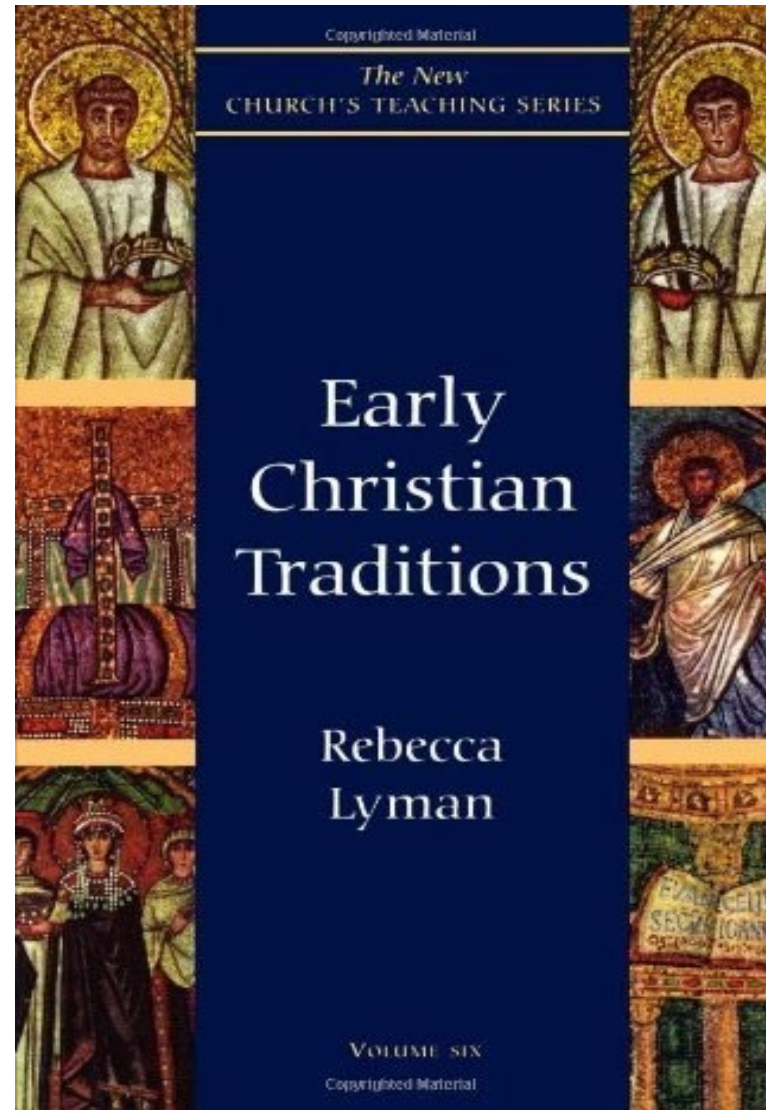


## Rebecca Lyman

Episcopal priest and the Samuel Garrett Professor of Church History at The Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley.

178 pages, including endnotes, resources and questions for discussion



## Why should we care about the first five centuries of Christianity?

“Christianity saw its growth [during this time] from a small group of followers of Rabbi Jesus to a persecuted Hellenistic missionary movement to the imperial church of the Roman Empire. . . . Liturgy, orthodoxy, monasticism, and scripture were all ‘invented’ during these centuries. The prayers, hopes, and conclusions of these ancient people are ours whether we know it or not” (p. 2).

## Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Richard Hooker

Richard Hooker (1554 - 1600) is credited with Anglican theology sitting on a three-legged stool of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.

*What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience are due; the next whereunto, is what any man can necessarily conclude by force of Reason; after this, the voice of the church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason overrule all other inferior judgements whatsoever.*

*Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie Book V; Chapter 8*

**Tradition**



**Scripture**

**Reason**

# The Apostolic Tradition

1. Established an official succession of teachers, defined as the list of bishops in the early communities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome;
2. Defined a body of theological teachings as the 'rule of faith';
3. Collected authentic writings about Jesus, which came to be defined as the 'canon' of scripture [the source by which proper Christian belief is judged].

