

The Spread of Christianity



by the time of Irenaeus (185 AD)
by the time of Constantine (325 AD)

Christianity Spread to These Areas

The Spread of Christianity
in the Roman Empire
By the Second and Fourth Centuries



Spread of Christianity outside Greco-Roman world

Matthew 28:16-20 The Great Commission

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We should aware of the widespread of the Gospel beyond places we thought it may have gone.

Late Roman Empire, A. D. 117



Christianity Spread: Copts to Africa, Nestorians Asia, Irish to Germans



Coptic Christians in Egypt



Christ & disciples.
Painted panel in
Coptic museum,
Cairo

Coptic Christians

today: c.16 million:
c.12 million Egypt +
c.3-4 million abroad
(Diaspora)



Origin & Spread of Copts

“**Coptic**”= Afroasiatic language

1st Christians in Egypt mainly Alexandrian Jews (ex. Theophilus, whom Saint Luke the Evangelist addresses in introductory chapter of his gospel).

Church of Alexandria founded by **Saint Mark**: native Egyptians (not Greeks or Jews) embraced Christian faith.

Christianity spread throughout Egypt within half a century.

Fragments of New Testament found in Middle Egypt, dating from 200 AD, Gospel of John in Coptic, found in Upper Egypt dating to 1st half-2nd century.

Coptic Christians

Contributions:

Birthplace of **monasticism**: 1st = hermits imitated Jesus's 40 days in desert. **St. Anthony the Great** (c. 251–356).

Biography by Athanasius of Alexandria inspired Christians w/ how Anthony overcame temptations.

Monasticism = called “**white martyrdom**” no blood shed;

underlines *pilgrimage* through this world= “not my home.”



St. Mark
Coptic
Cathedral in
Alexandria



Coptic Christians

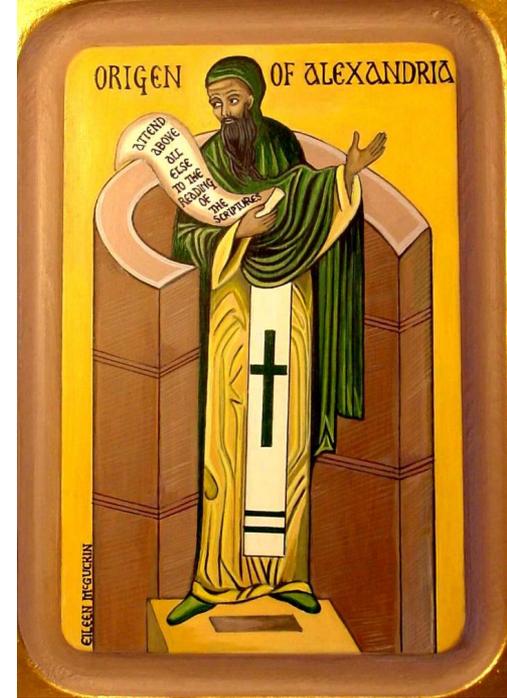
2. *Didascalia* = famous catechetical school

Alexandria early Christian scholars showed reason & revelation, philosophy & theology compatible.

Most famous= **Origen**; said he wrote more books than anyone could read. Origen evangelized Jews in Palestine w/message that Jesus fulfilled all promises of God in OT. Exposition of Bible, day by day, chapter by chapter, was an effective evangelistic technique.

PROBLEM: Teachings extremely controversial

pre-existence of souls, final reconciliation of all creatures, including perhaps even devil (*apokatastasis*), subordination of Son of God to God the Father.



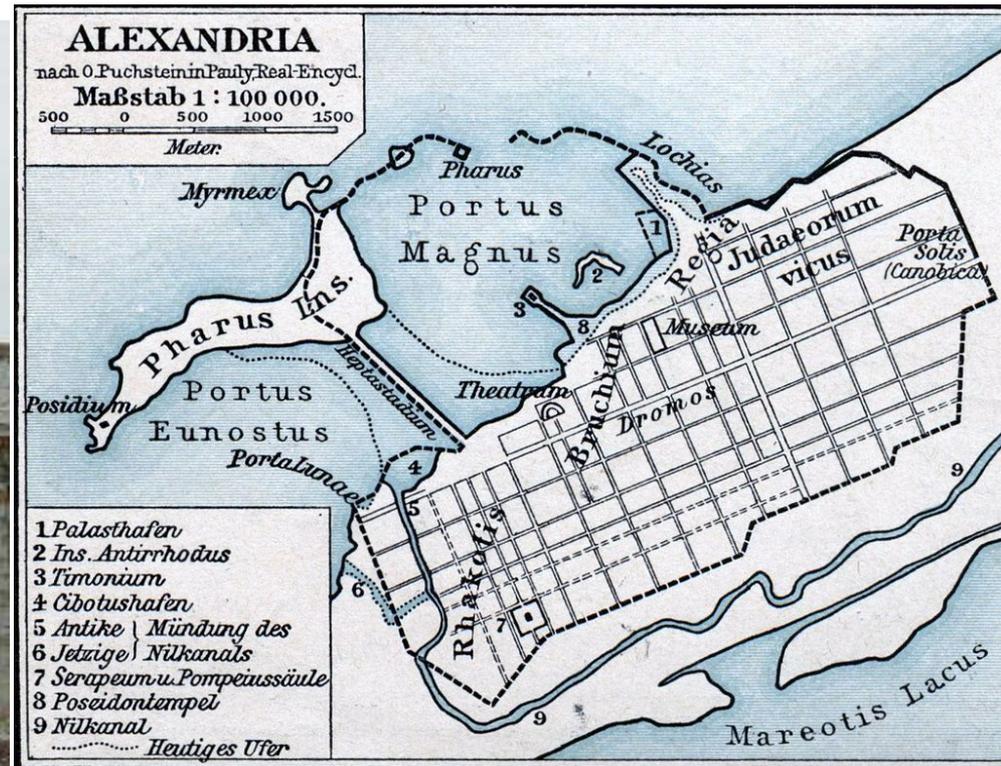
Great Library of Alexandria

one of largest & most significant libraries of ancient world. Library part of large research institution= **Mouseion**, est. c. 260 BC.

At height, library held est. 40,000-400,000 scrolls.

48 BC part of library accidentally **burned by Julius Caesar**, BUT its demise due more to Egyptian condemnation of scholars & exiles.

270-275 AD numerous rebellions destroyed & vandalized whatever remained of Library.

