

## Cities of the New Testament: Alexandria

This is the sixth in a sporadic series ET&N issues on cities of the New Testament. Previous issues in the series were Corinth ([ET&N 23](#)), Ephesus ([ET&N 28](#)), Laodicea ([ET&N 33](#)), Antioch ([ET&N 40](#)) and Rome ([ET&N 53](#)).

### Then

There are only four references to Alexandria in the New Testament:

- Alexandrians were among the synagogue of the Freedmen whose dispute with Stephen eventually led to his stoning (Acts 6:9ff).
- Apollos, who arrived in Ephesus shortly after Paul departed (ca A.D. 51), leaving Aquila and Priscilla behind, is described as a "native of Alexandria." According to Luke, he was eloquent and "competent in the Scriptures," but his understanding of Christ was incomplete, so Aquila and Priscilla gave him more thorough instruction. Later, he moved on to Corinth, where his powerful arguments (Acts 18:24-28). His influence was so profound, in fact, that some Corinthians became his followers (1 Corinthians 1:12). Where Apollos originally learned his incomplete Christianity is not known.
- The ships used on the second (Lysia to Malta, where it was wrecked) and third (Malta to Puteoli) legs of Paul's journey to Rome were both Alexandrian (Acts 27:6; 28:11).  
As a major seaport in the Roman Empire, Alexandria sent many ships throughout the Mediterranean.

We also know that there were Egyptians Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Since Alexandria was the largest and most important city in Egypt, it is quite possible that these pilgrims returned with the story of the fire of the Holy Spirit and Peter's first sermon. Perhaps one of these shared the Gospel with Apollos. Tradition holds that John Mark first brought the Gospel to Alexandria during the reign of Nero (54-68), and while this has no supporting evidence, we do know that there was a thriving Christian community there by early in the second century. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that Alexandria was the dominant Christian community from the mid- to late-second century until the Council of Chalcedon in 481.

## Historical Background

Alexandria was founded in 331 B.C. by Alexander the Great as the new regional capital on the site of a small fishing village that may have existing continuously from the 13th century B.C. The island of Pharos, just a few hundred feet into the Mediterranean, is mentioned in [Homer's Odyssey](#):

*Now off Egypt, about as far as a ship can sail in a day [from the mouth of the Nile] with a good stiff breeze behind her, there is an island called Pharos- it has a good harbour from which vessels can get out into open sea when they have taken in water... (Book IV)*

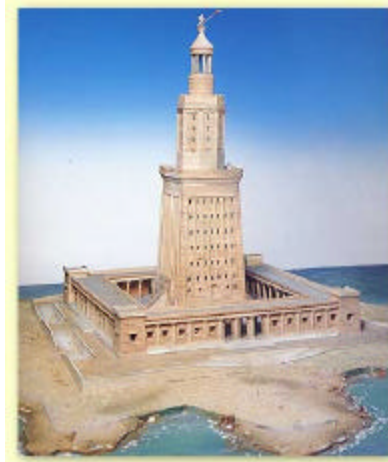


Map of Alexandria - click for larger view  
Source: [Alaa K. Ashmawy](#).

Alexander never saw the new city rise on his chosen site. After conquering Egypt, he pushed on to Babylon, where he died of malaria in 323, but his body was returned to Alexandria for burial. After his death, no single leader emerged to match Alexander's greatness, so his kingdom was parceled up among a number of his leading generals. Foremost among those generals was Ptolemy, a fellow Macedonian, who assumed leadership of Egypt and surrounding territory, establishing a dynasty that would last 300 years, culminating with Cleopatra.

Strabo (66 BC-ca AD 24), the now-famous geographer and historian (his works were largely ignored by his contemporaries), spent a number of years studying in Alexandria and described the city in [Book XVII](#) of his *Geography* (ca AD 20). Strabo praised the city's location, careful planning, protected harbors, extensive trade, public grounds and palaces, and in particular, the pleasant climate.

