential character of this new category of letters. In the individual case they discover the universal principle, and state it in such a way as to reach the heart of every man similarly situated; and yet they state this, not in the way of formal exposition, but in the way of direct personal converse, written in place of spoken.”
272 See Romans 16.17-18; 2 Corinthians 10-13; and Winter, 203 for the cities of Corinth and Rome. Ehrman, Lost Christianities, 141 asserts that in “Corinth, the church [was] wracked with problems of division, infighting, flagrant immorality, chaotic gatherings, and doctrinal error, [Paul] did not address the ‘pastor’ of the church or the ‘bishop,’ telling him to resolve the church’s problems. He wrote to the entire church with instructions concerning how to handle the situation…It was because there was no person in charge. Paul’s churches, as evident from 1 Corinthians itself, were organized as charismatic communities…” In Romans 1.1, Paul begins his writings to the Romans affirming his apostolic authority. Also, in 1 Corinthians 1.1 and 2 Corinthians 1, Paul begins both letters to the Corinthians who also experienced remarkable diversity among them by also affirming that he is an apostle. The same happens in Galatians 1.1, wherein Paul likewise begins his writings to the Galatians by speaking of his
reasonable, especially considering that the idea of apostolic authority gained such a degree of importance in centuries to come that Christians used it as a legitimizing factor.

Despite the complex theological diversity in pre-Constantine Rome, Christians nevertheless tolerated each other since they recognized their devotion to a similar religion. During the time of Paul for example, the apostle accepts Christians into his house even though they worship in various locations in the city. In the late first century and early second century, Hermas is able to circulate his book quite easily among the various priests and teachers without any opposition to his teachings or difficulty in finding the house-churches. And also in the second century, Justin the Martyr admits that households like unto his group of students lived in Rome and yet he does not label them as heretics, but simply implies that they too are Christians even though their theologies must have differed from his particular beliefs. Moreover, for some time an alliance existed between the Montanists and “proto-orthodoxy” as discussed earlier, only to be broken by the founder of another form of Christianity in Rome named after its teacher, apostolic authority. According to Galatian 1.8-12, Paul advises the Galatians to be careful and not follow any gospel that may have arisen during his absence from among them. In Ephesians 1.1, Paul again begins his epistle to the Ephesians by reminding the Christians of his apostolic authority. In Ephesians 4.3-6, Paul speaks of unity among the Ephesians in the sense that there is only one gospel, one faith, and one baptism, which he preached to them. According to Ephesians 4.11, Paul furthermore reminds the Ephesians of the role of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In Philippians 2.14, Paul speaks of disputations among the Philippian Christians. And in Philippians 2.1, Paul encourages the Philippian Christians to be of “one mind.” According to Colossians 4.12, while in Rome Epaphras visited Paul from Colosse in Asia Minor and told the apostle about the divisions that had developed among the Colossians. For this reason Paul writes in Colossians 2.8 and tells the Christians to “beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” In 1 Thessalonians 2.4-6, Paul says to the Thessalonian Christians: “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness. Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.” According to 1 Timothy 1.1, Paul again affirms his apostleship in his epistle to Timothy that is passed throughout Asia Minor. Later on in the same epistle in 1 Timothy 6.3-6, Paul reminds the Christians reading the epistle circulated by Timothy to not follow the teachings of anyone who arises and causes disputations among them. Again in 2 Timothy 1.1, Paul stresses to Christians of his apostolic authority and in 2 Timothy 3, Paul notes that his proclamation of authority is in response to men of excellent learning who will arise among the Christians in Asia Minor.

Praxeas. And as Einar Thomassen has demonstrated in her investigation, Valentinus is never condemned during his time for his teachings, but as a teacher he is respected among his students and even other house-churches. Thus, despite theological differences the various house-churches seemed to tolerate each other, that is, until the differences became too overbearing between them like the Montanists and “proto-orthodoxy.” The archaeological evidence further attests that Christians tolerated each other since the various divisions of Christianity buried their dead in the same locations. Stevenson observes for instance in his study of the Catacombs that several of the subterranean burial places host the dead of Christians from nearly every distinct form of the religion that existed in Rome. His conclusion mostly relies on the observance of philosophical motifs near the loculi of certain Christians as well as actual inscriptions that denote a particular Christian division. If the catacombs alone are ample enough evidence then the conclusion is for certain: Christians may have worshipped in various locations and believed in different theologies but they all believed in the same religion and thus perceived that they belonged to a Christian community. For this reason at times they tolerated each other and even buried their dead together in communal burial grounds.

The evidence for religious tolerance among the various divisions of Christianity in pre-Constantine Rome has led scholar Einar Thomassen to conclude that it is not accurate to speak of

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274 Tertullian, *Against Praxeas 1.*
275 Einar Thomassen, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Second-Century Rome.* Religious tolerance among the Christian divisions and thus, the non-existence of Christian orthodoxy and heresy is the main thesis of Thomassen’s article. Thomassen’s analysis of sources provided reason for her to conclude that Valentinus was never actually perceived as a heretic during his time. Justin’s *First and Second Apology* for example never names the Valentinians as heretics. In *First Apology* 1.26 for example, Justin only names Simon, Menander, and Marcion. Irenaeus, *Prescription Against Heretics* 3.15.2 remarks that as late as 180 the Valentinians held lectures with protoorthodox Christians and that they were shocked when Irenaeus urged their withdrawal from the Valentinians.
276 Stevenson, 109-116; 124-130 concludes after his analysis of philosophical images that they must denote religious themes of certain Christian heresies. Stevenson, 122-123 examines inscriptions in the catacombs that possibly have their origin among the Montanists, a “Christian heresy.”
277 Nicolai, 23-25 observes that by the first half of the third century there is clear evidence of Christian communal cemeteries. Such cemeteries likely had their origin around the year 250. Nicolai furthermore notes that several of the catacombs, although they were founded by private wealthy individuals, actually donated loculi for poor Christians and thus, became a sort of communal burial ground.
orthodoxy or heresy in a sociological sense. Christians worshipping in house-churches in the city clearly alternated between cooperation and conflict towards one another, but no group had taken the “the decisive step of declaring any of the others to be outside the general category of Christianity; if such attempts were made, they were of little consequence.”

It is nevertheless important to point out that the withdrawal of a student from his teacher and the formation of distinct theologies discussed in chapter 7 and the fractionation or presence of various house-churches examined in chapter 6 of this thesis, indicates the impulse to establish a form of orthodoxy. Despite such impulses, Christians in Rome still tolerated each other, at least to a certain degree, because they all belonged to the same religion, Christianity.

The apparent unity among Christians in Rome does not undermine the argument for fractionation and theological diversity. It is true that Christians acknowledged a similar religious affiliation among themselves but they nevertheless belonged to one of several autonomous house-churches each presided over by a prominent teacher or priest. When cooperation failed the house-churches clashed with each other over theological issues. The autonomy of the house-churches and the impulse of the priests and teachers to form distinct theologies from one another and thus establish orthodox doctrine suggests that a lack of a central governing authority over all the Christians in Rome was the primary cause of divisions.