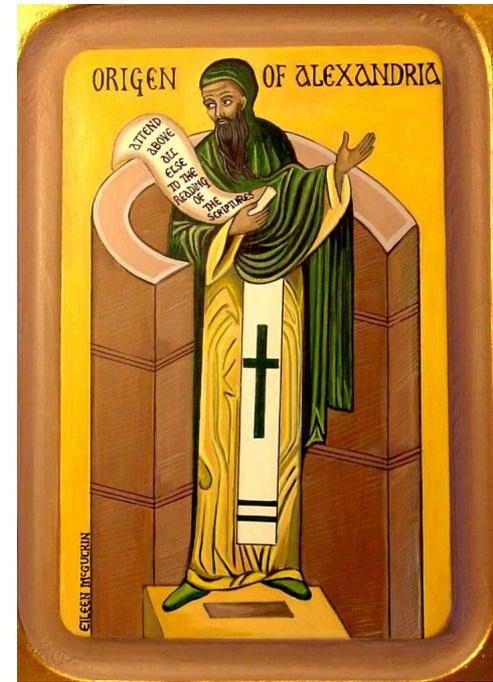


Coptic Christians

2. *Didascalia* = famous catechetical school
Alexandria early Christian scholars showed reason & revelation, philosophy & theology compatible.

Most famous= Origen of Alexandria (184-253)
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EGYPT'S COPTIC CHRISTIANS: A PERENNIAL MINORITY

Anti-Christian attacks in Sinai Peninsula throw spotlight on Egypt's largest minority



EGYPT'S CHRISTIAN POPULATION

According to official data:

5 MILLION

According to Coptic Church:

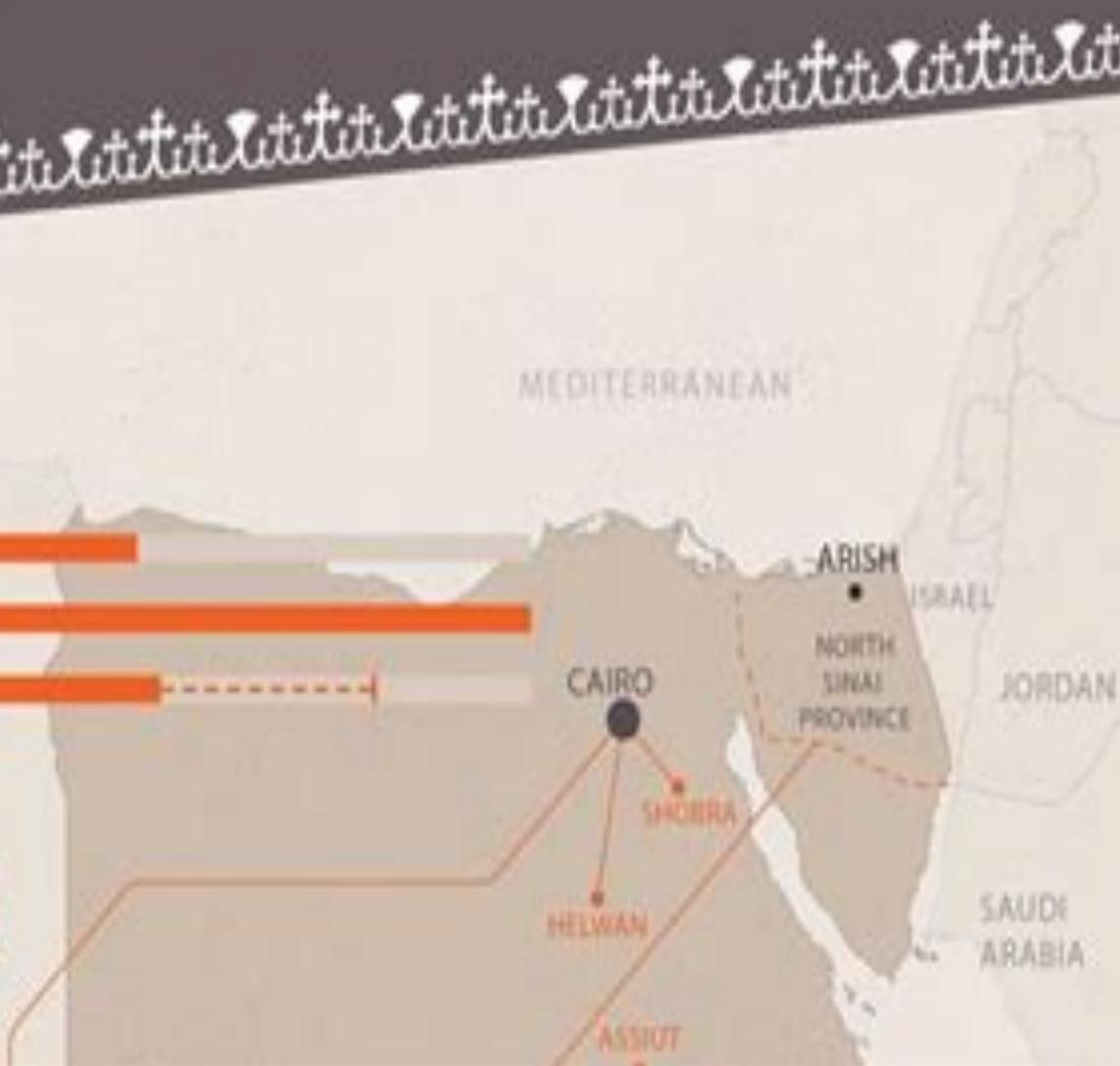
15 MILLION

Independent sources:

6-11 MILLION

AREAS WITH LARGE CHRISTIAN POPULATIONS

Cairo's Shobra and Helwan



Origen of Alexandria, soteriology

Origen: first to propose **Ransom theory of atonement** [Irenaeus earlier proposed prototypical form].

Theory: **Christ's death** on cross a **ransom to Satan** in exchange for humanity's liberation. Satan tricked by God because Christ not only free of sin, but also incarnate Deity, whom Satan lacked ability to enslave.

Some basis? = Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14 depicts cross as Jesus' triumph over Satan. Through His death, Christ destroyed power of Devil.

11th century, **Anselm of Canterbury** criticized Ransom theory; it declined in western Europe.

Reformed view atonement

Reformed view= **debtors to God, not Satan.**

Scripture never describes us as owing Satan anything. Also, to view Son of God paying anything to Devil gives him far more credit & power than he actually deserves.

Most important, Matthew 6:12 tells us to ask the Lord to forgive us our debts. If we accept ransom-to-Satan view, we neglect that **we are debtors to God.**

All impenitent sinners are in bondage to sin & Satan. Bondage = God's sovereign permission & does not originate from power of Satan. Enslavement is a consequence of debt sinners have incurred against God.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-ransom-theory/>

Christianity to Asia

Well-known Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4thc.) & Saint Jerome (late 4thc.) report missionaries to India.

12 Disciples/ Apostles:

Thomas the Apostle: Muziris, India AD 52; baptized several people, founding *Saint Thomas Christians* or Nasranis.

Saint Bartholomew: India 1stc. (left Gospel of Matthew there).

Others:

Saint Pantaenus the Philosopher: Greek theologian in Catechetical School of Alexandria (c.AD 180) to India.

Olopun, Syrian monk: stone stele (AD 781) records to capital of **China** in 635 AD (Tang Dynasty, Chang An or Xi'an) but disappears c. AD 800 w/ fall of Tang.

Saint Thomas Christians

Saint Thomas Christians (aka Syrian Christians of India, Nasrani or Malankara Nasrani, Nasrani Mappila)=

Ethno-religious community of Indian & Syriac Christians w/
origins in evangelistic activity of Thomas the Apostle, 1st century.