Under the rule of the early Ptolemies, Alexandria grew rapidly. The great temple to the Greek/Egyptian god Serapis arose, the Ptolemaic Palace extended perhaps a mile along the shores of the harbor, and a causeway (heptastadium) connected the city with Pharos Island. Most notable, however, was the Pharos Lighthouse. Rising perhaps more than 400 feet in three unique sections (rectangular, octagonal, and cylindrical), the tower included a beacon with bronze mirrors that reflected the flame several miles out to sea. Legends even suggested that the mirrors were used to burn approaching enemy ships. So impressive was Alexandria's lighthouse that it was included among the Seven Wonders of the World, the newest structure so honored and the only one with a practical purpose.

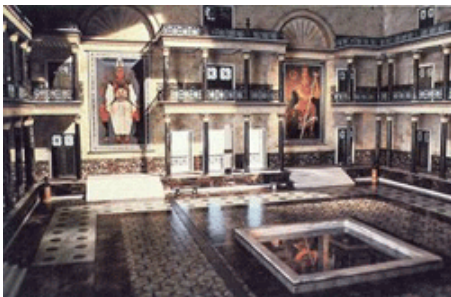


Model of the Pharos Lighthouse  
Source: [touregypt.net](#)



Lighthouse miniature

From the time of its completion, the Lighthouse became a popular tourist attraction, drawing well-heeled Greeks, and later Romans, to Alexandria. As in Ephesus, where miniature replicas of the Temple of Artemis represented a significant proportion of the local economy, tourists could buy small versions of the Lighthouse. The extent to which the well-to-do traveled in ancient times might surprise some modern readers, but during most of the time of the Greek and Roman Empires, the sea was relatively safe to travel, and visits to important attractions were considered a vital part of a young man's education. The list we now know as the Seven Wonders of the World was not, in fact, a single list, but several compiled by travelers. The best known were probably Antipater of Sideon and Philon of Byzantium. The list we recognize today was finalized in the Middle Ages, and it may only have been possible for one individual to visit all seven for a very brief time after the completion of the Lighthouse, since the Colossus of Rhodes was destroyed by an earthquake in 226 B.C.



A reconstruction of the main hall of the Museum of Alexandria used in the series [Cosmos by Carl Sagan](#)

Alexandria is perhaps best known, however, as the home of the largest museum and library in the ancient world. Initiated by Ptolemy II (309-246 BC), the library eventually grew to as many as 500,000 volumes including, legend says, Aristotle's private collection. The Alexandria Library was far more than just a collection of books—it became the primary center of learning in the Greek world. Euclid invented geometry there, Eratosthenes calculated the circumference of the earth, and Aristarchus taught that the earth rotated around the sun. The loss of the library is somewhat of an historical mystery.

Many blame it on Christians seeking to destroy the "wisdom of the world," but others, noting that Strabo failed to mention the library in his *Geography* and that he commented that his predecessors had access to more knowledge, believe the library was gone by the early first century.

Alexandria also had the largest Jewish population outside of Judea, a collection of Hellenic Jews of the Diaspora who, according to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, suffered periodic persecutions by the Greek and indigenous Egyptian populations of Alexandria. By and large, however, Alexandrian Jews prospered and were influenced by the profoundly Greek environment. According to a tradition supported by Josephus (*Antiquities* XII.2), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the [Septuagint](#)) was supported by Ptolemy II Philadelphus when his librarian Demetrius Phalerius reported " he had been informed that there were many books of laws among the Jews worthy of inquiring after, and worthy of the king's library."

The Neo-Platonic movement that flourished in Alexandria in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. produced the noted Jewish philosopher, Philo (ca 25 B.C.-ca A.D. 45), whose allegorical interpretations of Scripture and emphasis on the moral implications of divine inspiration were to have a significant influence on later Alexandrian Christians. Sometime in the future, I intend to devote an issue of *ET&N* to Philo.