10.3 The Formation of the Roman Episcopacy

The formation of the Roman episcopacy has its beginnings with the unique office holder Lampe calls the “administer of external affairs,” who is first mentioned by Hermas. In fact Hermas speaks of two individuals that seem to hold a special position over the various house-churches in Rome. In one of his visions Hermas is told to give a copy of his book to Clement and

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279 Lampe, 404 designates this office holder by the term “administer of external affairs.”
one to Grapte. Clement because it his duty to send the writings and messages to foreign countries, “for permission has been granted to him to do so,” and to Grapte because it is his responsibility to “admonish the widows and the orphans.” It is interesting to observe that Clement did not have the responsibility of circulating Hermas’ book among Christians in Rome but rather only in foreign countries because, after all, as the author remarks, the priests and teachers presided over the house-churches. The priests and teachers that presided over the house-churches received letters and news from Clement, so it appears, and then transmitted the information to the Christians over whom they presided. Thus, despite the divisions between the priests and teachers and their respectful house-churches, Clement and Grapte, at least during the time of Hermas, basically served in authoritative positions that allowed them to act for and in behalf of all the different households in Rome.

It is the office held by Clement that is particularly interesting. As the official in charge of communication Clement had the duty to both communicate to Christians in other cities in behalf of the total Christian population in Rome, hence the epistle of First Clement written in behalf of the Christians in Rome to the Christians in Corinth, but also to circulate letters and writings sent to the Christians in Rome from outside cities. In addition to communication it is very likely as Peter Lampe asserts, that donations to Christians outside of Rome also passed through the stewardship of Clement’s office. Such an assertion by Lampe is supported by literary evidence. Eusebius, for example, mentions other men who held this office in charge of communication and asserts that they also acted as suppliers of aid to foreign countries in his History. The first Church historian speaks of Bishop Soter, who “sent contributions to churches

280 The Shepherd of Hermas Vis 2.4.
281 Ibid, Vis 2.4.
282 Lampe, 402.
in every city.” Eusebius’ quotation of Irenaeus suggests that Anicetus also held this office and took care of foreign guests in Rome before Bishop Soter. And in a similar manner Eusebius mentions that Eleutherus, the successor of Bishop Soter acted as a caretaker of foreign guests. This office of “administer of external affairs” thus held a unique position of authority to Christians inside and outside of Rome: inside of Rome because the “administer of external affairs” represented the Christians of the capital city to Christians in other countries, and outside of Rome because Christians would have likewise perceived him as an official overseer.

The word bishop in Greek, *episkopos*, is derived from the verb meaning to “to oversee.” Interestingly the word *episkopos* appears only rarely in the New Testament. According to Claudia Rapp, Paul’s letters reveal that priests led the earliest Christian communities. Such priests according to the lengthiest passage on bishops in the New Testament, 1 Tim 3: 1-7, “reveals the absence of any clear distinction between the prebyterate and the episcopate.” In some communities, however, Rapp suggests that the episcopate presided over the priests, mainly with administrative tasks such as, organizing donations from wealthier members of the community, distributing the donations to the poor, and caring for the widows and orphans. Clement’s office of “administer of external affairs” clearly correlates to the office of episcopate as described by Rapp but with one major exception. While in some Christian communities a bishop actually existed according to Rapp, such authorities actually presided over

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283 Eusebius 4.23 quotes a letter of Dionysius to Bishop Soter and the Romans: “It has been your custom from the beginning to show kindness to all Christians and to send contributions to churches in every city, relieving the distress of those in need at some places or in the mines. This, your ancestral Roman custom, Bishop Soter not only had maintained, but also increased by generously sharing bounty among the saints and encouraging brethren coming to Rome with inspired, paternal words.”

284 Eusebius 5.24.16 comments that according to Irenaeus, Anicetus took care of guests in Rome. Eusebius 4.22.3 also mentions that Hegesippus speaks of Anicetus.

285 Ibid, 5.4.2.


287 Rapp, 25 observes that *episkopos* is entirely absent from the Gospels, it surfaces in Acts only as a quotation from a psalm, and appears in the letters of Paul a total of seven times.

288 Ibid, 25.

289 Ibid, 25.
the priests. In Rome the situation is different. Clement never presided over the priests; he merely was authorized to “oversee” the administrative tasks discussed by Rapp. The priests and teachers of the house-churches clung onto their authority over their followers and thus the “administer of external affairs” lacked a position of central authority in the beginning of Christianity’s emergence in Rome.

Although this “administer of external affairs” at first lacked governing authority over all Christians in Rome, the holder of this office nevertheless held a unique position. Considering the circumstances of this position it is all too easy to conclude that this man would eventually rise to importance among Christians in the capital of the ancient world. The priests and teachers may have governed the house-churches, but the “administer of external affairs” had correspondence between the various households. This communication allowed the “administer of external affairs” to not only represent the totality of the Christian population in Rome in correspondence with Christians in other countries but also receive respect abroad as a governing official, an overseer. Undoubtedly the “administer of external affairs” belonged to if not governed one of the house-churches, most likely that of the “proto-orthodox.” Eusebius for instance remarks that Anicetus and Soter belonged to “proto-orthodoxy” and acted as presiding priests.290 Such words by Eusebius suggest that “proto-orthodoxy” existed as merely just one of the various house-churches governed by a prominent priest or teacher that consequently was also the “administer of external affairs.” Since this individual represented the total population of Christians in Rome and received respect from Christians abroad he must have experienced a position of authority unmatched by any other Christian in Rome. Also, the apparent wealth of the “proto-orthodox” and the very strong possibility that this “administer of external affairs” was in charge of almsgivings provided them leverage to win over the massive population of poor Christians who

290 Eusebius 5.24.
congregated in the countryside because they likely felt alienated from the rest of the house-churches in the city. Such wealth likely had a big influence on Christians outside of Rome too, like the Corinthians, who according to Dionysius’ letter to Bishop Soter, expressed their gratitude for the contributions of the Christians in Rome for relieving their distress.\(^{291}\) As one of the wealthiest of Christians who represented the community in Rome, the “administer of external affairs” quite easily came to hold considerable influence on doctrinal controversies; hence the importance of Bishop Victor I, the successor of Bishop Soter in the controversy over Easter.\(^{292}\)

The opinion of the Roman overseer was important to other Christians since he represented the head of the Christian population in the capital city.