Syrian/ Syriac not ethnicity but historical, religious, liturgical
connection to Syriac Christianity.

Nasrani from Semitic languages= Christians in general, an
ethnoreligious community of Indian.

Tertullian wrote of a strong Christian community in Persia by 220
AD. Gregory the Illuminator led King Tiridates of Armenia to Christ
about 301.

Acts of Thomas , early 3rd century

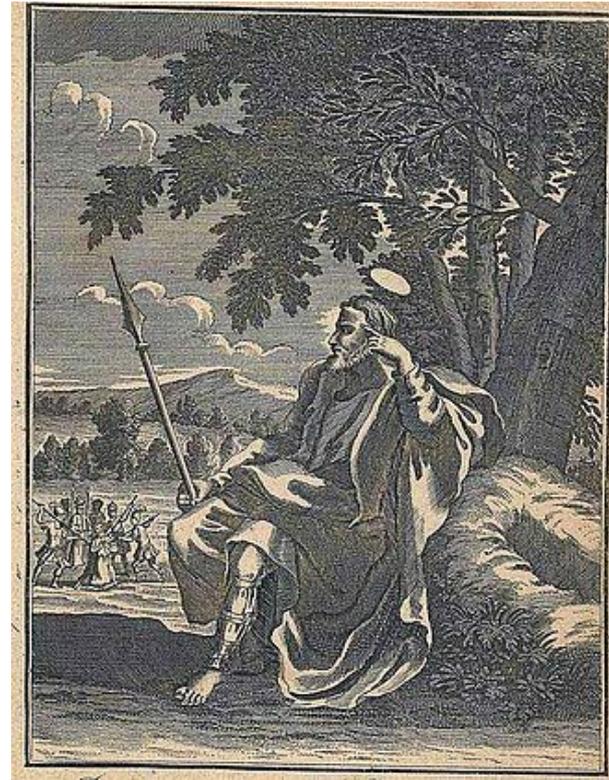
Part of New Testament **apocrypha**= early Christian writing accounts of Jesus, teachings, nature of God, apostles' teachings & lives. Some cited as scripture by early Christians, but since 5th c. widespread consensus emerged limiting New Testament to 27 books of modern canon.

References to work by **Epiphanius of Salamis** show it was in circulation 4th c.; surviving fragments of text exist.

Scholars detect **Greek original** written in **Syriac**, places *Acts of Thomas* in Edessa.

Surviving Syriac MSS, edited to purge of most unorthodox Encratite passages; Greek versions reflect earlier tradition.

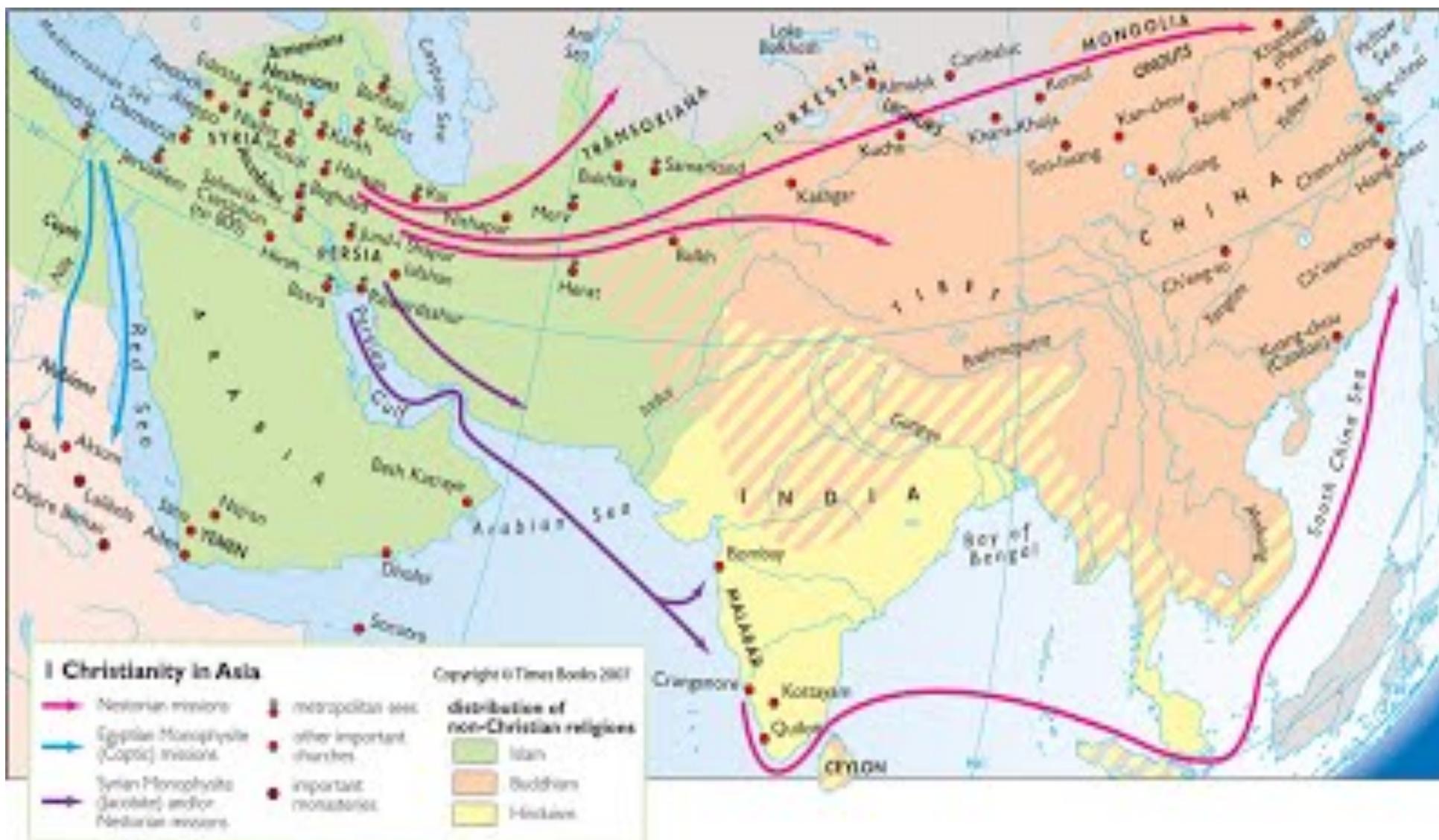
Thomas martyred (background) by order of Indian monarch Vasudeva I (foreground) →



Saint Thomas Christians

Legend= Thomas began community w/ conversion of Brahmin families.
Saint Thomas Christians trace growth to arrival of Christians from Middle East led by *Knāy Thoma* (anglicized **Thomas of Cana**— merchant) 4th or 8th century [Portuguese had vibrant trade]. He led group **72 families**, as well as clergymen to Malabar coast.





Acts of Thomas & Jesus

View of Jesus in Acts= **docetic (Docetism)** Greek= to **seem, apparition, phantom**. Heterodox doctrine: Jesus' historical-bodily existence & human form of Jesus= mere semblance w/o any true reality. **Jesus only seemed to be human**; his human form an illusion.