Even though the Romans were far less interesting in philosophical pursuits, the fertile intellectual environment of Alexandria continued even after the end of Ptolemaic rule in 30 B.C. The legendary Cleopatra ascended to the throne in 47 B.C. after the death of one brother and her marriage to another. Recognizing the growing power of Rome, she allied herself with Julius Caesar and became his mistress. When

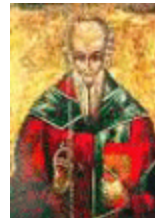
Caesar was killed, she returned to Egypt and allied with Mark Antony, whom she later married after murdering her brother/husband. When the forces of Antony and Cleopatra were defeated at the Battle of Actium of 32 B.C., they fled back to Alexandria. Hunted down by victorious Octavian (later Caesar Augustus), Antony falls on his sword and Cleopatra, unable to convince Octavian to take her as a lover, commits suicide, according to the legend, by snake bite.

## The Roman/Christian Era in Alexandria

The onset of Roman rule, however, does not slow down Alexandria's growth. Roman leaders recognized the value of its location and protected harbor, and by the middle of the first century, its population may have grown to a million inhabitants, the second largest city (after Rome) in the Empire. It is difficult to imagine that the Apostles would have failed to such a large and relatively close city where ships came and went frequently. However Christianity came to Alexandria, the city was to become the nexus of Christian learning by the late second century and continue as such well into the fifth. Given the intellectually tolerant nature of Alexandrian education, it would also be the source of major Gnostic leaders and Arius, whose speculations about the nature of Christ precipitated the Nicene Council of A.D. 325 and the [Creed](#) it produced.

Christians in Alexandria faced periodic persecutions, but a great catechetical school grew that produced many of the greatest thinkers of the early church. The school, known as the Didascalia, was not limited to Christian thinker, nor to Christian students, but was a center of learning where Christians, Romans, and Greeks learned mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, and medicine side by side. The earliest days of the Didascalia are lost in obscurity until its first famous leader, **Pantænus**, in about 180. Pantænus was perhaps the first teacher to make use of Greek philosophy in interpreting Scripture, having been thoroughly schooled in Stoicism. Little is known of him beyond Eusebius Pamphilus' (Church History, ca. 320) report that he spent time as an evangelist in India (V.11). His primary fame, however, comes from being the teacher of Titus Flavius Clemens, generally known as **Clement of Alexandria** to distinguish him from Clement of Rome, whose writings date from the very late first and early second century.

Clement, venerated for centuries before being "de-sainted" by a papal namesake, Clement VIII, early in the 17th century, succeeded Pantænus as head of the Didascalia in about 190. He is believed to have been born in Athens and, having a thirst for learning, traveled across the Roman world studying various philosophies until he found Pantænus in Alexandria. The Severian persecution of 202 forced Clement from Alexandria, but other than some time in Jerusalem and Antioch, little is known of his later life. Clement was a prodigious writer and though many of his works have disappeared, we still have three major works—*The Exhortation*, *Pædagogus (The Instructor)*, and *Stromata (Miscellanies)*. Taken together, these works represent a sequential trilogy of the Christian walk—belief, discipline, knowledge—although many scholars view Clement as too unsystematic to have preconceived such a schema. A fourth, smaller work, *Who is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved* is another gem containing, as it does, a memorable story about John the apostle in his old age.



Clement

Earlier writers had edged around the idea, but it was Clement who is primarily known for having introduced Greek philosophy into Christian theological speculation. Paul wrote that the Law was "a tutor to lead (the Jews) to Christ" (Galatians 3:24, NASB), and Clement suggests that philosophy served the same function for "the Hellenic mind, saying "Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and

primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks" (*Stromata* I.5). While he excoriates pagan beliefs and practices in *Exhortation*, he frequently quotes Greek philosophical treatises, particularly Plato, as evidence of God's inspiration—albeit incomplete—to non-Jews. He claims that Paul's comments about the "wisdom of men" in 1 Corinthians 3 and elsewhere were aimed at specific philosophies—Epicurean and Stoic—but not "the teaching (philosophy) which is agreeable to Christ" (*Stromata* I.11). Clement therefore sees considerable value in studying philosophy, as well as the Scriptures, in gaining wisdom.