The “administer of external affairs” clearly held a unique authoritative position so powerful and influential that Irenaeus could say without hesitation that the “proto-orthodox” in Rome had a position of “preeminent authority.”\(^{293}\) But for Irenaeus, such a position of authority had to be traced back to the apostles to be legitimate, or at least more ancient than the heresies of Marcion, Valentinus, or Basilides.\(^{294}\) The idea of antiquity had a particular importance to Christians and their contemporaries. In fact Pelikan has observed that “part of the campaign” of early Christians was “to prove the superiority of Christian doctrine on the grounds of its antiquity.”\(^{295}\) Christians not only used the idea of Christianity’s antiquity against the criticism of non-Christians, but even among themselves. Such a legitimizing factor of antiquity is illustrated by the concept of apostolic succession, which must have been an easily perceived solution to

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\(^{291}\) Eusebius 4.23 quotes the letter of Dionysius to Bishop Soter: “It has been your custom from the beginning to show kindness to all Christians and to send contributions to churches in every city, relieving the distress of those in need at some places or in the mines. This, your ancestral Roman custom, Bishop Soter not only has maintained, but also increased by generously sharing bounty among the saints and encouraging brethren coming to Rome with inspired, paternal words.”

\(^{292}\) Eusebius 5.24-25.

\(^{293}\) Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.2.

\(^{294}\) Ibid, 3.2.1.

diversity among a Christian population. Paul’s letters as addressed earlier hint at the importance of apostolic authority and although the succession is not actually mentioned the argument clearly was implied. Even in *First Clement* there is no explicit reference of apostolic succession for reasons that are quite explanatory. Rome and Corinth did not have a presiding bishop or central authority at the time Paul and Clement wrote their letters. Both of the cities, as discussed earlier, consisted of several house-churches presided over by priests and teachers who basically acted like bishops over their households; but, as far as a central bishop is concerned or a bishop that presided over all the Christians in a given geographical city or area such a figure did not exist, hence the reason why the letters addressed the various households to resolve their infighting and divisions instead of explicit instructions to a leader to restore order.296 Tertullian, Hegissupus, Eusebius, and Irenaeus understood that apostolic succession provided a powerful outlet for arguing a strict hierarchy of authority under ecclesiastical leaders with particularly strong administrative skills.

The list of bishops in Rome that formed a sort of genealogical family tree of successors to the apostles Peter and Paul written by Irenaeus and partially by Hegesippus contain discrepancies. This list is certainly problematic since one of its main roots is Peter who likely never actually visited Rome.297 Moreover the assertion that Paul played an important role is further doubtful. As illustrated at the beginning of this thesis and further reiterated in the current chapter Paul had nothing to do with founding Christianity in Rome and most likely only represented one of the several house-churches in the city. But besides the controversy surrounding Peter and Paul in this list, other problems are apparent too. Irenaeus’ for example, lists in order Paul, Linus, Anacletus,
Clement, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus, Telephorus, Hyginus, Pius, Anicetus, and Soter while Hegesippus, in the meanwhile as quoted by Eusebius, only names Anicetus, Eleutherus, and Soter.\textsuperscript{298} Even if Hegesippus shortened the list he nevertheless adds Elutherus while Irenaeus does not. The apparent discrepancy is because Irenaeus lists Elutherus as Anicetus’ deacon and thus denied him the status of a presiding figure of “proto-orthodoxy.” Thus the two lists differ not only in content but also as to who acted as a presiding authority.

Several of the men in the lists of Hegesippus and Irenaeus held the office of “administer of external affairs.” Besides Clement each person named by Hegesippus held the office according to Eusebius: Anicetus, Eleutherus, and Soter. Interestingly the list of Hegesipppus clearly correlates to the “administer of external affairs” while the list of Irenaeus seems to stretch even further back to legitimize the Roman bishop through apostolic succession. It appears that when the “administer of external affairs” had successfully shifted its primary purpose of communication to full-out administration, or rather exploited this purpose to gain recognition as the “preeminent authority” as Irenaeus asserted, the list of apostolic successors officially was created to legitimize the central governing official of “proto-orthodoxy.” This had to have occurred at the time of Victor I, the successor of Bishop Soter. For this reason the list suddenly ends after Bishop Soter leading straight to Bishop Victor I as the current administrator in authority at the time of Irenaeus and Hegissupus in the mid second century.

\textsuperscript{298} Irenaeus, \textit{Against Heresies} 3.3.3. Eusebius 4.22. Tertullian, \textit{Prescription Against Heretics} 32 interestingly skips several ecclesiastical leaders mentioned by Irenaeus and asserts that Peter passed on his authority to Clement. Ehrman, \textit{Lost Christianities}, 142 gives an overview of the lists of Roman bishops, concluding that each list has several discrepancies.
10.4 Summary

The full consolidation of power for the Roman episcopacy over the majority of Christians would not take place until during and after the reign of Constantine.²⁹⁹ The next chapter illustrates that theological diversity continued not only in Rome but also on an empire-wide level until Constantine provided Christians centralization. But as to the official recognition of the first real bishop of Rome, although unsuccessful candidate for centrality, this took place with Victor I. Unsuccessful in the sense that even after Victor I had gained an authoritative position, theological diversity still continued among Christians in Rome as well as abroad. The continuation of theological diversity is depicted with the writings of early Christians, particularly those of “proto-orthodoxy” who created the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy.

²⁹⁹ See Kristina Sessa, The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy. Sessa’s argument claims to be the first cultural history of the rise of the Roman diocese to Papal authority. She argues that Roman bishops adopted the ancient elite household as a model of good government for leading the church during the fourth and fifth centuries.
Chapter 11. The Dialogue of Orthodoxy and Heresy

11.1 Introduction

The classical dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy is found in Eusebius’s *Church History*. Eusebius argued in a ten-volume history that Jesus taught Christian orthodoxy to his disciples who in turn handed it down to the leaders of the Christian churches. Along with correct doctrine the classical interpretation legitimizes orthodoxy by asserting that the ecclesiastical leaders are the rightful successors of the apostles. Any false deviation from orthodox belief is labeled as heretical by Eusebius since heresies according to this view consisted of false perversions of Christian Orthodoxy created by false teachers and priests that had gone astray from true doctrine, attracted small groups of followers, and taught theologies not-sanctioned by the apostles or Jesus. In this sense the classical view is merely a retelling of this thesis’ discussion of the formation of fractionation and theological diversity but with a personal agenda. Teachers and priests clearly governed various house-churches in Rome and taught different theologies, including “proto-orthodoxy.” But as illustrated earlier these diverse forms of Christianity all emerged at approximately the same time and similarly focused on closeness to Christ. Eusebius recognized the existence of Christian diversity even during his time in the fourth century and as any clever speaker trained in rhetoric would, he manipulated the evidence to favor his theological biases. Christian Orthodoxy took as Irenaeus said, a “preeminent authority” over all the other divisions of Christianity with the transition of the “administer of external affairs” to an official overseer, a bishop. And once this office holder had exploited his position to rise to prominence among the Christian population in Rome, the next step was the legitimization of the house-church they belonged to that of the “proto-orthodox,” by labeling the other divisions of Christianity that did not conform to the authority of the newly established Roman bishop as heresies. Such a complex
and arduous undertaking depended on the development of orthodox doctrine, which consequently took place long after Victor I.