In *Acts of Thomas*

Thomas is not just Jesus' twin, he is Jesus' identical twin. Hence it is possible that Thomas is meant to represent the earthly, human side of Jesus, while Jesus is entirely spiritual in his being. In this way, **Jesus directs Thomas' quest from heaven, while Thomas does the work on earth.** For example, when the apostles are casting lots to choose where they will mission, Thomas initially refuses to go to India. However, Jesus appears in human form to sell Thomas as a slave to a merchant going to India, after which Jesus disappears.

Oriental Orthodox Churches

Oriental Orthodox Churches = group of Christian churches adhering to **miaphysite Christology & theology**= 60 to 70 million members worldwide.

Cyril of Alexandria: Christological formula= person of Jesus Christ, divine nature & human nature united (*heis*, one or unity; feminine nominative singular: *mia*; stem: ἕν, *hen*) in a **compound nature** (physis); two united w/o separation, mixture, confusion, alteration.

CONTRAST: Nicene & Chalcedon orthodoxy= **hypostatic union**= union of Christ's humanity & divinity in **one hypostasis, or individual existence.**

Oriental Orthodoxy

Oriental Orthodoxy keep faith w/ first three ecumenical councils: First Council of Nicaea (AD 325), First Council of Constantinople (381) & Council of Ephesus (431),

BUT reject dogmatic definitions Council of Chalcedon (451).

- ❖ Coptic Orthodox Church,
- ❖ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- ❖ Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- ❖ Jacobite Syrian Church of Antioch
- ❖ Armenian Apostolic Church

F.F. Bruce: importance of **accurate language in creeds**: “Inasmuch as the **deity of Christ** and the doctrine of the **Trinity** are embedded in the **New Testament**, although not explicitly formulated there, we must make the effort of **wrestling with difficult terminology** if we are not to fall an easy prey to misunderstanding or to actual heresy.”

Early Church: theology & rationality

Thomas Torrance underscores importance of applying **good reasoning to theology** so that the rationality of God can “throw its masterful light upon the whole area of human experience and knowledge.”

Council of Nicaea 325 defined Trinity by focusing on identity of Jesus, but did not define Jesus’ humanity & relation of two natures to each other.

Trinitarian doctrine had significant implications for Christology addressed at **Chalcedon 451**. Council wrestled with how one person, Jesus, could have two natures. If Jesus is the same *homoousios* with the Father and is God, this must be reconciled with Jesus’ clear humanity as evidenced in the Gospels.

Chalcedon affirmed unity of Jesus’ person & duality of His natures, His identity with divine substance.

Athanasian Creed & **hypostatic union**

Attributed to “Athanasian Creed” (Athanasius 298-373) BUT

Point: late 5th /early 6th c. AD—100 yrs. after Athanasius—theology of creed rooted in **Augustinian tradition** w/exact terminology of Augustine's *On the Trinity* (415 AD)

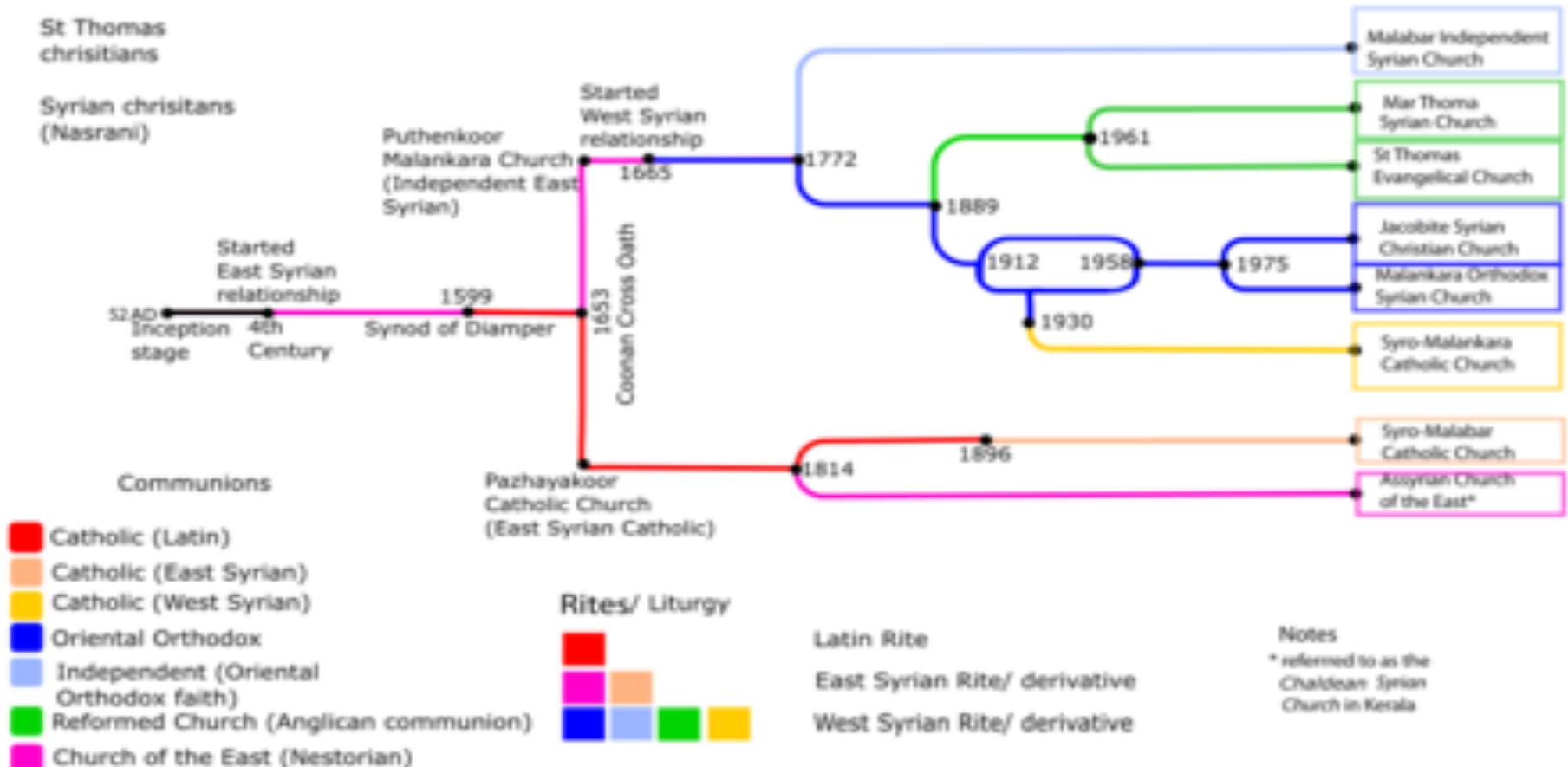
“He is **God from the essence of the Father**, begotten before time; and he is **human from the essence of his mother**, born in time; **completely God, completely human**, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and human, yet **Christ is not two, but one**. He is one, however, **not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself**. He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human.”