# Threefold Ministry

1. Bishops oversaw the administration of a whole city of churches;
2. Presbyters (by now called priests) presided at various house churches;
3. Deacons supervised the distribution of money or goods from the bishop's treasury to the poor in the community.



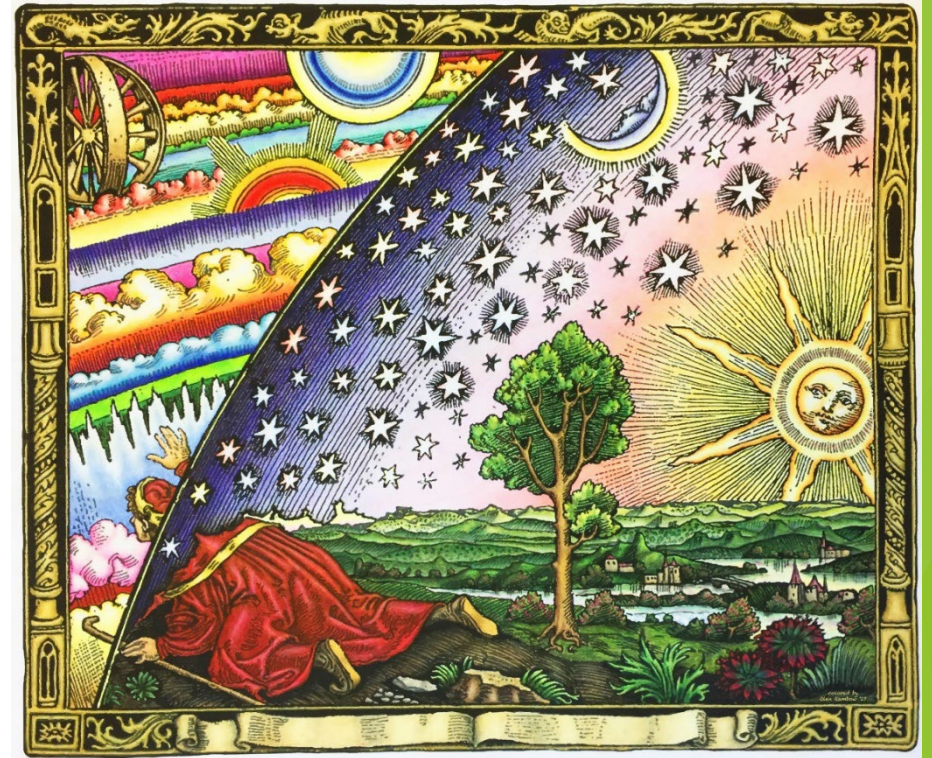
# Gnosticism

Saw the world in terms of polar opposites - light and dark, spirit and matter, good and evil.

Because [Gnostics] believed God was wholly transcendent, material creation had happened by accident; it was the work of a lower evil god.

Thus . . . Jesus had little need of a physical nature: he appeared in the flesh only to rescue souls trapped in the physical world.

The stark contrast between flesh and spirit denied the biblical account of creation as good, and it also rejected the idea of the Incarnation, Jesus actually taking on the flesh and blood of humanity.



# Vilentinus

c. 100 - c. 180 C.E.

Three kinds of people: the spiritual, psychological, and material

Only those of a spiritual nature could receive the gnosis (knowledge) that allowed them to return to a divine state of being, while those of a psychic nature (ordinary Christians) would attain a lesser or uncertain form of salvation, and that those of a material nature were doomed to perish.



## Iranaeus

c. 120/140 - c. 200/203

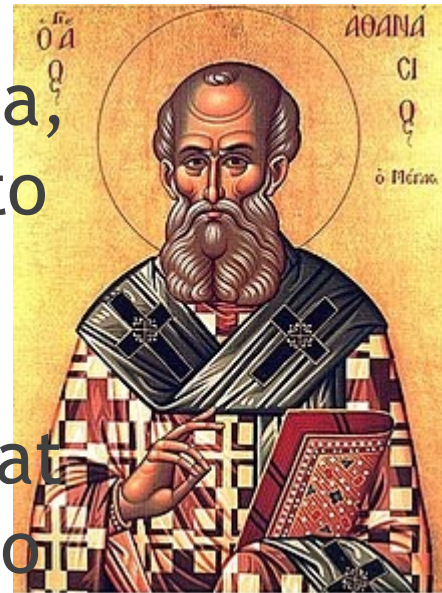
Says he and others can enumerate the bishops that the apostles placed in charge, giving their names and cities, and they can also do the same for the bishops that those bishops placed up to the present. He ensures them that the apostles didn't keep any secrets hidden. They passed on all there was to pass on concerning the teachings Jesus handed to them.