Clement also extolled a considerably severe ascetic approach to the Christian walk. In *Pædagogus*, he present Jesus as the trustworthy Instructor of God's children, "adorned as He is with three of the fairest adornments—knowledge, benevolence, and authority" (I.11). After his lofty introduction to Jesus as Instructor, Clement presents detailed prescriptions for attaining perfection, even while admitting that this is "the prerogative of God alone" (I.2). In often-lengthy discourses, he advises about

- Eating: "Excess, which is all things is an evil, is very highly reprehensible in the matter of food" (I.1)
- Drinking: "The natural, temperate, and necessary beverage, therefore, for the thirsty is water" (I.2)
- Food and drink containers: "The elaborate vanity...of vessels in glassed chased, more apt to break on account of the art, teaching us to fear while we drink, is to be banished from our well-ordered constitution" (I.3)
- Feasts: "Let revelry keep away from our rational entertainments" (I.4)
- Laughter: "...even laughter must be kept in check; for when given vent to in the right manner it indicates orderliness, but when it issues differently it shows a want of restraint" (I.5)
- Bad language: "For filthy speaking we ourselves must entirely abstain, and stop the mouths of those who practise it by stern looks and averting the face..." (I.6)
- Speaking: "...modulation in the voice is characteristic of a wise man..." (I.7)
- Ointments: "The use of...ointments is not necessary for us; for it impels to pleasure and indulgences, especially on the approach of night" (I.8)
- Sleep: "...sleeping on downy feathers is injurious, when our bodies fall down as into yawning hollow" (I.9)
- Clothing: "...neither are we to provide for ourselves costly clothing..." although as an "accommodation," women "may be permitted to use softer clothes" (I.11). Clement believed that Christians should all dress pretty much the same—plain and functional.
- Shoes: Women "ought for the most part to wear shoes; for it is not suitable for the foot to be shown naked; besides, woman is a tender thing, easily hurt. But for a man, bare feet are quite in keeping, except when he is on military service" (I.12)
- Jewelry and ornaments: Women "...must accordingly utterly cast off ornaments...rejecting adornment itself entirely" and must "let not their ears be pierced, contrary to nature..." (I.13)

In the matter of food, Clement would undoubtedly be highly critical of the typical American diet. "In their greed..." he writes of contemporaries, "the gluttons seems absolutely to sweep the world with a drag-net to gratify their luxurious tastes..." which, he points out, "a little after go to the dunghill" (I.1).

It is reasonable to assume that Clement's prescriptions became the rules for students at the Didascalia, and it is no wonder, therefore, that the later monastic movement initially arose in Egypt. His writings about knowledge and wisdom also

had a slightly elitist air, similar to that of the Gnostics, who claimed an inheritance of secret knowledge (*gnosis*) from Jesus' inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, John and, for some, [Mary Magdalene](#).

Clement is also known as the teacher of the Ante-Nicene period's most prolific and controversial writer, **Origen** (185-ca 253) whose opinions eventually earned papal anathema. But it would be impossible to minimize Origen's contribution to the history of church thought. Hans Urs von Balthasar comments that "there is no thinker in the church who is so invisibly all-present as Origen"<sup>1</sup>.



Origen

Origen was committed to the church and a thoroughly devoted student of Scripture, which he recognized as both the Hebrew Scriptures and the emerging canon of apostolic literature. He saw three levels of meaning in Scripture: historical, moral and mystical. For Origen, the ultimate meaning of all Scripture was Christ, and he therefore viewed Scripture as a unified whole. He drew deep, significant meaning in every word, and ranged across the entire bible in his interpretation of specific passages. His methods are, consequently, rather antithetical to modern exegetical approaches to interpretation.

Among his doctrines, however, the one that probably created the most furor was universal salvation—not only for human beings, but also for angels, whom Origen viewed as rational beings capable of error and therefore comparable to humans. In his commentary of the Gospel of John, Origen states, "Jesus, therefore, in completing the work of God—I mean every rational being and not just the human being—completes it in the same way. For the more blessed beings which are persuaded by the Word and do not need suffering are made perfect by the Word alone. But the others, not persuaded by the Word, need suffering so as to be able, after suffering and making progress, to be made perfect by the doctrines."

Origen's writings are both complex and extensive, even though many of his approximately 2,000 works have not survived. As soon as I can devote the time, I will be making a more thorough study of Origen and devoting an entire issue of ET&N to this important figure in early church history.