Saint Thomas Christians

Saint Thomas Christians divided into different Eastern Catholic, Oriental Orthodox, Protestant, independent bodies, each w/ own liturgies & traditions.

History and Evolution of Saint Thomas Christians



Tertullian (c.160-c.220 AD)

Carthage: wealthy, educated citizen exercised all passions (gladiators, sex, food). Struck w/ courage Christian martyrs & converted.

Totally rejected philosophy; **NO** value to Christian theology; became great **apologist**, book *Apologeticum pro Christianis*.

“**Father of Latin Christianity**”: pushed “**apostolic succession**” proof correct doctrine & practice.

Promoted **strict discipline & practice**; abstaining from “worldly” pleasures. Underlined responsibility for developing spiritual life.

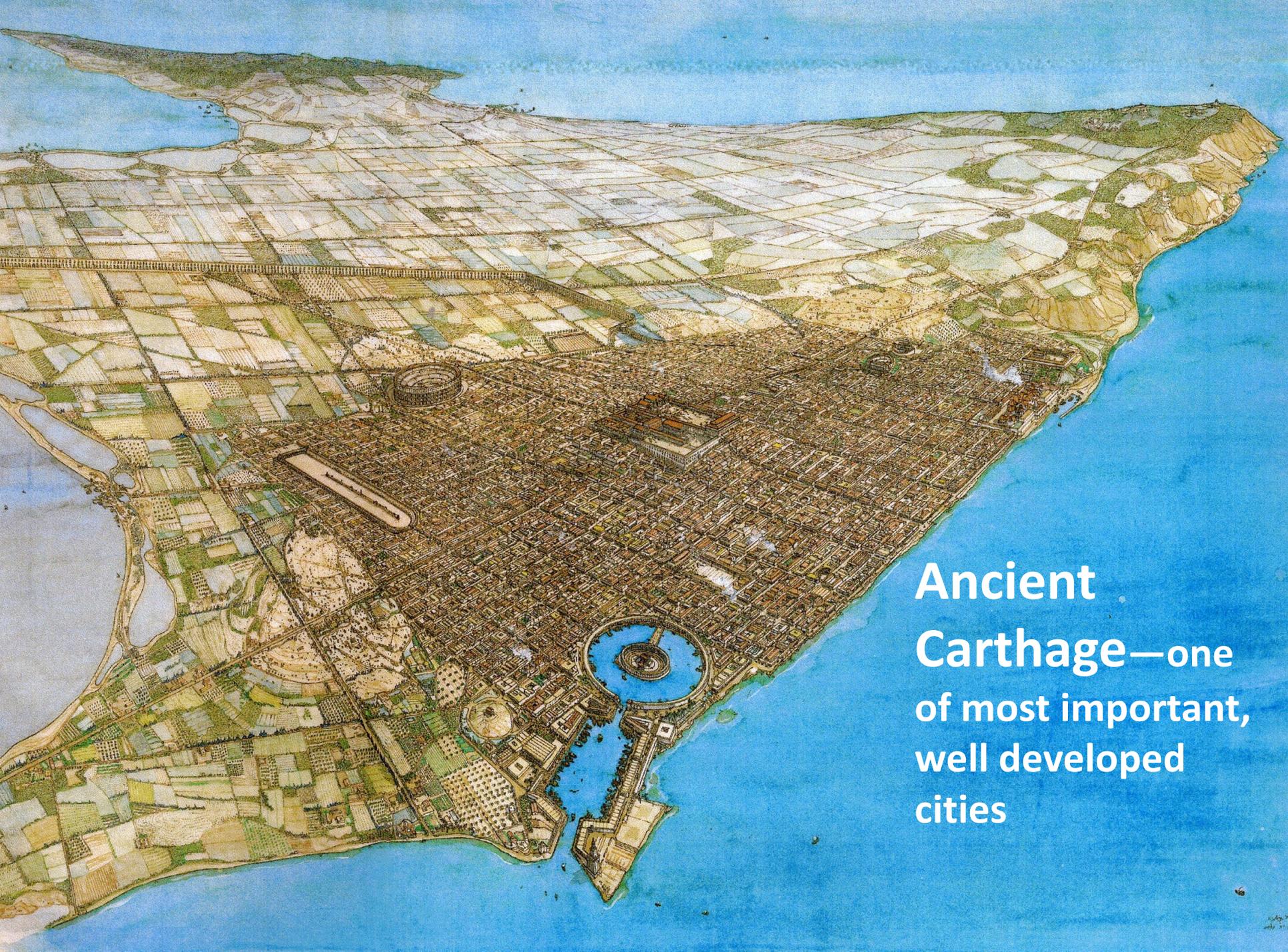
Coined phrases:

1. “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”
2. “Trinity” used in Nicene Creed.



Christian North Africa





**Ancient
Carthage—one
of most important,
well developed
cities**

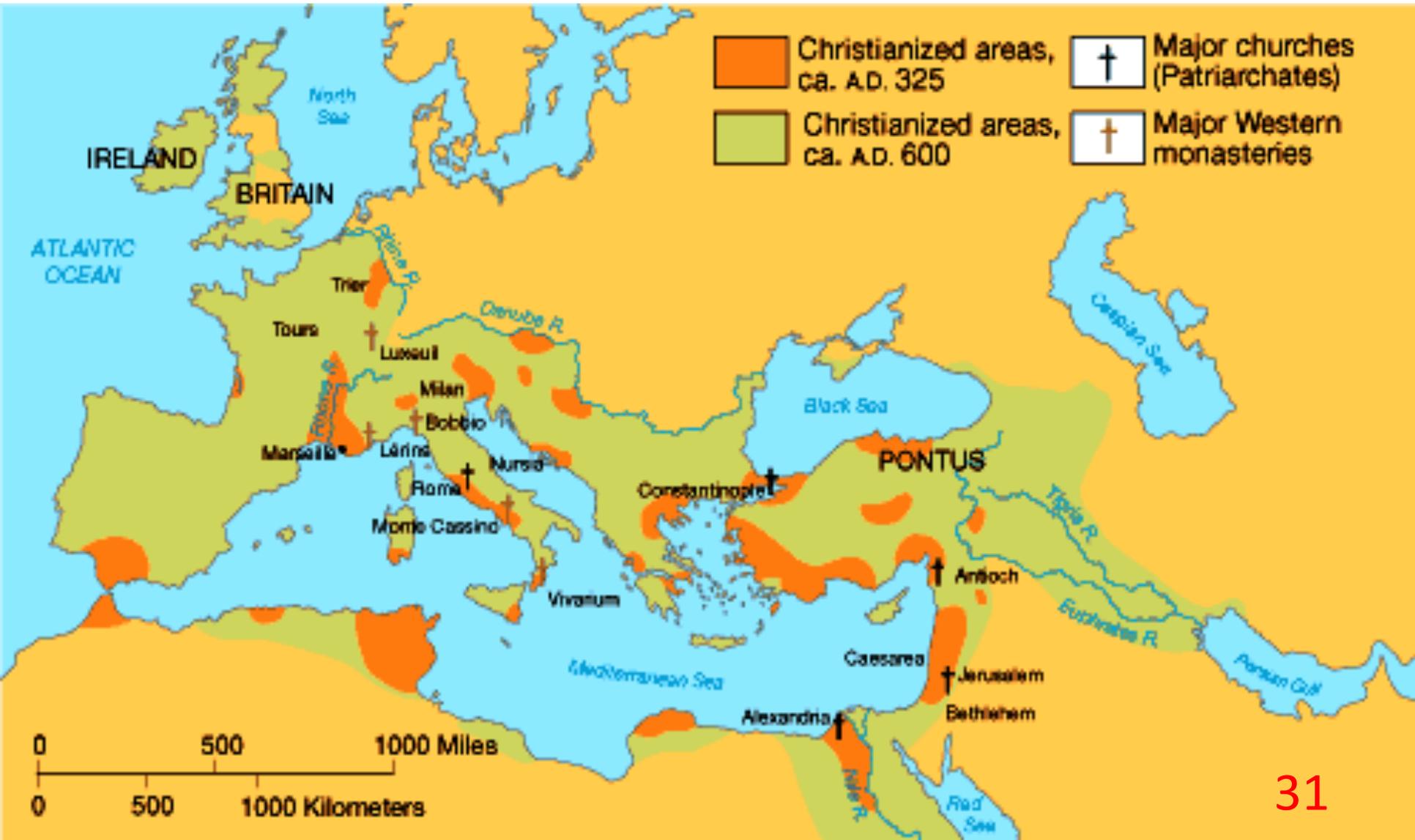
Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*