## Athanasius

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, wrote his annual Easter letter to his churches in 367 which contained the same list of 27 books of the New Testament that are found in our Bibles today. So far as we know, Athanasius was the first Christian leader to compile a list of New Testament books exactly as we know them today.



## Guide to Christian Living

Charity and self-control embodied the ideals of self-sacrifice and active love found in Jesus and the Father and reflected and revealed the character of God to society at large.

The behavior of Christians in imitation of Christ revealed them to the surrounding world as the special people of God.



# DIDACHE

THE APOSTLES



# Apostasy

Offering sacrifice to Roman gods - was seen as betrayal of sole allegiance to God and considered unforgivable. The sinner was cast out of the Christian community.

After much debate, Church authorities decided that apostates (schismatics) could be “reconciled with the church through the laying on of hands, but baptism in the name of the Trinity should not be repeated because the church affirmed one baptism for the remission of sins.”

## The Council of Nicaea (325)

The Son of God is  
homousios with the Father.

The term, *homousios*, is  
made up of ‘*homo*,’ meaning  
‘same,’ and ‘*ousia*,’ which  
means substance.

The Son of God is of the  
same substance as God the  
Father.



## *Homoousios*

*Homoousian*: Those who believed the Son of God and God the Father shared the one, exact same substance. That is, there is only one substance, which both have (Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus).

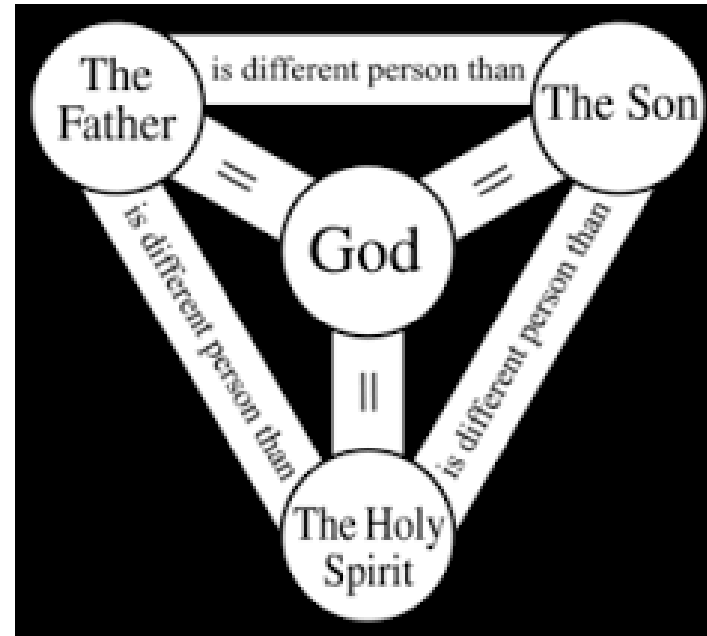
*Homoian* ('homoi' means 'like'): Those who believe the Son of God was 'like' God the Father. They did not wish to use the language of 'ousia,' or 'substance' (Basil of Ancyra, Eustathius of Sebaste).

*Heteroousian* ('hetero' means 'different'): Those who believe the Son of God was 'of a different substance' from the Father. These followers were the heirs of Arius' theology, who developed it to its final form (Aetius and Eunomius of Cyzicus).



## The Counsel of Constantinople (381)

The doctrine of the Trinity asserts that God is one and exists as or in three equally divine “Persons”, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



# Relevance of Early Church History

As we Anglicans seek to understand our role in the twenty-first century, we need to remember these first struggles over unity and plurality. In our desire for unity or in our nostalgia for the past, we forget that theological diversity is also part of an apostolic church. Although theological argument inevitably happens in a church that treasures honesty and discernment, consensus is always possible in the light of our call to unity in Christ.