11.2 Continuity of Christian Diversity to the Reign of Constantine

The unanimous acceptance of a correct doctrine of God among presiding Christians since the beginning is far from certain. In fact it is quite accurate to label this concept of unity since Christianity’s emergence in regards to doctrine as nothing more than a fairy tale. Even among traditional orthodox Christian writers their understanding of God is diverse. Not to mention that the understanding of God according to these “proto-orthodox” Christians is far different than those later labeled as heretics. The differences between various Christians and their rhetorical debates are best illustrated through their exhaustive writings, the very purpose of which was meant to combat conflicting opinions. In the first four centuries Christian writers all over the Mediterranean forcefully proclaimed the truthfulness of their beliefs while denouncing the theologies of other Christians. Tertullian from North Africa and Rome, Irenaeus from France, Origin and Eusebius from Palestine, and Arius and Athanasius from Egypt as well as several other Christian writers and apologists leading up to the Council of Nicaea frequently wrote treatises of a similar nature. Such treatises all repeat the common paradigm of writing “against” a particular Christian teacher or priest and their theologies and students. The writings of Tertullian dated to the second century alone are sufficient illustration of this common genre. Tertullian wrote one major work against all the other forms of Christianity he could think of in *Prescription Against Heretics*, at least *Five books Against Marcion*, a book *Against Hermogenes*, another

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300 Pelikan’s *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* is a lengthy investigation that illustrates that even among Christians traditionally referred to as orthodox writers their beliefs conflicted with each other. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 155 mentions that doctrine according to “proto-orthodox” writers is considerably different. Origen for instance, has different beliefs concerning God than Tertullian and Irenaeus.

301 I have only chosen the writings of Tertullian as examples of writings “against” other Christians because they are mentioned earlier in this thesis.
book *Against Valentinians*, and another work *Against Praxeas*. Of the “heretical” Christians that Tertullian denounces at least the followers of Marcion, Valentinus, and Praxeas lived and worshipped in Rome.

Most of what is known about the beliefs of the so-called heresies mainly derives from the writings of proto-orthodox Christian writers who sought to condemn these divisions of Christianity as “heretical” and “false.” For this reason scholars frequently have difficulty actually constructing how these forms of Christianity differed from one another.\(^{302}\) Despite the difficulty in capturing the essence of each Christian division’s beliefs, it is certain that the so-called “heretics” must have similarly written treatises against their perceived enemies within Christendom. The lack of available writings of the “heretics” is mainly due to the eventual victory of “proto-orthodoxy,” which certainly destroyed any evidence that favored their enemies or at least won them sympathy and interested audiences. It is nevertheless correct to infer from this one-sided glimpse into the debates between proto-orthodoxy and other Christian divisions that both sides argued their theological beliefs with persuasive eloquence from Victor I all the way to the fourth century, hence the reason why Eusebius continued to denounce Christians that did not blend very well with the proto-orthodox theology that he advocated. Christians argued their points of departure from one another persuasively enough that “proto-orthodoxy” perceived the popularity of the so-called heresies as a danger to their position of “preeminent authority” from the second century well into the fourth century when Eusebius lived.

The rhetorical debates between “proto-orthodoxy” and the other Christian divisions continued with vigor from the second to the fourth century leading up to the Council of Nicaea. Bishops, priests, teachers, and other clerical leaders presided over their students and fellow

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\(^{302}\) See Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma* for an example of a meticulous investigation into the beliefs of different heresies carefully pieced together from extant writings.
Christians with authority, some with greater or less success certainly depending on their charisma and administrative skills. The writings against certain Christian divisions surely must have influenced popular opinion enough to persuade Christians to stay clear of particular theologies, avoid affiliation with “corrupt” teachers or leaders, and even to create alliances with clergy whose doctrine shared similarities with their own. But by the fourth century the debates and controversies of previous centuries further divided Christians to such a degree that Christianity as approaching the reign of Constantine and the Council of Nicaea is characterized by unprecedented theological diversity on an empire-wide level. It is undeniable that Christianity became a religion full of complexity, confusion, infighting and disagreement.

11.3 Constantine and Christianity

Constantine’s adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire was a major turning point for the religion. The imperial endorsement not only won Christianity converts, officially ended the persecutions, and transitioned the religion from private to public worship; hence the massive construction projects of Churches under the patronage of Constantine, but now the reality and extent of Christianity’s diversity became openly known. The infighting and disagreements of the various Christian divisions caused controversy in the earliest days of Christianity’s legalization under Constantine. Each form of Christianity fought for converts and assiduously debated with each other over doctrine in an effort to come out victorious from the previous centuries of theological controversies. Such a war of words and tumult of opinions agitated Constantine, who now as the guardian, patron, and savior of Christianity decided once and for all to unite Christians either willingly or forcefully in order to

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303 Bishops frequently wrote to each other about doctrinal concerns and even allied themselves together to combat conflicting forms of Christianity. Two very clear “alliances” from the sources include Arius and his supporters who gathered together to debate Athanasius and his supporters at the Council of Nicaea.

304 See the “Archaeology Remains of Churches” appendix of Ramsay MacMullen, The Second Church for a list of the sudden increase of Churches built by Constantine.
transform Rome into the kingdom of God with a level of peace unknown since the *Pax Romana* of Augustus.\textsuperscript{305} The Emperor’s solution to the infighting and disagreements was to hold a council of Church leaders and make them come to an agreement. Those that refused to conform to one version of Christianity and strong-mindedly continued in their particular form of the religion, causing further diversity and problems in the empire would face severe consequences.\textsuperscript{306}

11.4 The Council of Nicaea

It is true that the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 has its origin in the Trinitarian controversy, but underpinning this gathering of ecclesiastical leaders is Christian diversity. Christians had become so divided theologically concerning their belief in the doctrine of God that their disagreements could not be compromised nor their personal grievances healed. The events of the Council of Nicaea are foggy at best, but the work of various scholars has outlined the basic events that took place. The Council of Nicaea met from May to the end of July. This gathering of bishops from all over the Roman Empire had never occurred in such a great magnitude before. While it is difficult to calculate the actual number of bishops present at the council, the sources indicate that between 250 and 300 attended the meeting accompanied by

\textsuperscript{305} Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 15-17 recounts that Constantine “promoted Christianity as a unifying religion for the empire. Unity of Christians as a body was of as much concern to Constantine as any doctrinal issue involved: and it initially took the efforts of bishops like Ossius and Alexander of Alexandria to persuade him that anything significant was at issue in Alexandria.” Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.12 records Constantine as saying, “And now I rejoice in beholding your assembly; but I feel that my desires will be most completely fulfilled when I can see you all united in one judgment, and that common spirit of peace and concord prevailing amongst you all, which it becomes you, as consecrated to the service of God, to commend to others. Delay not, then, dear friends: delay not, ye ministers of God, and faithful servants of him who is our common Lord and Saviour: begin from this moment to discard the causes of that disunion which has existed among you, and remove the perplexities of controversy by embracing the principles of peace.”