(*On the prescription of heretics*), chap.7

Tertullian claims Paul:

“names **philosophy** as that which he would have us be **on our guard against**. ... ‘See that no one beguile you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and contrary to the wisdom of the Holy Ghost.’ ... at Athens, ... had in his interviews become acquainted with that human wisdom which **pretends to know the truth, whilst it only corrupts it,....** **What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?** What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? ... ‘the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart’. Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!”

5 Principal Cities (religious authority): Alexandria; Jerusalem; Antioch; Constantinople; Rome



Christianity to Asia

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Nestorian Christians

Christian theologian **Nestorius** (386–450), **Patriarch of Constantinople (428-431)** came into conflict with other prominent church leaders, notably Cyril of Alexandria, who criticized his rejection of *Theotokos* (Mother of God) for Mary, mother of Jesus.

Cyril issued 12 anathemas at a council in Rome 430. Nestorius & followers condemned as heretical at Council of Ephesus 431 & Council of Chalcedon 451.

Reason: Nestorianism claims **Monophysitism**

Christ had **2 loosely united natures**, (divine/ human), which implies Christ is neither “truly God” nor “truly man.”

Nestorian Christology= “Jesus Christ, who is not identical with the Son but personally united with the Son, who lives in him, is one hypostasis and one nature: human.”

Chalcedonian Christology

Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Baker Books, 1996), 30-34:

1. **True INCARNATION of Logos**, or 2nd person of God-head . . . an actual abiding union of **2 in 1 personal life**.
2. Distinction b/w NATURE & PERSON. Logos assumed, not a human person (else 2 persons, divine & human), but human nature common to us all; & hence he **redeemed**, not a particular man, but **all men as partakers of same nature**.
3. GOD-MAN as result of incarnation. . . . he is **one person both divine and human**.
4. DUALITY OF THE NATURES. distinction of nature even after act of incarnation, **without confusion or conversion**, & **without division or separation**, so that **divine will ever remain divine, and human ever human**, and yet two have continually one common life, and **interpenetrate each other**, like persons of the Trinity.

Chalcedonian Christology

5. UNITY OF THE PERSON. Union of divine & human nature in Christ is a **permanent state** resulting from incarnation, and is a real, supernatural, personal, inseparable union. . . . Two natures constitute but one personal life, and yet remain distinct.

6. **Whole WORK of Christ is to be attributed to his person**, and not to one or other nature exclusively. Person is acting subject, nature the organ or medium. It is the one divine-human person of Christ that wrought miracles by virtue of his divine nature, and suffered through sensorium of his human nature

7. *ENHYPOSTASIA*, of human nature of Christ meaning that Christ's human nature had **no independent personality of its own**, besides the divine, & divine nature is the root & basis of his personality. . . . His **human personality was completed & perfected by being so incorporated with pre-existent Logos-personality** as to find in it alone its full self-consciousness, and to be permeated & controlled by it in every stage of its development.

Nestorian Schism 431

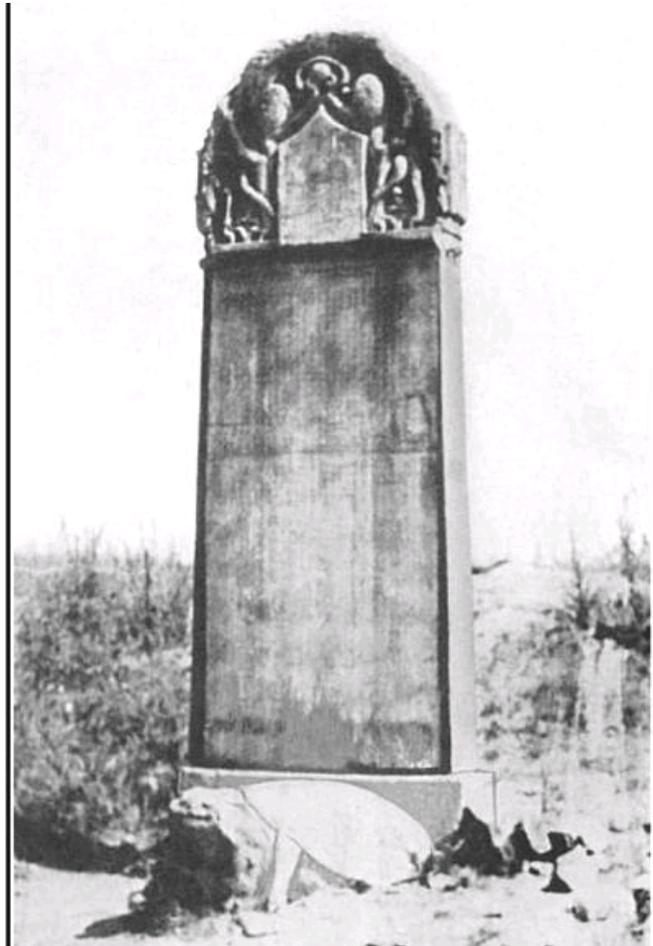
After condemnation Nestorians affiliated with **Sasanian (Iranian) Empire & School of Edessa**, great importance to Syriac-speaking world, founded in 2nd century.