### **Arianism, Catholic Councils, and the Coptic Church**

Alexandria began to lose its influence as a major seat of Christianity with the first major dispute over the nature of Christ and the resultant Council of Nicaea in 325. **Arius** (250-336) had studied under Lucian of Antioch, who had taught that Christ was only a man. Like many Christian intellectuals of his day, Arius journeyed to Alexandria.

From the first, he was a controversial figure, alternately ordained as a deacon and, in 313, a presbyter and excommunicated for his views. As head of a parish in Alexandria, Arius spread his opinion that Christ was a created being who could therefore not be eternal. Alexander (bishop of Alexandria, 313-328), recognizing Arius's growing popularity, called a meeting of the city's priests and deacons, to denounce what came to be known as Arianism. Arius refused to submit to Alexander and continue his teaching until Alexander called a synod of 100 Egyptian and Libyan bishops in 321. Eighty of those bishops voted to condemn Arius and expel him from Alexandria.



Athanasius



Arius

In a follow-up letter to other bishops, Alexander first used the term "**homoousios**" (of one substance) to describe the relationship between God and Christ. While some church leaders preferred the term "**homoiousios**" (of like substance), homoousios was to become the hinge point of the continuing controversy and, eventually, the adoption of Christian orthodoxy. Exiled from Alexandria, Arius fled first to Caesarea in Palestine then to Nicomedia in Bithynia (northwestern Turkey) where he enlisted supporters who held their own synod, condemning Alexander.

The growing infighting between church leaders apparently annoyed Constantine, the Roman emperor who recognized Christianity in 313 (and, according to legend, himself became a Christian). Ignorant of the significance of the controversy, Constantine first attempted a reconciliation between Arius and Alexander, sending his personal ecclesiastical advisor with letters to each, characterizing their dispute as merely semantic. When this attempt failed, Constantine called for a general church council at Nicaea in Bithynia.



The Nicene Council marked a profound turning point for the church since it was the first intrusion of secular authority into ecclesiastic issues. Constantine may not have cared about the issues of the argument, but he cared deeply about ending it. He saw Christianity as the stabilizing influence for his empire so he wanted the council to establish the parameters of his new religion.

The council, attended by hundred of bishops and their assistants, held almost daily sessions for at least two months. Alexander, accompanied by his deacon **Athanasius** (ca 296-373), represented Alexandria and successfully convinced the council to categorically reject Arianism and include homoousios as part of the Nicene Creed: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and born of the Father before all ages. (God of God) light of light, true God of true God. Begotten not made, **consubstantial** (homoousios) to the Father, by whom all things were made."

Athanasius was to become a major figure following the council. The persistent legend suggests that Alexander saw a group of young boys playing at a river, pretending to baptize (a privilege limited to bishops or their designees by that time) under the direction of their leader, Athanasius. Alexander summoned the boys but rather than punishing them for their sacrilegious activities, recruited them into the school and made Athanasius his personal protégé. On his deathbed three years after the Nicene Council, Alexander supposed named the still-underage Athanasius his successor. Athanasius continued to fight Arianism, but with the death of Constantine and the division of his empire between his sons Constans (western empire, pro-Nicene) and Constantius (eastern empire, anti-Nicene), the political battle continued and Athanasius was excommunicated.

For a short period, in fact, Arianism became the official position of the church. When Constans died in 350, Constantius gained control of the entire empire and soon convened two councils, strong-arming both into adopting a homoios (similar) formula and condemning both homoousios and homoiousios. When Constantius gained in 361, the debate re-opened, but the final victory over Arianism did not come until 381

when the Constantinople Council reaffirmed by Nicene Creed.

The speculative nature of Alexandrian theology eventually continued to undermine its influence, as church tradition established by further councils tightened by definitions of orthodoxy. The eventual schism between the Coptic (Egyptian) Church and Rome came when the Alexandrian church refused to accept the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Yet another disagreement about the nature of Christ emerged, the West accusing the Coptic Church of being "Monophysites" (claiming that Christ had a single nature, rather than two—human and divine). While the Coptic Church claims to have always considered monophysitism a heresy, the split continues to this day. The Coptic Church speculates that the monophysite accusation was a red herring, and that the Roman Church used it to justify isolating the Egyptian church for its failure to submit to the authority of the political action of the Roman pope.