\textsuperscript{306} Ibid, 3.12. Eusebius records Constantine’s address to the bishops: “for, in my judgment, intestine strife within the Church of God is far more evil and dangerous than any kind of war or conflict; and these our differences appear to me more grievous than any outward trouble.” The Council of Nicaea is not the first time Constantine personally took charge of a religious controversy. In late 313 Constantine took decisive action to end the Donatist schism, especially in 315 when he threatened to come to North Africa and personally solve the situation. In both the Donatist and Trinitarian controversy in Nicaea the circumstances are the same, Constantine is prepared to use force if necessary to achieve religious conformity. See also H.A. Drake, *The Impact of Constantine on Christianity*, 116-121.
priests, teachers, deacons, slaves, and servants.\textsuperscript{307} The actual identity of the bishops that attended the council is debated, but a few prominent Christian leaders are acknowledged with some certainty as among the attendants.\textsuperscript{308} The sources lack information about the proceedings of the council and therefore are unable to reconstruct the order of business actually conducted at Nicaea. What is known is that the Christian leaders scrupulously debated each other to produce a doctrinal creed. In fact the debate of the clergy in the council has led some scholars to assert that the discussion took the model of the philosophical schools, undoubtedly influenced by the educational background of these Christian leaders.\textsuperscript{309} Some of the bishops did not agree to the arrangement and refused to sign the creed. The consequence for nonconformity was exile. While there is much ambiguity in regards to details concerning the council the underlying purpose of the event is clear: theological divisions among Christian leaders caused a clash of conflicting opinions to reach an all-time new height in the year 325, and Constantine in an effort to make his empire the Kingdom of God and enjoy peace and unity called a council of clerical leaders to resolve their differences.\textsuperscript{310}

\textsuperscript{307} Leo Donald Davis, \textit{The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787) Their History and Theology}, 57.
\textsuperscript{308} Davis, 58 provides an overview of the Council of Nicaea and a list of known bishops and other clergy members that can be identified in attendance.
\textsuperscript{309} Lewis Ayres, \textit{Nicaea and its Legacy}, 86. R.P.C. Hanson, \textit{The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God}, 98, 856-869 observes after reviewing the ideas of the leading contenders in the Council of Nicaea that their educational background, especially in philosophy undoubtedly influenced these men to form a new philosophical-theological creed of doctrine. Ramsay MacMullen, \textit{Voting About God in Early Church Councils}, 95 emphasizes that the discussions in Church councils required “understanding of very abstract ideas: ideas about the differences within the whole, and among the individual parts, and in the constituent material or substance of a being, Christ, his prosopon, hypostaseis, and ousia, diachronically considered.”
\textsuperscript{310} Hanson, 152-163 has produced an investigation of the triumph of Nicene theology. His book is the standard English scholarly treatment of the Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century. Khaled Anatolios, \textit{Retrieving Nicaea}, 15-27 has written a more recent investigation. Although Anatolios’ book is not as clear and coherent as Hanson’s, it nevertheless gives an overview of the events leading up to the Council of Nicaea as well as the actual proceedings of the events as best constructed from the sources. Ayres, 85-100 similarly covers the main events leading up to the council as well as the actual proceedings that took place among the bishops in the meeting. Drake, 111 observes that modern scholarship concedes that when Constantine’s reign began Christianity “was still by later standards simply a loose assemblage of local congregations, held together by regular meetings of their bishops, but still differing significantly in character and even in the fine points of belief.” Drake, 123-130 furthermore asserts that the main purpose of the Council of Nicaea was unity among Christians.
Why Constantine favored one form of Christianity and its doctrine over all the others is fiercely debated among scholars. One scholar who has recently joined the debate, Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, emphasizes that the Christian writer Lactantius perhaps acted as the architect of the emperor’s developing religious policy. Lactantius, after all, served in Constantine’s court at Trier as early as 310 and was appointed tutor to Constantine’s son Crispus. Moreover, many of the works of Lactantius influenced Constantine’s theology, providing the Emperor a foundation to express his ideas in letters and orations.\(^{311}\)

The connection between Constantine, Lactantius, and what later became Christian orthodoxy is best explained by circumstance and a theological alliance. Lactantius’ personal beliefs express a particular inclination towards the doctrine of God formed at Nicaea.\(^{312}\) Such a similarity implies a theological alliance between Lactantius and the supporters of the Nicene Creed, in particular Bishop Ossius who also acted as an advisor to Constantine. Bishop Ossius, as observed by Lewis Ayres most certainly presided at the Council of Nicaea and his particularly strong theological opposition to Arian made its way into the Nicene Creed.\(^{313}\) It is very unlikely that the two theologians closest to the Emperor, Lactantius and Ossius, could have acted in advisory capacities with Constantine if they had conflicting opinions about Christian doctrine. Constantine’s location in Rome where “proto-orthodoxy” had already begun extending its influence in the city and abroad by the Roman bishop for more than a century makes it all but too easy to expect that Lactantius and Ossius enjoyed the benefits of friendship with the former


\(^{312}\) Lewis Ayres, 70-72.

\(^{313}\) Lewis Ayres, 17-18. Davis, 62-63 also suggests that the close relationship of Ossius with Constantine makes him the most likely candidate for the presiding bishop at the council.
“administrator of external affairs.”  

This connection between Lactantius, Ossius, the Roman bishop who was Sylvester I at the time, and the Emperor Constantine emerges as a very probable answer why the doctrine of the Council of Nicaea became affiliated with the “proto-orthodox” Church, but as previous scholarship has shown such a theory will always be open to debate.

11.5 The Nicene Creed

The first reason for the creation of an official creed of doctrine is the legitimization of orthodox doctrine and condemnation of any other form of Christianity or philosophy that argued the contrary. Jaroslav Pelikan’s in-depth analysis of creeds emphasizes that they are intended to condemn anyone who expresses novelties of another faith different than the confessions of orthodoxy. While Eusebius is careful to highlight that the Nicene Creed he quotes from Athanasius is traditionally traced back to the apostles in the beginning of his Church History, Pelikan’s investigation clearly illustrates that change more than continuity characterizes this important confession of the year 325.  

It is important to note, however, that while “change” is often interpreted as “development” or “adaptation” it is nevertheless still a modification or novelty to the original confession, and thus the fact that clerical leaders held several other councils after Nicaea in subsequent centuries about the same theological issues is evidence in itself that orthodox doctrine, especially concerning the trinity, underwent significant alterations and never actually consisted in one coherent form in 325 let alone since the emergence of Christianity in the beginning.  

But armed with an official creed labeled as orthodox doctrine

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314 H.A. Drake, The Impact of Constantine on Christianity, 116-121. The Emperor’s role in the Donatist schism depicts the influence of the Roman Bishop over Constantine. After the Donatists appealed to Constantine in 313 for help in settling their dispute, instead of asking for the episcopacy in Rome for assistance they asked the emperor to assign their case to bishops from Gaul. Constantine followed tradition and turned the case over to the Roman Bishop that presided over ten bishops from each side of the controversy. The Bishop in Rome took precedent over all other bishops to solve the controversy simply because of his close location to the Emperor, even over other bishops in Italy.