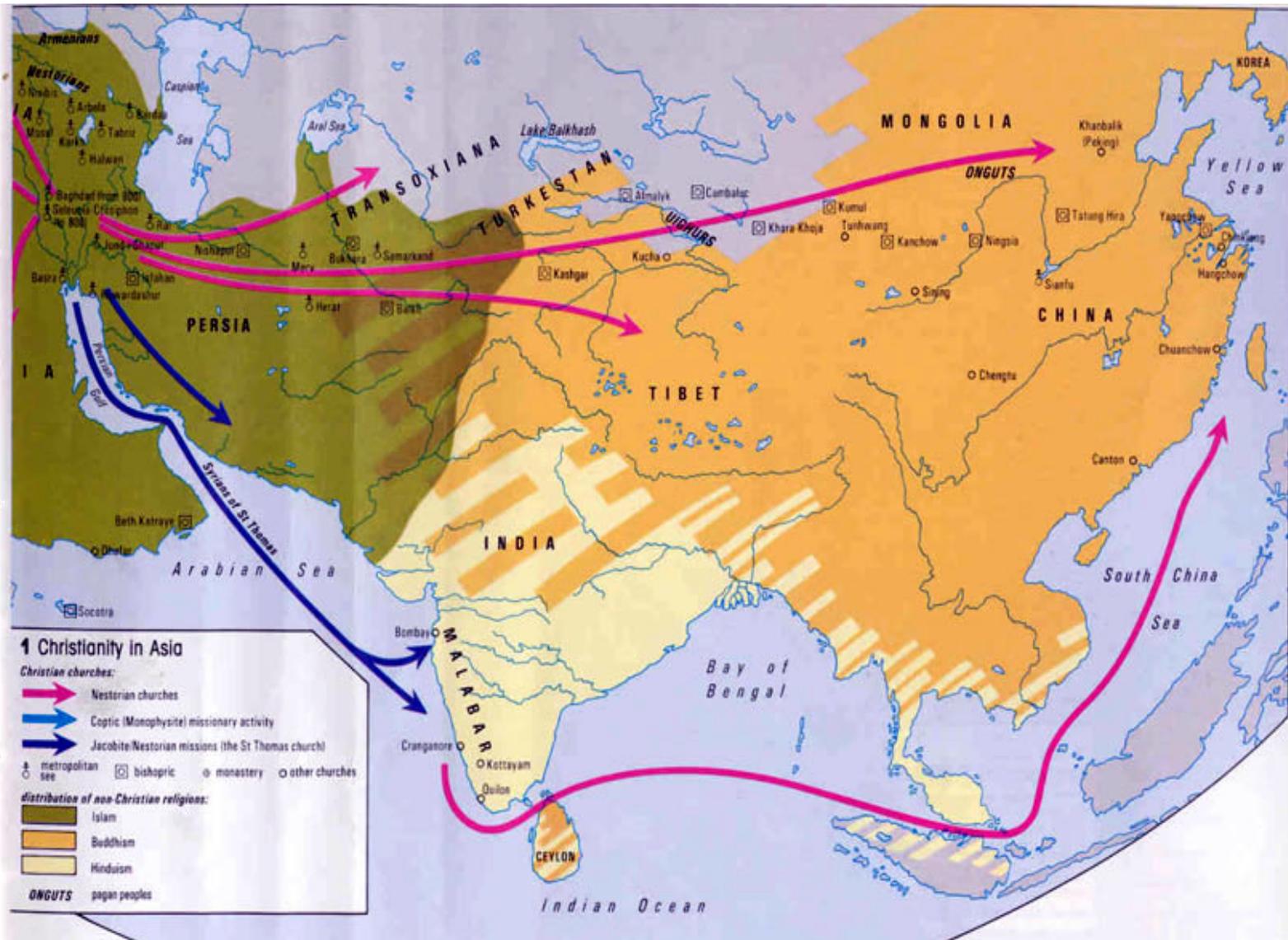
489: Nestorian Schism, Byzantine emperor Zeno ordered school closed for its Nestorian doctrine. Its scholars moved back to School of Nisibis (central modern-day Turkey)



Nestorian Christians

By 7th c. AD Nestorian Christians travelled from Mesopotamia to **western China**. Discovery by Jesuits 1623 of famous "**Nestorian monument**" old Tang dynasty (618–907) capital **Chang-an**. Church survived for 2 centuries. Xi'an Stele, on its turtle (Bixi) pedestal moved to Berlin museum 2010.





1 Christianity in Asia

Christian churches:

- ➔ Nestorian churches
- ➔ Coptic (Monophysite) missionary activity
- ➔ Jacobite/Nestorian missions (the St Thomas church)

⊙ metropolitan see ⊠ bishopric ⊙ monastery ⊙ other churches

distribution of non-Christian religions:

- Islam
- Buddhism
- Hinduism

ONGUTS pagan peoples

Many Heresies

Paul's warning in Acts 20:28-30

²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

²⁹ I know that after my departure **fierce wolves will come in among you**, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men **speaking twisted things**, to draw away the disciples after them.

Largest Trinitarian Heresies

Arianism: **denied true divinity** of Jesus Christ taking various specific forms, but all agreed Jesus Christ **created by Father** w/beginning in time, & title “Son of God” = courtesy. **Arius** (250–336) Alexandria, Egypt

Monarchianism: overemphasis on **indivisibility of God** (Father) at expense of other "persons" of Trinity leading to either Sabellianism (Modalism= **one person**) or Adoptionism [Jesus born mere non-divine man, supremely virtuous & adopted “Son of God”]

Monophysitism: Christ's **divinity dominates humanity**. Contrast Chalcedonian = Christ 2 natures: divine & human.

Nestorianism: Jesus Christ = natural union b/w Flesh & Word, **not identical to divine Son of God**.

Heresies

Manichaeism: Gnostic dualistic religion: **good & evil equally powerful**, material things are evil.

Donatism: **rigorists**: church must be **church of saints, not sinners**; sacraments administered by *traditores* invalid. Martyrdom = supreme Christian virtue; regarded those that actively sought martyrdom as saints.

Antinomianism: Christians **freed by grace from obligations of any moral law**. St Paul refuted a charge made by opponents because of his attitude to Mosaic Law (Romans 3:8).

Marcionism: affirmed Jesus Christ as savior sent by God; Paul= chief apostle, BUT **rejected Hebrew Bible** & Hebrew God who was separate & lower entity than all-forgiving God of NT.

Montanism: **new ecstatic prophesying** superseded & fulfilled doctrines proclaimed by Apostles.

Soteriological Heresies

Augustine's orthodoxy= people cannot come to God without grace of God.

Pelagianism: **original sin did not taint human nature**; mortal will still capable of choosing good or evil without Divine aid.

Semipelagianism: rejection of Pelagianism BUT also Augustine's doctrine had gone too far to other extreme & taught that **grace aided free-will** rather than replacing it. Thus, growing in faith – is the work of God, while **beginning of faith is an act of free will**, with grace supervening only later.