## Now

To most American Christians, the names Clement, Origen, and Athanasius are largely unknown except to those with an esoteric interest in the Ante-Nicene Fathers. To students of the development of the New Testament canon, Athanasius is known as the author of the first complete list of the 27 canonical books. In his Festal Letter for A.D. 367, Athanasius called these books "fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone," he added, "is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness."

In the great teachers and thinkers of the Alexandrian church are under-appreciated, the Coptic Church is little more than a curiosity. It is alive and well today, boasting 9 million adherents in Egypt alone and scattered congregations, composed primarily of emigrant Copts, across the rest of the world. Probably the most famous modern Copt is Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1992-1997.



Boutros-Ghali

The beliefs and practices of the Coptic Church are strikingly similar to Roman Catholicism with some notable exceptions. Throughout its history, Copts have assiduously adhered to a doctrine of separation between church and state. It is ironic that the Arian controversy which motivated the merger of church and state under Constantine and led to the Holy Roman Empire, arguably the most political religious institution in human history, and the Coptic Church should both have emerged from the early Alexandrian church.

Equally ironic is the fact that the seminal source of the east-west schism (however innocent the Alexandrian church may have been) is now, according to [Encyclopedia Coptica](#), the modern champion of ecumenicalism. A founding member of the World Council of Churches, the Coptic Church "plays an important role in the Christian movement by conducting dialogues aiming at resolving the theological differences with the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Evangelical Churches."

As for the Christology controversies that are, rightly or wrongly, attributed to Alexandria, Arianism is largely absent from Christendom today except, notably, in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). To the vast majority of Christendom, the Nicene Creed is the basis of Christology, and it is recited in many churches (including, incidentally, the Coptic Church).

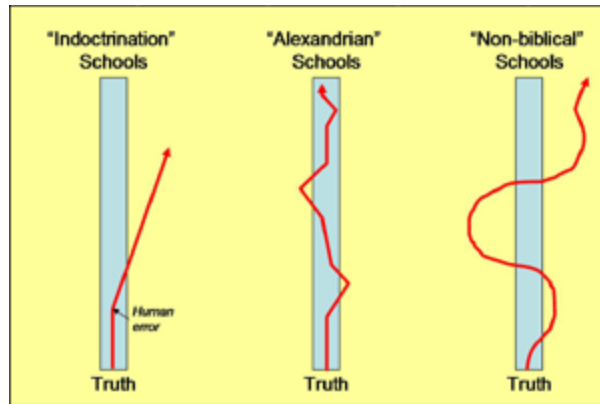
The monophysitism of which the Alexandrian church was wrongly accused, however, is alive and well in America in the form of Unitarianism. While Unitarianism has European roots as early as the 16th century, it is primarily an American phenomenon, spreading rapidly among New England Congregational churches. Unitarians deny, and even ridicule, the Trinity, insisting instead on the absolute unity of God's personality. The first American Unitarian church was King's Chapel (formerly Episcopal), which formed in 1785, and the Harvard School of Divinity was organized by Unitarians in 1817 (it became non-denominational, but no less liberal, in 1878).

Primary among early American proponents of Unitarianism was Thomas Jefferson. In a June 26, 1822, letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, Jefferson primarily slammed Calvinism, but also blamed Athanasius for turning Christianity into "a superstition." Contrasting the tenets of Unitarianism and Calvinism, Jefferson wrote, "which of these is the true and charitable Christian? He who believes and acts on the simple doctrines of Jesus? Or the impious dogmatists, as Athanasius and Calvin? Verily I say these are the false shepherds foretold as to enter not by the door into the sheepfold, but to climb up some other way. They are mere usurpers of the Christian name, teaching a counter-religion made up of the deliria of crazy imaginations, as foreign from Christianity as is that of Mahomet. Their blasphemies have driven thinking men into infidelity, who have too hastily rejected the supposed author himself, with the horrors so falsely imputed to him. Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as pure as they came from his lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christian. I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its creed and conscience to neither kings nor priests, the genuine doctrine of one only God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian."