315 Eusebius 1.1

316 See Pelikan’s discussion of Change and Continuity in Credo, 7-31.
“proto-orthodoxy” under Constantine’s patronage could officially make the transition to “orthodoxy” with the condemnation of non-conformists and their labeling as heretics, both those Christians living and dead.

Although the writings of Christians prior to Nicaea seem to express the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy, such tendencies actually depict the early ‘impulse’ to form an orthodox form of Christianity as Thomassen emphasizes in her study.\textsuperscript{317} The adoption of certain early Christian writers who could be interpreted as early advocates of orthodoxy and who did not belong to “proto-orthodoxy,” did not take place until orthodox doctrine had taken its first decisive step towards development at Nicaea. After the formal establishment of a true doctrine in this important council, the advocates of orthodoxy could accept or reject past or current Christians depending on how close their forms of Christianity adhered to or contributed to the outcome of Nicaea.\textsuperscript{318}

The second purpose of the creed of Nicaea is the conquest of classical culture. Since Christianity’s emergence the religion frequently clashed with classical culture traditionally called paganism. C. Kavin Rowe’s book \textit{World Upside Down} convincingly argues that since Christianity represented an entirely alternate way of life it clashed with classical culture.\textsuperscript{319} In contrast to other historians that argue Christianity did not represent a new cultural movement until much later, Rowe’s study places the formation of a Christian identity and thus its clash with classical culture during New Testament times. Judith M. Lieu’s investigation for instance, \textit{Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World} argues that a Christian culture did not

\textsuperscript{317} See footnote 275.
\textsuperscript{318} Davis, 66 emphasizes that after the creed was written down that the clergy discussed the readmission to the church of schismatics and heretics as attested to by two canons from the council. Such a discussion by the clergy present in Nicaea implies that they in fact, decided who among the living conformed to Christian orthodoxy. Ehrman, \textit{Lost Christianities}, 156 observes that “the orthodoxy of one age can become the heresy of the next.” Ehrman, \textit{Lost Christianities}, 194 furthermore argues that before the Nicene Creed that the earlier declarations of faith actually bonded Christians together instead of condemning each other.
\textsuperscript{319} C. Kavin Rowe, \textit{World Upside Down}, 140.
exist until at the earliest 100 years after Paul.\textsuperscript{320} And Averil Cameron pushes the formation of a Christian culture back even further to the third and fourth centuries with the development of Christian discourse.\textsuperscript{321} But the perception that Christianity represented a new cultural movement is already depicted in the vast genre of writings from the first and second centuries known as the \textit{Acts of the Martyrs}, which focuses on the religious conflict between Christians and their Roman counterpart.\textsuperscript{322} Such a conflict instigated the persecutions according to these traditional texts, and those martyr saints revered as holy have this bitter cultural misunderstanding to account for their deaths. This clash of cultures furthermore is evident in Rome and elsewhere since Christians congregated in private house-churches in urban cities to avoid the scrutiny and persecution that accompanied too much public attention. Even non-Christian writings such as that of Pliny’s famous confrontation with a group of Christians attest to the fact that Romans simply did not know how to deal with this new culture appearing in their midst and naturally perceived this new religion with curiosity and yet caution. Galen’s interesting description of Christians and his opinion that they appeared as philosophers depicts another early description that Christianity differed but also resembled the lifestyle of Romans. Also, Celsus’ opinions about Christians as recounted by Origen further illustrate that Romans perceived Christianity as quite different from Roman culture.\textsuperscript{323} Such a cultural misunderstanding is nowhere more apparent than in the writings of Christian apologists who defended Christianity against the accusations of all sorts from Romans between the second and fourth centuries.\textsuperscript{324}

\textsuperscript{322} See Herbert Musurillo Trans, \textit{The Acts of the Christian Martyrs}.
\textsuperscript{323} See Robert Louis Wilken, \textit{The Christians as the Romans Saw Them}.
\textsuperscript{324} Lactantius studiously defends Christianity against an array of accusations from philosophers in \textit{The Christian Institutions} and \textit{Introduction to True Religion}. Most notably Lactantius argues that the religion is a true philosophy compared to the heathen philosophies. In a similar manner Origen wrote \textit{Against Celsus}, which is a defense against the accusations of Christianity’s inferiority to Greek philosophy. Origen’s famous rejoinder to Celsus further defends Christianity against other accusations such as, Christian immorality in chapter 1, barbarous doctrines and
11.6 Clash of Classical Culture and Christian Culture

The clash of Christianity and classical culture has its roots in the imperial prerogatives of the Emperor Augustus in the first century. Just prior to the emergence of Christianity into the Roman world classical culture had undergone an extraordinary revitalization by the Emperor Augustus. The reign of Augustus marked an end to a period of chaos and civil war that threatened not only the existence of the Republic but also the Roman way of life. For the Romans, the rule of Augustus represented the dawn of a new and better time for humanity; for many scholars his reign symbolizes a Golden Age.\(^\text{325}\) The *Pax Romana* as realized by Augustus constituted the culmination of war wearied Roman’s most supreme desires: the hope for a stable, peaceful, and enduring civilization. Augustus undertook the reconstruction of Rome, the capital city, and, along with his massive construction projects, the rebirth of the religion of Roman culture.\(^\text{326}\)

Christianity as a religion thus found itself, especially in Rome, in less-than tolerable circumstances. Besides physical location the indictment of Christianity by Romans is also explained by the time period when the religion emerged. Christianity surfaced into a Roman world where ancient man had recently escaped from the vain belief in gods of flesh. Such a popular antipathy for a belief in a god of coarse and corruptible material is due to philosophical teachings that scoffed at such elementary myths and fables.\(^\text{327}\) Theophilus’ defense, for instance, engages such criticisms directly as the apologist argues that the Christian teaching of God’s Son

\(^{325}\) Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome*, 214 mentions that the Golden Age is usually in reference to the Ciceronian and Augustan ages of Latin literature. The Ciceronian age typically is dated from c. 70 to 30 B.C.E. while the Augustan age follows up to the year 17 C.E.