Spread of Christianity Roman Empire

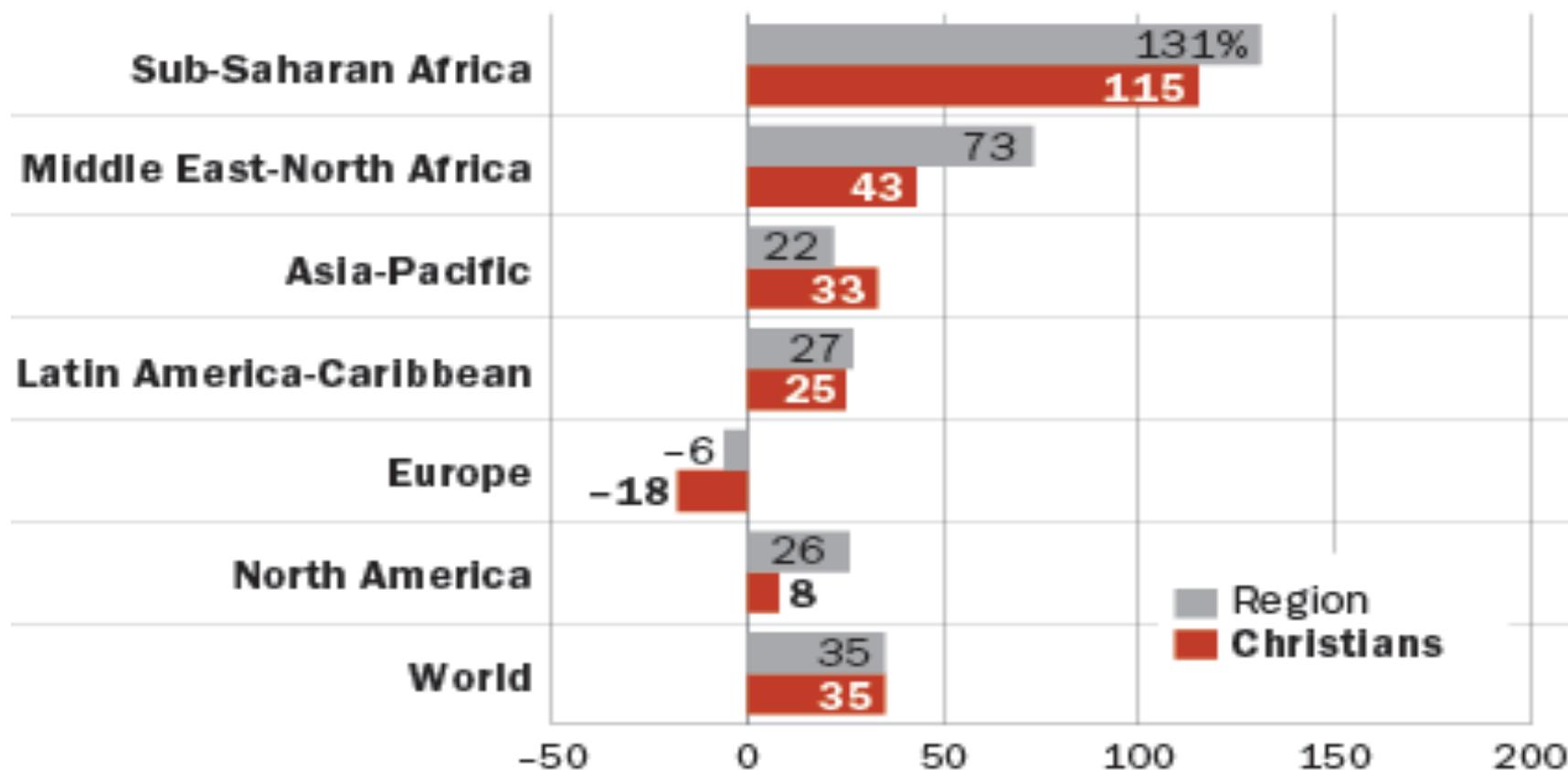
YEAR	Number	Percentage of Roman Empire
100 :	7,500	0.0126%
150:	41,000	0.07%
200:	220,000	0.36%
250:	1.7 million	1.9%
300:	6.3 million	10.5% → Constantine 312
350:	34 million	56.5%

See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton UP, 1996; Harper, 1997).

1.	United States	229,157,250
2.	Brazil	169,213,130
3.	Mexico	106,204,560
4.	Nigeria	80,510,000
5.	Philippines	78,790,000
6.	Russia	67,640,000
7.	China	67,070,000
8.	Dem. Rep. Congo	63,150,000
9.	France	55,948,600
10.	Italy	55,832,000
11.	Ethiopia	51,477,950
12.	Germany	50,752,580
13.	Colombia	44,502,000
14.	Ukraine	41,973,000
15.	South Africa	40,243,000
16.	Spain	38,568,000
17.	Poland	36,526,000
18.	Kenya	33,625,790
19.	Argentina	33,497,100
20.	United Kingdom	33,200,417

Christian Population Growth Compared With Overall Growth in Each Region, 2010 to 2050

% increase in population size



Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Spread of Christianity Roman Empire

Sociological Questions:

Appeal of Christianity: *Ekklesia* (Athenian= all citizens; not based on birth, wealth, but residence)= followers of Jesus Christ (“Church” later English).

Matt. 16:18: “...upon this rock I will build my church...” [Gk. “*Ekklesian*”; Latin “*ecclesiam*”]

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

Spread of Christianity Roman Empire

Contrast Rome & Christianity

1. From Social Inequality (female infanticide) to Equality:
Church= *Ekklesia* (all equal in God's sight) & Dignity of
Human Life (*imago dei*);
2. From Emperors as gods—plurality of impersonal gods—to
one God of Love.

Spread of Christianity Roman Empire

3. From little **Social Care** to Family: *Ekklesia*=

Matt.25:40 “...done to least of brethren, you have done to Me”;

Acts 4:32-35: “...whole congregation of believers was united as one—
one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own
possessions. ...They shared everything. ... Those who owned fields or
houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and
made an offering of it.”

4. Promise of **salvation** & afterlife to **ALL who believe**. Unique to
Christianity that

a. open to all

b. resurrected body. Death= sleep.

Spread of Christianity

Outside Rome and Greece,
Christianity spread north into
“Gaul.”

Difficult to determine actual
numbers, but massive **Persecution**
in Lyon (177 AD) means sufficient
numbers created fear and hatred
in Rome.



(above: Lyon amphitheater)

Emperor Marcus Aurelius: Stoic philosopher (believed person after death absorbed into Divine essence); Christian immortality of the soul, with moral consequences, dangerous to the welfare of the state.

Intolerance of Christians

Roman State Religion= fulfilled state duties; state dependent on will of gods!

Christianity= fulfilled individual & community needs. Accused of :

1. **Atheism**= disbelief in Roman gods (& Emperor) & taught corporate unity above the state.
2. **Cannibalism** (eating Eucharist)
3. **Corrupting morals** (not patriotic= venerate Emperor)
4. **Corrupting family** (marriage, place of women)

Persecutions (under Emperors): few 1st -2nd c; increased by 3rd c.

1. Nero: 64+ sporadic/ localized
2. Domitian: 81-96 sporadic
3. Marcus Aurelius: 177+
4. Diocletian: 284-305 goal of total extermination