

Institutionalizing Jesus

For the past two months, I have been listening to lectures on the apostolic fathers and reading their works. It has been fascinating to go back to a time when Christianity was a small, splintered sect of Judaism, and every aspect of the religion was being debated. Was Jesus human or divine, did he have a real body, should ministers be paid, would his believers have a bodily resurrection, and since Jesus preached the immediate coming of the kingdom of god when would this resurrection happen? What was the relationship between Christianity and Judaism?

At the time, sincere Christians believed that Jesus only appeared to have a real body (e.g., docetism), others that he became divine at his baptism, and others argued that Christians must first become Jews. While proto-Orthodoxy hated docetism, they really hated the Judiazers. Ignatius, one of the early church fathers, wrote, "Do not be deceived by strange doctrines or antiquated myths, since they are worthless. For if we continue to live in accordance with Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace." One rather petty solution to prevent others from thinking they were Jews is given in another text, "Do not let your fasts coincide with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Monday and Thursday, so you must fast on Wednesday and Friday" (Didache 8:1).

This is fascinating to have a front row seat watching the apocalyptic message of Jesus tempered by a developing orthodoxy, to watch Jesus become institutionalized.

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