\(^{326}\) Charles Norris Cochrane asserts that the spirit of classical paganism is “the religion of culture which was later to be confronted by the culture of religion [Christianity],” in *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 35

was not meant “as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of God.” 328 Origen also boldly declares that as Christians, “we do not, then, relate marvels when we narrate the history of Jesus.” 329 Christianity with its teachings of a Son of God born to a virgin, who died and was resurrected, seemed outdated and ridiculous to educated Romans who knew better. For this reason philosophers mocked Christianity as too simple, absurd, full of crude language and teachings, un-philosophical, and too new compared to their revered philosophies developed over several centuries. 330 Such accusations provoked Christian apologists and early writers to defend Christianity and prove that as a religion it in fact represented a true and antique philosophy, the only true philosophy that influenced the greatest of philosophers and their teachings. 331 Christianity according to the apologists exemplified the root of truth “much older not only than Plato, but even than Homer and the invention of letters among the Greeks.” 332

The philosophy of the Nicene Creed strongly counters Roman accusations that Christianity suddenly appeared as a new religion full of absurdities. In fact, the philosophical concepts affirmed in the creed draw upon the teachings of the god of the philosophers to construct a doctrinal framework that could not easily be disputed by even the most educated of Roman critics. 333 In short, the philosopher god became joined with the Christian God. According to historian Peter Brown, the Christian God spoken of in the New Testament was personal and

328 Theophilus, To Autolycus 2.22.
329 Origen, Against Celsus 6.8.
330 See footnote 309.
331 See Lactatnius, The Divine Institues and Tatian’s Address to the Greeks. Tatian and Lactantius both argue in these apologetic works that Christianity is the only true philosophy while emphasizing the vices and errors of the heathen philosophies. This argument is most apparent in Address to the Greeks 2 and The Divine Institutes 3.1-7.
332 Origen, Against Celsus 6.7.
333 Hanson, 163-172. Ayres, 92-98. Anatolios, 33-79. Hanson, Ayres, and Anatolios provide complex overviews of the philosophical concepts included in the Creed of Nicaea.
comprehensible; he cared and loved mankind, and for this reason became particularly attractive to converts who grew weary of the same old sacrifices and rituals to their unknown gods. But such a God according to the philosophers was too simple and based on uncultured ideas. The Nicene Creed still confesses Christ but with a philosophical spin concerned with the details of God’s substance, antiquity, eternal existence, supremacy, glory, and purity. Christ becomes a complex God to grasp but at the same time difficult to criticize by pagans. Christian orthodoxy, now armed with the arsenal in the form of a doctrinal creed is now not only able to label other divisions of Christianity as heretical but also to conquer paganism.

11.7 Summary

Although a central authority arose among Christians in the capital city theological diversity continued to characterize Christianity on an empire-wide level. The Roman bishop very well had extended his influence in Rome and in other countries by the reign of Constantine but their lack of total authority over Christians is all too evident in the complex scene leading up to the Council of Nicaea. If the Roman episcopacy had a position of apostolic authority over all the Christians throughout the Empire their word should have been sufficient enough to resolve doctrinal controversies in the first place. The lack of uniformity on an empire-wide level is best explained with the microcosmic explanation for fractionation and theological diversity in Rome; simply put, Christianity as a whole lacked centrality as well. Constantine’s authority to call Christian clergy to assembly in Nicaea is a definitive progression towards centrality for Christendom and an attempt to unite Christians. Any discussion of the Council of Nicaea interestingly focuses on Constantine’s central role in the empire-wide controversy. Underpinning this assembly of clergy from around the Roman world then is clearly theological

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diversity, the clash between classical culture and Christianity, and the lack of a central authority over Christendom that Constantine supplied. The outcome of this tumultuous event is the creation of a doctrinal creed that created unity at the cost of labeling Christians as heretics if they did not accept the doctrine of the trinity, and the conception of a philosophical framework that proclaimed Christianity’s superiority over anything the ancient world ever produced.
Chapter 12. Epilogue

12.1 Summary

Christians in Rome came from a diverse ethnic background: they either converted to Christianity from Judaism or as Gentile-God-fearers. The earliest Christian converts spoke Greek, either Jews of the Diaspora or Greeks from the Greek mainland or Hellenic lands from the East. The Christians lived in diverse residential quarters outside of the pomerium since Christianity emerged as a foreign religion from the East and was not permitted in the inner city. Jewish areas in particular act as the main areas of concentration of Christians, which is to be expected since the first Christians were either Jews or God-fearers living in close proximity to the synagogues. Those Christian residential quarters not usually associated with Jewish concentrations act as a bridge between Jewish quarters.

Christians in Rome came from diverse social stratifications. The majority of Christians in Rome lived in poverty, but a small percentage had likely acquired wealth. While the majority of Christians struggled to acquire wealth the few that did so easily became distracted from worship and devotion to God by the luxuries of life. Sometimes the wealthier Christians neglected the poor and for this reason, the earliest Christian writers frequently rebuke them for their avaricious behavior.

The desire for privacy, the ancient household structure, and wealth prompted Christians to worship in house-churches scattered throughout the city. The house-churches in Rome were extremely fractionized, lacking centrality and thus acting autonomously. The members of each house-church gathered around the teaching of a prominent teacher or priest. The house-churches in Rome did not practice a unified religion but rather were theologically distinct. Students separated from their teachers and formed their own house-churches, and in their new worship
locations the students now the teachers taught new theologies to their own students, and the pattern repeats itself.

The Christians worshipping in house-churches scattered throughout Rome acquired various levels and types of education, at least significant enough to allow them to develop philosophical theologies. The number of house-churches must have been limited in number and operated within private settings to avoid persecution. Since the members of the house-churches must have received an education in philosophy they must also have had wealth and belonged to a higher cultured stratification of Roman society. Not all Christians could obtain a thorough education, however, since instruction was quite expensive. The poor Greek-speaking Christians that made up the majority of the Christian population lived on the fringes of the city. These poor Christians certainly found themselves alienated from the philosophical house-churches and must have looked elsewhere to worship still outside the pomerium. The best-suited locations outside the pomerium were the cemeteries and catacombs where Christians already congregated. Also since these poor Christians must have found it difficult to understand the philosophical-theologies of the house-churches, they had an entirely different theology that was more connected to their pagan past.

The fractionation and theological diversity of Christians in Rome took place because of a lack of centrality. Such fractionation and theological diversity characterizes Christianity in Rome since the religion’s emergence. Only in the second half of the second century did an authority figure rise to prominence among Christians in Rome. The “administer of external affairs” exploited his unique office and duties among the various house-churches to transition to an official overseer, the Roman bishop. The transition of the “administer of external affairs” to the
bishop of Rome is more of a tale of political maneuvering, however, than theological authority, although the later was the legitimizing factor.

Even after the development of the Roman bishop in the capital city theological diversity continued to characterize Christianity on an empire-wide level. Constantine’s call to Christian clergy to assembly in Nicaea is a definitive progression towards centrality for Christendom as well as an attempt to unite Christians. Underpinning this assembly of clergy from around the Roman world is theological diversity, the clash between classical culture and Christianity, and the lack of a central authority over Christendom that Constantine willingly supplied. The outcome of this tumultuous event is the creation of a doctrinal creed that created unity at the cost of labeling Christians as heretics if they did not accept the doctrine of the trinity, and the conception of a philosophical framework that proclaimed Christianity’s superiority over anything the ancient world ever produced.