Where are the great schools of Christianity today? Certainly, there is no institution comparable to Alexandria's Didascalia, where speculation was encouraged within the context of profound respect for the Scriptures. To those who might claim that the canon of the New Testament had not yet been developed when Clement and Origen were writing, it should be noted that Clement specifically approved of (directly or by quotation) all New Testament books except Philemon, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, and 3 John; Origen all except James, 2 Peter, 2 John, and 3 John. Among non-canonical books, Clement approved of the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Traditions of Matthias, the Preaching of Peter, and the Apocalypse of Peter, in addition to four works from the collection now known as the "Apostolic Fathers." Origen showed no approval of any works outside the eventual canon.

It seems to me that Christian schools of higher education fall into two distinct categories: (1) indoctrination of church/denominational tradition and (2) denial (or at least minimization) of biblical authority. Indoctrination schools discourage independent thought unless it leads to pre-determined orthodox conclusions. Non-biblical schools hold ancient works such as the Gospel of Thomas, as well as modern works by such liberal theologians as Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and Elaine Pagels as virtually equal to Scripture. What is needed is "Alexandrian" schools that encourage biblically-based speculation to discover ways in which the God's truth relates to current culture.

The impact of such schools might be simplistically characterized by the figure at right. Schools dedicated to inculcating orthodox/denominational doctrine start within the range of God's truth but are inevitably infected by human error that is reinforced by tradition, straying further and further from truth. Liberal schools may also start with truth but, denying the authority of Scripture, stray with no corrective standard. They may randomly touch on truth from time to time but rarely adhere to it for long.



Alexandrian schools start with truth but, by encouraging individual and group speculation, may stray off track. Holding to a biblical standard, however, provides a corrective device that brings errant speculations back into truth.

The monolithic views of Christian groups led by human councils, synods, or conventions become entrenched as tradition. Whether or not the group considers church tradition and the Bible equally authoritative, the result is the same. Human error is perpetuated.

One might ask, of course, why not a school that teaches strictly down the straight line of truth? There are two problems with that: (1) God's truth probably can't be represented by a straight line and (2) the human mind is too creative (or rebellious perhaps), culture too pervasive, and political influence too powerful to stick to a line, even if it were straight. There are, however, some movements within Christianity that approach "Alexandrianism." The Emergent Church speculations seem to offer the elasticity required to produce original thought while often honoring self-correction. For better or worse, most of these ideas lie outside of formal institutions of Christian learning.

One concrete example I might offer of an Alexandrian-type mode of thought involves the speculations surrounding "Open Theism." Many Open Theists start on a biblical basis and, when apparently moving outside of the range of biblical truth, are pulled back respectful disagreement by opponents. The book, [Does God Have a Future](#) (listed in the [Peculiar Press bookstore](#)), is a fascinating example of speculation tempered by orthodoxy.

## Discussion

Comment from subscriber John W:

Thanks for the excellent chapter on Alexandria in Egypt. It is loaded with valuable material. I do not agree with you closing assessment of the kind of school that is need to train and prepare Christians for useful service in the kingdom of Christ. Human philosophy is one thing...always in the real of speculative human thinking while Scripture is revealed truth and while we may vary in our understanding of it, it remains the same today as when first given by the HolySpirit.

---

Several subscribers also asked where they could find the Ray Boltz *One Drop of*

available at: <http://www.musichristian.com/sys/product.php?PRODUCT=23500>



Unsure about or don't agree with something in Ekklesia Then & Now? First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, [post a message](#) so we can all share in the discussion!

## **NEXT ISSUE: ART and Genetics**

© Richard M. Soule, 2005 Unlimited copy and distribution permission is hereby granted on the condition that this copyright notice is included and no profiteering is involved.

Website: [www.peculiarpress.com](http://www.peculiarpress.com)

View back issues at [www.ETandN.com](http://www.ETandN.com)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.