12.2 Significance

The arguments put forth in this thesis have several significant implications. First, if Christianity since its emergence in Rome is characterized by diversity because of local conditions then should the religion not also be characterized by diversity in other regions by similar conditions? Such is a likely assumption considering that by the time of the Council of Nicaea Christianity had become extremely diverse throughout the empire. Second, if several divisions or forms of Christianity, including “proto-orthodoxy” all surfaced in the late first and early second century in Rome and similarly emphasized their closeness to Christ then the dividing-line between orthodoxy and heresy is quite difficult if impossible to actually pin down. Also, since the dialogue of orthodoxy and heresy furthermore has its beginning when “proto-orthodoxy” began to rise to prominence among all the other Christian divisions in the city, both
because of the affiliation of the “administer of external affairs” that transitioned into the Roman episcopacy and because of “proto-orthodoxy’s” affiliation with the Emperor Constantine, such a dialogue is a vehicle for legitimization rather than an original concept of Christianity. This naturally leads to the question that Adolf Harnack asked so many years ago: *What is Christianity?* If an original form of Christianity existed in its purity and originality then it could not have existed in Rome. Christianity in Rome is characterized by diversity in the first place and the apostle Paul’s place in the city only adds to the theological divisions and fractionation not to mention that an unknown Christian taught an unknown form of Christianity in the capital city in the beginning. Along the lines of Harnacks’ elusive question could be added: *What Makes Someone Christian?* All the Christian divisions in Rome conceded that despite their theological differences they each were Christian. At times Christians cooperated with each other and at times their differences clashed, but in retrospect before Constantine, if you were a believer in Christ, then you had to be Christian.
Illustrations

Illustration 1.a.

Inscription from the Vico del Balcone Pensile reads, “CHRISTIANOS.” Image traced in 1995 from carbon particles retained in the wall surface. (Berry, Plate 1)

Illustration 1.b.1-2

A. The so-called “Magic Square,” or “Rotas Opera Square,” found near the Amphitheater in 1936 Pompeii. Notice the word “Tenet” is formed vertically and horizontally, (Paul Berry, the Christian Inscription at Pompeii, 10)

B. When the letters are arranged around the letter “N” in the center the first words of the Lord’s Prayer are formed, “Pater Nostrer.” The letters “O” and “A” surround each line, perhaps representing Christ as the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega (Revelations 1:8). (Lampe, 9)
Illustration 1.c.1.

The Casa Del Bicentenario sometimes referred to as the “Christian chapel.” Notice the mark of the cross-imprinted into the plaster of the wall.
(Deiss, 96)

Illustration 1.c.2.

The Casa Del Bicentenario. The chamber with the cross on the wall is through the door on the right down the walkway.
(Deiss, 96)
Illustration 3.a.

Map 2.
- Topographical terms appearing in the text
- The fourteen Augustan regions (dotted lines or city walls; Roman numerals)
- The hills of the city

The residential quarters of early Christians: Trastevere (XIV), Aventine (XIII to the right of Trastevere), Appian lowlands and Porta Capena (XII to the right of the Avetine), Mars Field (VII above Trastevere), Caelius (II on the right above Via Latina), Subura (IV near the center of the map), Vicus Patricius and Cispius (IV center and to the right). Taken as a whole each of these areas form a sort of perimeter around the city outside of the pomerium. (Lampe, Map 2, 476.)
Illustration 8.a.

The Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls at Rome, presumed to be the location of Paul’s burial.  
(Paul L. Maier Trans, *Eusebius the Church History*, 92)

Illustration 8.b.1.

An altar is located at the *loculus* of a martyr, with a repository hewn into the rock for relics directly beneath it. Christian *loculi* are located to the right and left of the martyr’s *loculus*.  
(J. Stevenson, 43.)
Illustration 8.b.2.

The Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of S. Callisto. (Nicolai, 24).

Illustration 8.c.

A *fossor* or digger dressed in a tunic with his pickaxe. (J. Stevenson, 11)
Illustration 8.d.

[Image]

Gallery of *loculi* in the catacomb of Priscilla. (Nicolai, 76)

Illustration 8.e.

The tunnels were kept to a minimal width, which barely allowed the *fossores* to swing their pickaxes. They worked in a dangerous environment: it was dark, unstable footholds, and undoubtedly hard to breathe. (J. Stevenson, 16).
Illustration 8.f.1.

Cubiculum located in a catacomb near the Via Latina in Rome, dated to 320 C.E. (Jas Elsner, 156.)

Illustration 8.f.2.

Cuiculum Leonis located in the catacomb of Comodilla, dated to the late fourth century C.E. (Jas Elsner, 157.)
Illustration 8.g.1.

Entrance to a cubiculum in the catacomb of Aurelii. (Nicolai, 88)

Illustration 8.g.2.

Cubicula in the catacomb of S. Callisto. (Nicolai, 21)

Illustration 8.g.3.

The so-called “Pantheon” of the “Regione di Sotere” found in the Catacomb of S. Callisto. (Nicolai, 41)
Illustration 8.h.

*Cubiculi* stacked on top of one another, most likely very poor Christians. (Nicolai, 50)

Illustration 8.i.1.

Banquet scene found in the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus in Rome. Dated to the end of the third or early fourth century C.E. (Dunbabin, 185)
Illustration 8.i.2.

Another banquet scene in the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus in Rome. Dated to the end of the third to early fourth century C.E. (Danbabin 179)

Illustration 8.i.3.

Banquet scene in the catacomb of Callixtus in Rome. Dated to the third century C.E. (Danbabin, 176)

Illustration 8.i.4.

Banquet scene in a tomb above ground in the Hypogaeum of Vibia in Rome. Dated to the second half of fourth century C.E. (Danbabin, 191).
Illustration 8.i.5.

Relief of a banquet scene found in the Church of Santo Stegano in Rome. Dated to the mid-first century C.E. (Danabin, 80).

Illustration 8.j.1.

This image depicts a mourner’s bench, where participants would sit during a funerary banquet in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome. (J. Stevenson, 17).

Illustration 8.j.2.

On the right a stone seat for the dead as seen in the coemeterium Maius. (J. Stevenson, 96) On the left a stone seat is seen in a cubiculum in the Coemteterium Maius. (Nicolai, 44-45)
Illustration 8.k.

A table is located in a *cubiculum* in St. Paul’s catacomb. (J. Stevenson, 150)

Illustration 8.L.

Dining couches, tables, and cooking provisions are located right outside tombs in Isola Sacra. Notice the remains of a table and stone seats on the left of the image.

(MacMullen, *the Second Church*, 78)
Just outside Pompeii on a road leading into the city are numerous tombs. In the image above there are two round monuments on the left and the right designated for funerary banquets. People could sit on the stone benches that once surrounded a table. (Francis W. Kelsey, 324)

This image is an artist’s rendition of image 8.j.1. Notice on the left people are seated on the benches. (Paul Zanker, 123.)
Illustration 8.n.

Triclinia and space for a table and seats at Isola Sacra right outside tombs. (Danbabin, 128)
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